



Culture Vultures

Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?

**Edited by
Munira Mirza**

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Contents

	About the Authors	7
	Foreword	9
	<i>City of London</i>	
	Introduction	13
	<i>Munira Mirza</i>	
1	The social impacts of the arts – myth or reality?	20
	<i>Eleonora Belfiore</i>	
2	Unreliable evidence	38
	<i>Sara Selwood</i>	
3	Who owns public art?	53
	<i>Josie Appleton</i>	
4	A business solution for creativity, not a creativity solution for business	71
	<i>James Heartfield</i>	
5	The arts as painkiller	93
	<i>Munira Mirza</i>	
6	Consumed by the political	111
	<i>Andrew Brighton</i>	

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Foreword

City of London

The City of London is delighted to sponsor this book and continue our relationship with Policy Exchange who have firmly established themselves as one of the principal sources of innovative policy thinking in the United Kingdom.

The City of London is the most famous and successful financial centre in the world. This is in part because it can offer what many other financial districts cannot – a huge range of world-class arts and cultural entertainment. Steeped in history and alive with new ideas, the City is at the heart of the thriving and vibrant metropolis – London itself is one of the world's leading entertainment capitals, a magnet for visitors and a daily treat for those who live and work here.

The City of London provides local government services for the City of London and invests heavily in the City's cultural attractions, not just for London's benefit but for national and international audiences.

Last year the City invested around £60 million in the arts and cultural services in London. It is the largest sponsor of the arts in the UK after the Government and the BBC and the City's Community Strategy has as one of its aims "a vibrant and culturally rich City".

We aim to create greater awareness of the City of London as a cultural asset of local, national and international significance. We aim effectively to develop, coordinate and promote existing and new culture and leisure opportunities to the City's communities and to potential visitors whilst remaining sensitive to the varying lifestyles and expectations of the City's communities. And we aim to encourage greater diversity of culture and leisure opportunities in line with the broad spectrum of interests, incomes and tastes across the City.

The City's Barbican Centre is Europe's largest multi-arts and conference venue under one roof. It attracts 1.6 million visitors a year to its two art galleries, concert hall, two theatres, three cinemas, foyer events and conference facilities. The Barbican is also home to its resident Grammy award winning orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra. The LSO brings hundreds of thousands of people in contact with classical music each year, through its programme of concerts, international tours and an extensive, award winning education and community programme.

The world's largest urban history museum and Europe's largest archaeological unit and archive – the Museum of London – is co-funded by the City and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Museum welcomes half a million visitors a year, and the Museum in Docklands which opened in May 2003 attracted 100,000 visitors in its first year of operation.

The City's Guildhall School of Music and Drama is an internationally recognised conservatoire, training musicians, actors and stage managers for the performing professions. Alumni include Ewan McGregor and Bryn Terfel. The school runs an extensive programme of events at its home in the Barbican with its 700 students from more than 40 countries.

And there is much more: each year the Lord Mayor's show in November attracts around 500,000 visitors to the City streets, and is watched live by an estimated 3 million viewers worldwide. One million items a year are loaned by our three lending libraries. Our reference libraries attract another 200,000 people each year and our archives which cover not only the City but the whole of London are arguably the best municipal archives in the world.

Other attractions include Tower Bridge, Monument, Keats House in Hampstead, the Guildhall Art Gallery, and the millennium foot-bridge: the latter has led to a huge increase in the number of visitors coming to the City, and we are working to encourage visitors to come beyond St Pauls not only to the Museum and the Barbican Centre but also to the many other glorious churches, galleries, and modern buildings which we have all around us. Finally, the City provides core funding for London's oldest multi-arts festival, the City of London Festival which this year included Stockhausen on the top floor of the Gherkin and John Cage in the Lloyd's building.

As a major supporter of the arts, we welcome the contribution of this book to the ongoing debate about their role in our society. The chapters offer provocative, stimulating and original discussion about why we should fund the arts, and are essential reading for those who wish to see them flourish.

Introduction

Munira Mirza

According to the chairman of Arts Council England, Sir Christopher Frayling, we are living in a 'golden age' for the arts.¹ Since the National Lottery was set up in 1994, it has awarded £2 billion for the arts in Britain. New Labour has kept up the pace, announcing the single biggest increase in support for the arts in the new millennium: £100 million over three years on top of a £237 million base. In 2003, it topped this with an extra £75 million to Arts Council England. This included a doubling of funding for individual artists to £25 million, plus a further allocation of £45 million to the arts education scheme, Creative Partnerships between 2002-2006.² And of course, one of this Government's most popular and effective policies was free admission to the national galleries and museums. Arguably, our politicians have never devoted so much commitment to developing the arts and culture in this country.

Certainly, 'creativity' has been a vital plank of New Labour strategy. It not only hands out money with the enthusiasm of a

Medici, but also invites the talented arts world into the very heart of government. Who could forget those heady days of ‘Cool Britannia’, when a fresh-faced Tony Blair mingled at Number Ten with the Britpop bands, Oasis and Blur? This Government has talked about the arts and culture with much affection, taking every opportunity to boast about Britain’s cutting-edge fashion designers, artists, writers and musicians.

But the growing interest in the arts represents something new in the way they are perceived. The Arts Council and DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) tell us that the arts are now not only good in themselves, but are valued for their contribution to the economy, urban regeneration and social inclusion. Their enthusiasm reflects a prevailing mood. Business leaders and management gurus talk about the importance of ‘creativity’ in a post-industrial Britain; how we have changed from being a manufacturing economy to an ‘economy of the imagination’. Urban regeneration experts and town planners argue that major new cultural buildings like the Lowry Centre in Salford or the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, are key to regenerating former industrial towns. People employed in healthcare, education and the judicial system talk about the value the arts bring to their work, in boosting people’s self-esteem, enhancing well being and empowering individuals.

Up and down the country, arts organisations – large and small – are being asked to think about how their work can support Government targets for health, social inclusion, crime, education and community cohesion. Galleries, museums and theatres are busy measuring their impacts in different policy areas to prove they are worth their subsidy. When the Government decided to curb its spending on the arts in 2005 by £30 million, many people within the

arts sector felt much of their socially-oriented work had been overlooked. As Sir Nicholas Serota of the Tate put it, “I’ve obviously failed to persuade Government that [the Tate Modern] matters as much as a new hospital or school.”³

Arts policy today (within the wider remit of cultural policy) is infused with the idea that the arts are good for society, and that they can help achieve a number of social policy objectives. The people who fund the arts, provide the arts, and research the arts have all produced a consensus about the value of what they do, which hardly anyone challenges.

But do the numbers add up? For all the claims made about the arts, how accurate are they? If you read the policy literature, it seems uncontroversial that the arts can stimulate economic growth, reduce social exclusion and improve our health – in short, transform our society. Yet, as this book seeks to show, there is suprisingly little evidence for these claims. We may have a government that calls for ‘evidence-based policy’ but as its support for the arts demonstrates, they don’t have much of a leg to stand on.

This book is an attempt to break the stifling consensus about arts policy today, and challenge the increasing instrumentalism of policy-makers. It brings together some of the leading experts on the UK arts and cultural sector, and reveals many of the problems that have emerged as a result of recent policies. As Government places increasing demands on the arts, it is worth taking a step back and asking if they can deliver. It also makes sense to ask whether the freedom of the artist is compromised by these extra demands and the bureaucracy of ‘box-ticking’.

It would, of course, be wrong to say that the arts have no social value. They have tremendous power and can often, indirectly, make

our world a better place to live in. A civilised society ought to make ample provision for everyone, no matter their background, to enjoy the arts and culture. However, the mantra of creativity can often seem like nothing more than political displacement activity. The Tate Modern, a much loved feature of the London landscape, is often talked up by politicians, academics, local authorities, and regeneration companies as a catalyst for urban change. But at a time when new housing construction is at its lowest point since 1924 and Londoners are struggling to meet spiralling house prices, the conversion of a power station into a world-class art gallery seems like a rather limited regeneration strategy. We might better appreciate it as part of our cultural landscape, rather than as a solution to the poor infrastructure and housing provision in inner city London. Although there is much debate over the effectiveness of culture-led urban regeneration, this strategy is stubbornly fashionable, as cities all over the UK attempt their own Tate Modern style revival. The Public, a £40 million community arts centre designed by Will Alsop is planned to open in West Bromwich later this year and promises to be the largest of its kind in Europe. It is the flagship building of the area's regeneration strategy.

One of the striking things about research done on the arts sector is how much it is driven by advocacy. In her essay Sara Selwood points out that the failure to 'prove' the social value of the arts has led to an even more desperate (and wasteful) search for evidence, resulting in a heavy burden on arts organisations to collect data. The difficulty of 'measuring the unmeasurable' is echoed in Eleonora Belfiore's essay, in which she argues that the current methods used to measure social impacts are often flawed. She raises important questions about the evidence base for many claims about the arts

and social inclusion, even suggesting there is room to look at some of the negative effects of arts policy, which are routinely ignored by policy wonks.

It is certainly conceivable that arts policy is not just ineffective, but can actually cause long-term damage. James Heartfield argues that national and local government's focus on creativity in economic and business strategies has prevented much longer term investment in research and development; therefore holding British industry back. He notes that when the Department of Trade and Industry rattles on about 'creativity', it is, in fact, the creative industries that are the first to suffer because there is a failure to address real problems in business. In my own essay on the arts and health, I argue that the potential medical value of arts therapy is wrongly applied to the arts *in general*, with confusing results. The result is an arts policy that is more about therapy and 'well-being', than artistic quality. In all these areas, the woolly language of arts policy tends to hide the fact that many of these (sometimes expensive) projects are not proven to work.

Perhaps if the art produced was of high enough quality, there would not be a problem. But the agenda of social policy usually results in a culture of mediocrity. Josie Appleton shows how, despite the unprecedented growth of public art in our towns and cities, there is a depressing lack of character in these works and even less public interest. Whenever a local authority commissions a piece of public art with the aim of generating 'community spirit', it risks distracting the artist from the tricky job of producing inspiring art. Look no further than the Millennium Dome. Costing nearly £1billion, this project lacked such cultural vision that it only attracted half the forecast number of visitors. Andrew Brighton,

writing from the perspective of a curator and arts professional, sees the rhetoric of social inclusion as a deeply anti-democratic strain in the arts. Current arts policy, he argues, misunderstands the universal power of art and leads to a tick-box culture of political bureaucracy which all artists should be wary of.

Challenge for the arts

The arts can be expensive, but that is not the central complaint of this book. On the contrary, we welcome the much-needed long-term cash injections administered by this Government. The vagaries of the market do not always produce excellent art and for the sake of the public good, most people accept that the Government should be prepared to step in. The problem with Government funding these days is that it often comes with strings attached. The conventional narrative about the arts sector in Britain is that, since the 1980s, it has become more ‘commercialised’ and ‘market-driven’. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Whilst artists and arts managers may speak the language of ‘performance measurement’, ‘market share’ and ‘return on investment’, they are more dependent than ever upon the state. In terms of funding and policy direction, politicians have extended their reach into the arts beyond the traditional ‘arm’s length’ envisaged in the post-war period. The close relationship between state and artist may be unintended but it presents worrying developments.

This new instrumentalism driven by the state, raises questions about how subsidy is increasingly decided. If the arts are valued for their role in tackling social problems, what happens to those individuals and organisations that fail to meet the targets set by their

funders? If they cannot attract big (or diverse) enough audiences, or if they cannot prove they have reduced crime or boosted local industry, do they lose their support? As one policy think tank put it: “Broader social and economic arguments for the arts are essential in today’s political, business and economic environment. Both public and private funders are increasingly likely to demand practical outcomes and robust evaluation”.⁴ The responsibility of aesthetic excellence is simply not enough. Artists and cultural organisations are under greater pressure to prove that they can transform society.

The essays in this book point out that when it comes to much arts policy today, the emperor has no clothes. However, it does not aim to be the last word on the subject. Rather we hope to challenge the bland consensus that has emerged and open up a much-needed discussion about what the arts really can and can’t do. To this end, each of the contributors has been asked to come up with some policy recommendations at the end of their chapter. The arts are important to society but the model of narrow instrumentalism that we currently have is just not working.

1 “Arts: Luck and Brass” *The Guardian*, by Stephen Moss, November 4 2004.

2 ‘Arts enter new era of growth’, Arts Council England press release, 25 March 2003: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press_detail.php?rid=0&sid=&browse=recent&id=20&page=2

3 ‘Arts Funding.: A Simple Lesson for Labour: A Small Cut Leads to Loud Protest’, *The Independent*, by Louise Jury, February 21 2005.

4 Cowling, J. (ed) (2004) *For Art’s Sake?* Institute for Public Policy Research.

1 . The social impacts of the arts – myth or reality?

Eleonora Belfiore

Cultural policy is considered, at least traditionally, the Cinderella of the public policy sphere. As an area of low priority in political discourse, the cultural sector has only ever attracted a modest proportion of public expenditure. Public spending on the arts is still significantly lower, proportionately, to spending on other sectors of the welfare system (education, social and health services, etc.). Nevertheless, there is little doubt that in recent years the arts and culture have gained a much more central role in public policy debate.

A clear sign of the growing interest of politicians and policy-makers in the arts is reflected, for instance, in the developments that have been taking place in the last twenty years or so at the local level. Despite pressure from the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) on local authorities to draw up ‘cultural plans’, cultural provision at

the local level is statutory only in Scotland and Northern Ireland. This means that, with the significant exception of the Public Library Service, the arts and culture represent areas of discretionary expenditure for local authorities. And yet, local authorities have chosen to get involved in art provision, so much so, that local authorities' spending on the arts exceeded that of central government for the first time in 1988/89; and the spending on the arts by local government is currently larger than that made by the ACE and the Regional Offices, and is only slightly less than that made by the DCMS.

Crucial in this development is the fact that the cultural sector's higher degree of visibility in the political arena has been accompanied by the increased capacity of the sector to tap into other public policy budgets. Clive Gray defines this phenomenon as 'policy attachment'.¹ Attachment, in short, represents a strategy that allows a 'weak' policy sector with limited political clout to attract enough resources to achieve its policy objectives. This is achieved through the sector's 'attachment' to other policy concerns that appear more worthy, or that occupy a more central position in the political discourse of the time. The most obvious (and often high-profile) example of this trend is surely the financing of cultural projects in the context of urban regeneration programmes. As early as the financial year 1993-4, urban regeneration spending was already the third most important source of UK central government support for the cultural sector in England.²

Another glaring case of 'attachment' is the cultural sector's involvement in the fight against the plight of social exclusion, a cause that has become the hallmark of New Labour's social policy. One of the first initiatives introduced by the New Labour government after it won the general elections in 1997 was the establishment of a 'Social

Exclusion Unit' (SEU) with the remit of placing the issue of 'inclusion' at the very heart of the processes of governance in this country. The SEU defines social exclusion as "a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown". The notion of social exclusion, then, has the benefit of conceiving poverty and disadvantage as multidimensional rather than merely in terms of income and expenditure. While material disadvantage is still a primary focus of strategies for social inclusion, they also encompass a growing awareness for the cultural and social dimensions of socio-economic disadvantage.

The arts and the cause of social inclusion

In view of such a central role of inclusion strategies in so-called 'third-way' politics and contemporary governance in the UK, it is hardly surprising that the subsidised cultural sector should have 'attached' itself to the inclusion agenda. In many ways, this has been a successful strategy, for it has allowed the cultural sphere an unprecedented visibility and prominence in the public policy discourse. That a process of 'attachment' was taking place was openly acknowledged by the government itself. The Policy Action Team 10 (PAT 10) report in 1999 argued that participation in the arts and sport can, and should, effectively contribute to neighbourhood renewal by improving communities' performance in the four key areas of health, crime, employment and education.³

References to the alleged social impacts of the arts still remain an important tool in the advocacy strategy followed by UK cultural

institutions today. It should not come as a surprise, then, that the ‘transformative powers’ of the arts should have pride of place in the current cultural policy discourse. That the belief in the positive social impacts of the arts still holds strong within the British arts funding system appears clearly from this passage from the latest Arts Council of England manifesto entitled *Ambitions for the Arts*, published in February 2003:

We will argue that being involved with the arts can have a lasting and transforming effect on many aspects of people’s lives. This is true not just for individuals, but also for neighbourhoods, communities, regions and entire generations, whose sense of identity and purpose can be changed through art.

As a result of these developments, the subsidised cultural sector is now expected to deliver on the basis of social and economic policy targets that relate to social inclusion and local economic development strategies already in place. After all, we must not forget that the linkage of cultural policies to strategies for social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal has taken place against the backdrop of the growing popularity of what is usually referred to as ‘evidence-based policy making’, and the trend towards what has been dubbed ‘management by measurement’.⁴ In this new climate, evidence-collection has increasingly come to be seen as a necessary grounding for decision-making and policy drafting.

Ultimately, this development – and the broader trend towards managerialism in public administration – has meant that the very term ‘subsidy’ has become increasingly unpopular within the cultural policy field, to the point of being supplanted by the now

more appealing alternative of ‘investment’.⁵ This is a transformation, however, that has gone well beyond the merely rhetorical level of a change in the language of cultural policy. A primary consequence of the attachment of cultural policy to other spheres of public policy-making was the fact that this encouraged expectations that the publicly funded arts and culture *ought* to address the priorities of those other policy areas and *should* actively contribute to achieving their objectives.⁶ As I will argue in the following section, this has put the public arts sector under strenuous pressure to deliver on the basis of such expectations and has moved commentators to argue that the British cultural sector is progressively becoming target, rather than process oriented.

The social impacts of the arts ... in detail

One important limitation of the current literature on the social impacts of the arts is the underlying assumption that the same type of impacts will accrue from different types of cultural activities on different types of audiences/participants. Another complication is represented by the fact that the phrase ‘social impacts of the arts’ is usually employed with reference to a wide group of evaluation methods, ranging from evaluation of the impacts of a single project or organisation all the way to the effects of culture-led urban regeneration.

A further problem is that extant impacts studies seem to focus mainly on community arts projects and programmes, often of a participatory nature, which are a very specific type of cultural activity (and, I would suggest that any type of participatory activity would probably have an empowering effect, whether arts-based or

not). It is not a matter of course that the social benefits accruing from such cultural activities should be expected of other, more traditional ones (such as, for instance, being part of an audience). Whether sitting amongst the spectators of a theatrical performance can genuinely be a life-changing event is a contention that is much harder to evaluate!

These are just some of the reasons why it is actually very hard (if not even dubious) to talk about the ‘social impacts of the arts’ as a broad group of beneficial social outcomes that can be expected of cultural participation (be it ‘active’ or ‘passive’). This is probably why it is somewhat difficult to deconstruct the claims made in the current literature and come up with a realistic list of possible social impacts. A notable exception is the influential report compiled by Matarasso for the consultancy group Comedia in 1997 and entitled *Use or Ornament?* Here Matarasso identifies no less than fifty distinct social impacts of the arts. However, these alleged impacts are remarkably broad-ranging, if not positively vague. They range from the more plausible claims that participation in the arts can “increase people’s confidence and sense of self-worth”, “encourage adults to take up education and training opportunities” and “provide a route to rehabilitation and integration for offenders”, to decidedly fuzzier ones – such as that the arts can “give people influence over how they are seen by others”, “develop contact between the generations”, “help people extend control over their own lives”, “help community groups raise their vision beyond the immediate” or - equally obscurely - “have a positive impact on how people feel”.

Arguably, not all of these impacts are susceptible to easy measurement by a realistic and feasible evaluation process. And, indeed, the assessment methodology proposed by Matarasso has been subjected to

extensive criticism for being “flawed in its design, execution and conceptual basis”.⁷ One of the more crucial problems with the proposed methodology was its lack of internal validity; the twenty-four questions that constituted the main aspect of the evaluation process did not appear to be informed by the hypothesis that the exercise aspired to verify empirically (the aforementioned fifty impacts). Furthermore, the questions were worded in an ambiguous manner that might have induced ‘social desirability biased’ answer in respondents, thus resulting in an on overstatement of the artistic activities’ impacts.⁸ Other problematic aspects of the proposed evaluation process were the lack of control groups and of any before/after comparison in the assessment of participants’ emotional state and quality of life.

More generally, the issue was raised about the lack of a longitudinal perspective in the analysis of what were described as life-changing experiences.⁹ The five-stage proposed evaluation model could never capture long-term transformation. The five steps of the suggested evaluation method are: planning setting indicators, execution, assessment, and reporting. The report advises us that the assessment stage should take place ‘on completion of the project’, whereas the different stakeholders should all compile reports on the results of the projects ‘shortly after completion’ of the project. However, as one of Comedia’s own working papers clearly explains, long-term impacts ‘will typically take longer to emerge than outputs’, and would not therefore be taken into account by such an assessment process.¹⁰ More importantly, Matarasso fails to establish a convincing causal link between any changes observed in the participants and their involvement in the arts activity. Obviously, such a failure strongly undermines his advocacy that “participatory arts project are different, effective and cost very little in the context of spending on social goals. They represent an insignificant financial risk to public

services, but can produce impacts (social *and* economic) out of proportion to their cost”.¹¹ The lack of any opportunity cost analysis to back up such a conclusion makes Matarasso’s claims all the more untenable.

In fairness, it is important to remind ourselves of the pioneering nature of the work carried out by Matarasso and his collaborators. As the report clearly acknowledged, Comedia’s researchers were treading previously uncharted territory. In Matarasso’s own words: “The study is a first stage of an ongoing research programme, not a definitive response to these issues. If it raises more questions as its answers, others may wish to address them in the context of practical work”.¹² In many respects, the most interesting aspect of the popularity and influence of Matarasso’s report in the British and international context is not the fact that the methodology itself has found to be flawed (which is to be expected in what was admittedly only a first step towards the development of an evaluation methodology), but rather the fact that policy-makers and arts administrators accepted the report *in toto* as *the* methodology for social impacts assessment. As a result, a number of alluring statistics from Matarasso’s report were selectively quoted repeatedly and out of context in policy papers and reports, with the result of “establishing a near-consensus among cultural policy-makers”.¹³

A very selective use of the available information and evidence seems to be, however, one of the characterising features of the debates over the social impacts of the arts. Let’s consider, for instance Fred Coalter’s *Realising the potential of cultural services: the case for the arts* (2001), published by the Local Government Association. Here Coalter gives great prominence to some data from a three-year study into the effects of arts education in British schools showing that students who took an arts-related subject (visual arts, music, drama) achieved better GCSE results than students who had taken

no arts subjects at all. However, Coalter barely comments on further findings showing that students who took more than one arts-related subject actually achieved *worse* results than students taking no artistic subject at all, thus failing to deal with what are obviously significant implications for his broader argument on the beneficial educational effects of the arts.¹⁴ Interestingly, the study referred to in Coalter's report is also cited in a recent literature review compiled by Jenny Hughes for The Unit for the Arts and Offenders.¹⁵ Here, unsurprisingly, the positive effects of arts education are listed in some detail, but no mention *at all* is made of the correlation between the choice of more than one art-related subject and poorer exam result.

Similarly, a report produced by Cave and Coutts in 2002 for the South East London Strategic Health Authority, and entitled *Health evidence base for the Mayor's draft cultural strategy* also displays a selective attitude to the choice of the sources of evidence for the social impacts of the arts. So, a note of caution is put forward at the beginning of the document, where the limitations of the extant literature and the existing evidence are pointed out. However, in the small section of the report entitled "Participation in the arts", the argument in favour of the positive effects of arts participation on health is built upon what is evidently a very partial selection of the available literature. As a result, if one were to only read the report in question, the matter of the arts' positive effects on people's quality of life and health would appear a rather uncontroversial matter - a misguided conclusion indeed!

The difficulty of identifying and classifying the supposed positive impacts of the arts is also reflected in the persisting dissatisfaction with current methodologies for impact measurement and evaluation. As I am going to argue in the next section, in the context of the growing trends towards evidence-based policy-making, the question

of whether the cultural sector can provide convincing evidence of the benefits that are assumed to accrue from cultural participation has become, simply, paramount. In other words, do the arts *really* generate positive social impacts?

The social impacts of the arts: the evaluation dilemma

The complex new reality in which the cultural sector now operates has meant that a lot of work has gone, in the last decade, into elaborating methodologies that can convincingly assess the extent to which the claimed social impacts actually follow from participation in the arts. The desperate need to find the holy grail of a reliable evaluation protocol has resulted in a growing body of literature, both empirical and conceptual in nature, discussing the various pitfalls of current methods, or putting forwards yet another toolkit for impact evaluation. A number of exhaustive literature reviews have been published in the last five years, in order to gain a clearer idea of what the impacts of the arts actually are and how they can be measured, with a view to describing the strength and weaknesses of current methods.¹⁶

Having read through this body of literature reviews, the general feeling that one is left with, is that the quality of the evidence on the social impacts of the arts is generally poor, and that evaluation methodologies are still unsatisfactory. The literature, indeed, seems to corroborate the conclusions presented by the Australian researchers White and Rentschler, who, speaking at the 2005 International Conference on Arts & Cultural Management, have characterised the state of the research field into the impacts of the arts as ‘embryonic’ still.

I would suggest that the main areas where shortcomings in current evaluation procedures can be identified are:

- ***The issue of the causality link:*** Noting that a change has occurred against a predefined indicator after participation in a cultural activity is not enough to argue that the transformation was *caused* by the arts activity itself. For the arts impact argument to hold, it is crucial to establish a causal relation between the transformation observed and the cultural project or activity being evaluated. This might entail a before/after comparison, although assessment of the participants before their involvement in the activity is still rare.
- ***The opportunity cost issue:*** An important basis for spending decisions is evidence of policy effectiveness and cost-efficiency. Therefore, the onus is on the cultural sector to convince the Treasury department that they provide the *most* cost-effective means to tackling social exclusion, health problems and so on, thus performing better at achieving the predefined targets than more traditional and established practices within social and health services. My argument however, is that the sector, is still far from being able to offer funders this type of evidence.
- ***The question of outcome versus outputs:*** One of the points of concern in current methodologies for impact assessment is that evaluation usually happens, soon after the arts activity takes place, so that the alleged life-changing effects of the experience (which, realistically, will take some time to become evident) are likely to be completely missed out in the evaluation process.
- ***The issue of successfully transforming ‘anecdotal evidence’ into robust qualitative data:*** Another common criticism moved against current methods for impact assessment is that evaluation

processes tends to rely heavily on anecdotal evidence and participants' declarations. Whilst the discussion and measurement of the transformative power of arts participation cannot elude the collection and analysis of qualitative data, there is a potential risk in equating reported experiences with robust data. A collection of quotes from projects organisers and participants does *not* automatically translate into a solid evaluation report.

- ***The question of the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' participation:*** The highest proportion of extant impacts assessment studies tend to focus on the evaluation of participatory arts projects. This can be explained by the fact that it is ostensibly easier to demonstrate measurable impacts in this area of work than in the more mainstream provision of galleries, museums and the performing arts. However, since the provision of art to audiences (as opposed to the active involvement of participants in an arts project) constitutes by far the largest proportion of the publicly funded cultural sector, this is precisely the area where the effort in developing a satisfactory assessment procedure should concentrate. Ideally, a robust impact evaluation protocol should be able to tackle the assessment of the social impacts of a broader range of culturally diverse artistic experiences.
- ***The issue of artistic quality:*** It is often the case that, in the process of social impacts assessment, the importance attributed to the expected beneficial social outcomes overshadows aesthetic considerations. This could be explained by the fact that cultural projects with explicit social aims are often funded in the context of anti-poverty strategies or urban regeneration programmes. In these cases aesthetic preoccupations are not always the primary reason why the projects were funded in the first place. However, there is no denying that cultural policy

decisions (especially by funding bodies such as the Arts Council) always imply a judgement largely based on aesthetic criteria. A rigorous impact assessment methodology therefore ought to be able to incorporate evaluation criteria that also refer to the aesthetic sphere. The problem here is that finding the way to best evaluate the artistic quality of an arts project is far from being an easy task.

- ***The question of negative impacts:*** This is another important issue that is routinely ignored in the discussion and measurement of the social impacts of the arts. The political and practical reasons for such neglect are obvious, and yet, to the careful observer, the evidence that the arts might actually have a *negative* effect on people is out there. For instance, a recent paper co-authored by the renown scholar of creativity Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (the creator of the ‘theory of flow’) reported the result of a vast empirical research that showed that young people who loved reading for pleasure and spent part of their leisure time reading displayed lesser social skills and lower indicators of happiness than their peers who devoted their free time to playground games.¹⁷ Whilst it would be foolish to suggest that funding to literature programmes should be cut on the basis of this evidence, a serious approach to social impacts assessment ought to at least acknowledge that no guarantees can be made that the impacts of a cultural activity will always and necessarily be positive. Similarly, the negative effects of culture-led regeneration (with regards to phenomena of gentrification) are also well documented. The experience gained in the course of the last two decades - through the consistent use of culture as an important element in the process of urban revival - is that the arts can actually be socially divisive, and lead to what have been described as ‘culture wars’.

For this reason, we need to consider the potential negative consequences of arts activity as well as the beneficial ones.¹⁸

- ***The ethical question:*** This is an issue that is often (perhaps conveniently) overlooked. An important exception is represented by Paola Merli who has suggested that the underlying inspiration behind strategies that tackle social exclusion through the arts is the notion that “the poor should be soothed through ‘therapeutic’ artistic activities”. In the mid-‘90s, US political theorist, Nancy Fraser, summed up this sentiment: “cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socio-economic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle”.¹⁹ In other words, the concern for addressing social cohesion and inclusion through a ‘soft’ approach such as the use of cultural projects, might be seen as a convenient means to divert attention from the real causes of today’s social problems and the tough solutions that might be needed to solve them. According to this line of reasoning, the whole discourse of social inclusion is a lot more appealing to the political elite than the old-fashioned rhetoric of poverty and the call for economic redistribution. As Merli explains:

... making deprivation more acceptable is a tool to endlessly reproduce it. Social deprivation and exclusion arguably can be removed only by fighting the structural conditions which cause them. Such conditions will not be removed by benevolent arts programmes.²⁰

Conclusions

So, we come back to the initial question “are the beneficial social impacts of the art a myth or reality?” The lack of evidence and the problems in

current evaluation procedures would seem to invalidate the claims that the arts can tackle social exclusion, health, crime issues and so on and so forth. And yet, the faith of politicians, arts administrators and artists alike in the transformative powers of the arts is extremely resilient. One of the most fascinating aspects of present-day cultural policy is that, despite the problems and limitations that I have discussed above, the growing trend towards instrumentality has not been slowed down by the obvious lack of evidence of the existence of such impacts. It is significant that, in a recent paper, Matarasso himself has taken a stance against what he sees as the excesses of arts evaluation:

Instead of being guided by the possibility of opening debate about culture within democratic society, arts evaluation is little more than an extension of private sector managerialism to a public service.²¹

Despite what I have referred to as the ‘evidence dilemma’, the rhetoric of instrumentalism and measurement is still popular. The present Secretary of State, Tessa Jowell, made a recent attempt to find alternative (and possibly non-instrumental ways) to articulate the value of the arts to society. Her essay, entitled *Government and the Value of Culture* (2004), was hailed as a welcome and overdue appeal for the reinstatement of ‘arts for arts’ sake’. However, the essay is fraught with internal contradictions, and is, in truth, far from being a repudiation of instrumentalism in cultural funding and policy.

Jowell claims that one of the main tasks of government in today’s society is to eliminate “the poverty of aspiration which compromises all our attempts to lift people out of physical poverty. Engagement with culture can help alleviate this poverty of aspiration”. She also adds: “Addressing poverty of aspiration is also necessary to build a

society of fairness and opportunities”. I would suggest that this final statement brings us back full circle, for, if the arts can and should address poverty of aspiration, and this can bring about a just society, then the arts are entrusted with the task of bringing about the conditions for such a “society of fairness and opportunities” to exist. In other words, we are back to a worldview whereby the arts are to be supported for the ‘good’ they do to society.

Recommendations

Where does this leave the cultural policy-makers and professionals working in the cultural sector? I would suggest that an important step forward would be the adoption of a more cautious approach to the whole rhetoric of the social impacts of the arts. Making exaggerate claims for the potential of the arts to transform lives will inevitably backfire if such claims cannot be substantiated by evidence. A more realistic vision of how the public interacts with the arts forms that are currently funded through taxpayers’ money is certainly needed, together with the sobering realization that one cultural event cannot have all sorts of social impacts on all its audiences/participants, and that the workings of the arts on people’s psyche are not something that you can always plan and direct in advance.

Secondly, I would suggest that the only way out of the ‘evaluation dilemma’ is a genuine commitment to serious evaluation work, and the acceptance that it is unlikely that robust evidence for whether and how the arts have life-transforming powers could ever be achieved through a ‘quick, one-size-fits-all’ evaluation toolkit. Impacts evaluation, if done properly, is a time- and resource-consuming exercise: there are no acceptable shortcuts!

Finally, I would argue that it befalls on researchers, policy makers and administrators working in the cultural sector to push for a ‘critical deconstruction’ of the notion of evidence, with a view to elaborating a more relevant and useful understanding of what constitutes acceptable and adequate evidence of social impact in the cultural sphere. Freeing the debate over the social impacts of the arts from the straightjacket of a view that equates acceptable evidence with a narrow conception of performance measurement will mean being finally able to talk meaningfully about all that performance indicators fail to assess. The area of debate this exercise would ultimately free up might turn out to be the very essence of what the arts ‘do’ to people.

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- 1 Gray, C. (2002) “Local Government and the Arts.” *Local Government Studies*. 28:77-90.
 - 2 Selwood, S. 2001. *The UK Cultural Sector*. Policy Studies Institute; pp. 54 ff.
 - 3 DCMS (1999) *Policy Action Team 10; A Report to the Social Exclusion Unit: Arts and Sport*, London, Department of Culture, Media and Sport.
 - 4 Noordegraaf, M. and Abma, T. (2003) “Management by measurement? Public management practices amidst ambiguity.” *Public Administration*. 81: 853-871.
 - 5 In his already mentioned paper, Clive Gray argues that one of the first examples of this trend can be traced within local government, when the Labour party was in power in the Greater London Council (GLC) between 1981 and 1986. It was precisely around this time that a shift first occurred from a policy focus on the arts per se, towards a conception of the arts as an instrument to bring about economic development and employment growth. This is confirmed by a 1985 GLC document entitled *The State of the Art or the Art of the State?* that reads: “we envisaged the state playing a new role, going well beyond the provision of culture to an often passive public. We see this role as being primarily based on investment rather than grant aid, and on supporting economic infrastructures- such as distribution and publicity networks - rather than individual productions”.
 - 6 Belfiore, E. (2004) “Auditing Culture: the subsidized cultural sector in the New Public Management.” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 10:183-202.
 - 7 Merli, P. (2002) “Evaluating the social impact of participation in arts activities.” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 8:107-118; p. 108.
 - 8 Ibid. p.108.

- 9 Belfiore, E (2002) "Art as a means towards alleviating social exclusion: does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 8:91-106; p.98.
- 10 Lingayam, S., Mac Gillivray, A., Raynard, P. (1996) *Creative Accounting; Beyond the Bottom Line*, Comedia, p.33.
- 11 Matarasso, F. (1997) *Use or Ornament? The social impact of participation in the Arts*. Comedia,,p.81.
- 12 Ibid. p.ix.
- 13 Merli, P. (2002) "Evaluating the social impact of participation in arts activities." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 8:107-118., 107. In this respect, it is interesting to note that, in 2003, Matarasso published another piece of writing on how to evaluate the impacts of community arts project, entitled *Did it make a difference?* Here he appears to put forward a more sophisticated version of his earlier methodology. Yet, this document never matched the popularity, circulation and influence of *Use or Ornament?* (Matarasso, F. 2003. *Did It Make a Difference? Evaluating community-based arts and business partnerships*, Arts & Business, London).
- 14 I am grateful to Munira Mirza for pointing me in the direction of this inconsistency in Coalter's argument.
- 15 Hughes, J (2004) *Doing the Arts Justice: A review of research literature, practice and theory*. The Unit for the Arts and Offenders, p.28.
- 16 See for instance: Jermyn, H. (2001) *The Arts and Social Exclusion: A review prepared for the Arts Council of England*, ACE; Jermyn, H. (2004.) *The Art of Inclusion*, ACE; Reeves, M.(2002) *Measuring the Economic and Social Impact of the Arts: A review*. ACE; Guetzkow, J. (2002) *How the Arts Impact Communities: An introduction to the literature on arts impact studies*. Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, Princeton; Ruiz, J. (2004) *A Literature Review of the Evidence Base for Culture, the Arts and Sport Policy*, Scottish Executive; and, Hughes, J (2004) *Doing the Arts Justice: A review of research literature, practice and theory*. The Unit for the Arts and Offenders.
- 17 Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Hunter, J. (2003) "Happiness in everyday life: The uses of experience sampling". *Journal of Happiness Studies*. 4:185-199.
- 18 Sharp, J., Pollock, V., Paddison, R. (2005) "Just Art for a Just City: public art and social inclusion in urban regeneration". *Urban Studies* 42:1001-1022.
- 19 Fraser, N. (1995) "From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age." *New Left Review* 212:68-93; p.68.
- 20 Merli, P. (2002) "Evaluating the social impact of participation in arts activities." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 8:107-118, p. 113.
- 21 Matarasso, F. 2005 "How the light gets in: The value of imperfect systems of cultural evaluation". Paper presented at the "Räkna med kultur!" conference in Vara, Sweden, 4-5 October 2005.

2. Unreliable evidence

The rhetorics of data collection in the cultural sector

Sara Selwood

‘Facts about the Arts’ sets out to bring together some of the available statistics on the arts. Anyone who has the temerity to try to do this invites the scorn of those who believe that the concept of the arts itself is elusive and indefinable and any attempt to measure it cannot begin to represent its essential quality. Others, however, believe that the considerable body of material which does already exist can be gathered together and presented in such a way as to lead to a better understanding of the extent to which the arts contribute to the quality of life of the country. Amongst those potential users are Parliament, the media, the general public, and the many who have the power to influence and make decisions about the arts.¹

The Policy Studies Institute, an independent research body in the UK, recognised the value of collecting data on the cultural sector nearly a quarter of a century ago. Its publication, *Facts About The*

Arts, pioneered overviews which showed how much was spent on the sector; the size of the economy; and how many people attended and participated in cultural events. Since then, successive governments have acknowledged the need to account for spending on the cultural sector, not least in terms of evidencing outputs. However, their efforts were largely unsustained and unsuccessful.

That it should have been so was, perhaps, not surprising. Prior to 1997, when New Labour came to power, cultural policy was, to all intents and purposes, determined by the actions of such organisations as the former Museums & Galleries Commission and the Arts Council of Great Britain. Despite being directly funded by government, these organisations tangibly operated at ‘arms’ length’ from it. Indeed, it has been suggested that they functioned in what was, effectively, a ‘policy vacuum’. At best, the government departments responsible for funding the cultural sector (such as the Office of Arts and Libraries and, subsequently, the Department of National Heritage) reviewed current provision, sought to improve the management of its advisory and funding bodies and promoted examples of best practice. As Muriel Nissel recognised in 1983, the prevailing culture of performance measurement was generally considered inappropriate for cultural provision and was effectively steered clear of.

However, with the establishment of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in July 1997, the ways in which cultural policy have been articulated, disseminated and assessed appear to have been transformed. Key to that was the fact that central government strategically ‘reclaimed’ responsibility for cultural policy.

In what remains the most detailed statement of its plans to ‘reform’ the sector, *A New Cultural Framework*, published in 1998, DCMS announced that it would be playing a full-part in ‘joined-up govern-

ment'. This manifest itself in its promotion of 'access for the many not just the few'; pursuing 'excellence and innovation'; nurturing 'educational opportunity'; and fostering the creative industries. As the current Permanent Secretary puts it, her mission is to

... lead a department which continues to make an important contribution to the Government's agenda. Not only in culture, media and sport, but in the broader areas of the economy, education, health, crime prevention and regeneration.²

DCMS's ambition to bring its sectors closer to the heart of British public policy has gone hand in hand with its securing increased funding for them. From the start, the department made it clear that any substantial increases in funding (some of which was earmarked for specific initiatives) would be linked to recipient organisations meeting its expectations; moreover, that government policy would influence their development directly, as well as that of the sector more generally.³ Since then, DCMS's 'sponsored' (or subsidised) bodies have been required to commit to agreed targets and to produce evidence to show that these targets have, indeed, been met. The sector's performance is measured by a series of indicators which are predicated on the assumption that cultural provision is instrumental and can deliver on government objectives. The targets and the performance measures are specified through a series of linked agreements which cascade down from the Treasury via DCMS.

Given that no previous manifestation of UK cultural policy has been so highly determined nor so closely audited, one might reasonably ask what evidence there is to demonstrate that DCMS is delivering on its intentions.

At the outset, DCMS implied that what was needed was for organisations to deliver. The department saw its function as being ‘to give direction, set targets, chase progress and take ‘direct action’ where appropriate’⁴ and the former Secretary of State, The Rt Hon Chris Smith, threatened ‘to bang heads together’ if necessary. But despite its emphasis on its funded organisations’ compliance, DCMS may have underestimated its own input - not least, because its paradigm (such as it is) appears to be flawed.

The process of converting intention into effect has evidently proved more problematic than the rhetoric suggests. As the following paragraphs suggest, many of the claims made on behalf of the subsidised cultural sector remain unsubstantiated, and many of the assumptions, methodologies and ‘procedures’ set in train to achieve New Labour’s cultural policies have come to be perceived as being inadequate to the task.

Measuring the return

It only took the former Minister for the Arts, Estelle Morris, a few months on the job to identify and articulate a fundamental dilemma facing DCMS – how to make the case for arts and culture.

We live in a political and economic climate where we all want a return for public investment. Money spent, time used, priorities awarded, all have to have a return. That is not a problem. It’s how it should be.

The problem, of course comes in measuring the return. Target performance indicators, value added, evidence bases are all part of the language we’ve developed to prove our ability to deliver, to make progress and to show a return and justify the public money that is used. I have no

problem with that but much of this sector does not fit in to this way of doing things. I know that Arts and Culture make a contribution to health, to education, to crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being, but I don't always know how to evaluate or describe it. We have to find a language and a way of describing its worth. It's the only way we'll secure the greater support we need.⁵

Morris' speech at the 2003 Cheltenham Festival of Literature, acknowledged two flaws in the department's thinking: one was its failure to distinguish between believing in the 'transformative' powers of culture and 'evidencing' them; the other, was the lack of appropriate measures to show that 'transformation' had actually occurred. While DCMS and its non-departmental public bodies (or quangos) were undoubtedly guided by the former, the task that they were set to deliver on was the latter. As the Treasury guidelines for departmental bids to the 2004 Spending Review of October 2003 made explicit:

In principle, all spending decisions should be supported by evidence, demonstrating that the money being spent will achieve the desired effects as efficiently as possible.⁶

DCMS is expected to present 'evidence' in ways that not only have to satisfy the criteria by which the department itself theoretically judges the 'robustness' of data; but which comply with the specifications laid down in the Treasury's *Green Book*.⁷ They also have to satisfy the recommendations made in the recent Office of Science and Technology review of the department's management and use of 'science'.⁸

But, despite the requirement to show 'a return', both Secretaries of State have struggled to get away from the dead hand of the auditor.

In a 2001 White Paper, the department, under Chris Smith, proposed adopting a ‘lighter touch’.⁹ His successor, Tessa Jowell, has sought to shift the department’s emphasis by insisting that it is ‘doing more’ than promoting a ‘utilitarian agenda’.

Too often politicians have been forced to debate culture in terms only of its instrumental benefits to other agendas – education, the reduction in crime, improvements in wellbeing – explaining – or in some instances almost apologising for – our investment in culture only in terms of something else. In political and public discourse in this country we have avoided the more difficult approach of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself.¹⁰

While appearing to align herself with ‘intrinsic value’ and ‘arts for art sake’ arguments (and perhaps, thereby, find greater support from artists), Jowell claims to be seeking a more coherent justification for subsidy. She proposes that public funding is about facilitating ‘personal value added which comes from engagement with complex art – or “culture” in my defined sense’.¹¹ This, she says, is ‘key to real transformation in society’.¹²

But, even if the arguments for the Government’s support of culture were to formally shift from ‘utilitarianism’ to ‘what it does in itself’, the Secretary of State’s ambition is still dominated by the need to reduce the ‘poverty of aspiration’ and ‘transform’ individuals as well as society. While the subtleties of her distinction between what is ‘instrumental’ and what is ‘transformatory’ remain unclear, accounting for its effects continues to be an issue. As she herself asks, ‘How, in going beyond targets, can we best capture the value of culture?’¹³

Discussing the direction that such monitoring might take in the future, of course, serves to obscure the debate about the present. Why is it that after seven years, we still don't have a robust evidence base for the cultural sector? It could be argued that two particular things have contributed to the unreliability of the present evidence: one of which might be classified as philosophical (if not ideological); and the other, as pragmatic.

Philosophical barriers

There is a substantial body of criticism that rejects the use of instrumentalist arguments to justify support for cultural provision. This includes voices from outside the sector itself. While the 1988 publication of Myerscough's *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, prompted a debate about economic value, it has often fallen to economists to make the case that the primary function of the arts is not to create economic impact.¹⁴

The sociologist, Joli Jensen, is similarly disparaging about the expectation that culture will solve social problems. She regards this as tantamount to a form of political displacement activity:

If we want to improve our children, our schools, our inner cities, and the lives of the marginal, the elderly, the impoverished, then we should do so directly, rather than argue for an injection of 'more arts'.¹⁵

More predictably, objections to the instrumentalist agenda have come from practitioners, the performing arts lobby in particular. At the nub of their arguments is a belief in the 'inherent value' of the arts. John Tusa, Managing Director of the Barbican, for instance,

describes the measurement of the arts and culture in relation to the political ambitions imposed upon them as ‘extraneous’, ‘distant from their true nature’, and potentially ‘antithetical to their basic functions and purposes’.¹⁶ Nicholas Hytner, Director of the National Theatre, trenchantly dismissed the social expectations of the DCMS and Arts Council England as ‘naïve’.¹⁷

Taking a historical perspective, the consultant Adrian Ellis (AeA Consulting) regards DCMS’s expectations that the arts will improve attainment and behaviour, encourage lifelong learning, help to combat crime, create safe cohesive communities and make a substantial contribution to the economy as ‘novel, even perverse’. In addition, he regards the form of accountability that DCMS has carried through to its sectors as singularly inappropriate.

It eschews value judgements that imply a hierarchy of cultural value; emphasises the quantitative in the field where qualitative assessments have been regarded as central; aspires to judge cultural organisations by their efficacy in addressing social and economic agendas that could in some cases be addressed more efficiently elsewhere.¹⁸

Indeed, the promotion of instrumentalism has come to be regarded as synonymous with the desire for quantitative evidence in the same way that other forms of value are associated with qualitative outcomes. The mismatch between the measures actually being used and those considered to be more appropriate means that, for many people working in the sector, the requirement to collect data represents a growth of state power and bureaucracy.

It has even been suggested that it’s not in arts institutions’ interests to learn anything from evidence that might be collected. According to

the economist Sir Alan Peacock (writing in 2001), the data produced by organisations supported by the Scottish Arts Council were not analysed for the public benefit. In his opinion, the Scottish Executive and its ministers had ‘no wish to be confused by the facts.’¹⁹ At about the same time, the trade journal, the *ArtsProfessional*, implied that the same was true of cultural funding bodies in England.²⁰

Pragmatic barriers

The literature on the collection, analysis and use of evidence in the cultural sector almost exclusively comprises ‘grey literature’ - reports commissioned to gather and interrogate, if not improve, the evidence base. But while such evidence is often acknowledged in the literature as inadequate,²¹ much data collection is prompted by the purposes of advocacy. It could, of course, be that the interests of advocacy and objective research are potentially incompatible.

An example of bias being built into the research effort is MLA’s (the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council) search for the ‘best possible evidence’ on its sectors’ ‘effective activity’ within the fields of cultural diversity, health, community cohesion and related community agendas, social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal.²² By the same token, two recent studies published by Arts Council England and DCMS²³ focus on what particular ‘evidence’ exists on the arts and culture’s contribution to regeneration. Both arrange their findings under a number of generic (but not mutually exclusive) headings which follow, hardly by co-incidence, the expectations of policy. The think tank, ippr, which is closely associated with New Labour, is similarly unquestioning in its acceptance of the arts’ contribution to education, mental health and offender rehabilitation outcomes.

The editor of the ippr's publication, *For Art's Sake: Society and the arts in the 21st Century*, argues that the case for the arts simply needs to be better made though a more robust 'evidence' base.²⁴

A major component of improving the data is the establishment of a baseline understanding of the sector. From DCMS's perspective, baseline studies underpin the development, monitoring and assessment of Public Service Agreement targets.²⁵ More generally, they provide the basis for measuring change through comparable, if not longitudinal, perspectives. However, to be effective, baseline data needs to be as comprehensive as possible; as consistent as possible; and as accurate as possible, as well as being fit for purpose. Yet, in many cases, the available data are potentially of little use in constructing baselines: they may be considered to be too poor, too limited or too general. In some cases, data that has already been collected may simply be inaccessible.

This, for instance, is true of certain sets of publicly-funded data which relate to museums and the arts. Detailed statistics from Target Group Index (TGI), for example, are rarely made available because of the copyright agreements to which its subscribers, Arts Council England and MLA, are bound.²⁶ Indeed, much of the information collected by DCMS from its sponsored museums is subject to confidentiality. It, therefore,

... never reaches the public domain, other than through piecemeal release to answer parliamentary questions, for inclusion in quinquennial reviews, or other ad hoc publication.²⁷

The lack of transparency in existing data that are available may also be a problem. The format of DCMS's annual resource accounts, which are laid before Parliament, for instance, cost all DCMS activities

against the programmes defined by its Public Service Agreement objectives. But as the audit certificate from the Controller and Auditor-General of DCMS's Resource Accounts 2000/01 indicates, the results of this kind of accounting are neither helpful nor reliable.²⁸

Just as problematic is the fact that some data are only available in aggregated form, which renders them relatively useless for reinterpretation. The former annual report, *Sightseeing in the UK* provided an excellent example of that. It was a primary source of annual data on museums in England from 1977 to 1999. However, when its format changed in 2001, the statistics that it included on the UK museums were no longer disaggregated on a country-by-country basis.

But, it's not just the perceived inadequacies of the data on the sector that are evident, so much as their apparent lack of corporate use. It remains unclear to what extent the funding system constructively revises its distribution of funds on the basis of evidence it collects, rather than depending on a combination of patterns of historic support and strategic priorities. As the Office of Science and Technology's review of DCMS's 'science' observed, the department could have been making better use of 'scientific' information.²⁹

Measuring the unmeasurable – an intractable problem

Despite the apparent consistency of DCMS's position on the instrumentality of cultural provision, there has been an evident shift in the debate towards 'cultural value'. In her 'personal essay', *Government and the Value of Culture* (2004), Jowell proposed that 'culture should be faced on its own terms and with recognition of what it does'.³⁰ Peter Hewitt, Chief Executive of the Arts Council England, also recently

called for ‘... a fresh evaluation of the inherent value of culture, what I would describe as its “transformative power”’.³¹ Like Jowell, his notion of the ‘transformative power’ is essentially Romantic insofar as it claims creativity, imagination and humanity for cultural activities.

However, this recognition of the cultural value of arts subsidy does not lessen the desire (or requirement) for measurement, evidence and evaluation. Hewitt has described himself as motivated by the desire to make a case for the ‘continued and increased support’ of the arts and to relate ‘the value of culture to our priorities and choices’.³² In order better to exploit this ‘inherent value’, he proposed the importance of understanding how emotional and psychological impacts are fired by different cultural experiences, and what factors might bring these about. He consequently called for research that would involve

... comparisons between the active (participant) or passive (spectator) experience, short-term as opposed to sustained experience, questions about contextualisation (drawing out meaning) or letting the art speak entirely for itself. Equally relevant will be issues such as surprise, risk, newness, enjoyment, escapism and the extent to which the experience or encounter engenders a greater sense of well being, connectedness, confidence and aspiration, or simply gives a greater sense of personal meaning.³³

Both Hewitt and Jowell take the quality of culture which their agencies promote as a given, but neither considers the investment of time likely to be required to produce the desired social effects. For Tusa:

There are no cheap thrills in art, but there are real thrills. They come slowly, gradually, over years and as a result of effort. How do you

market such an unappealing message, which happens to be the real message of the arts, the core – to use the market-speak – of their ‘Unique Selling Proposition’?³⁴

This implies that agencies’ habit of collecting short-term ‘evidence’ on ‘new audiences’ (as determined by the funding cycle) is relatively meaningless.

Such lacunae are both significant and serious. They suggest profound absences at the heart of cultural policy. It would appear that in the future, cultural organisations will be under even greater pressure to measure the unmeasurable.

Recommendations

What are the logical consequences of moving on from the current situation?

In a world in which it is imagined that the transformatory effects of peoples’ experiences of art might realistically be monitored, measured and accounted for – we would have to expect DCMS and its agencies to make public articulations about what they consider constitutes quality; they would need to guarantee the quality, if not the complexity, of what they subsidise; and they would need to explain how, and to demonstrate that, individuals’ transformational experiences can be, and indeed are, transferred from the individual to society.

It goes without saying that this scenario extends some way beyond practical reality and political desirability. However, that doesn’t obviate the need for certain improvements: the desirability of rationalising DCMS and other agencies’ data collections; of

distinguishing between advocacy and research; of investing in long-term evaluation, rather than short-term assessments which are determined by funding rounds; of initiating a rather more considered and honest discussion about the 'transformatory' qualities of the arts. In short, to cut through the rhetoric would benefit the politics and the pragmatics of the sector immeasurably.

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- 1 Nissel M (1983) *Facts about the Arts. A summary of available statistics*. Policy Studies Institute, p.1.
 - 2 Sue Street in DCMS (2003) *Strategic Plan 2003–2006*, p.4.
 - 3 DCMS (1998) *A New Cultural Framework* and DCMS (1998) *The DCMS Comprehensive Spending Review: A new approach to investment in culture*.
 - 4 Cited in DCMS (1998) *A New Cultural Framework* (unpaginated).

 - 5 Morris E (2003) Speech to Cheltenham Festival of Literature (16 October).
 - 6 I am grateful to Moira Goatley and Delis Aston, Analytical Services, DCMS for giving me sight of this internal document.
 - 7 This provides guidance to public sector bodies on how proposals should be appraised before significant funds are committed and how past and present activities should be evaluated (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/economic_data_and_tools/greenbook/data_greenbook_index.cfm, accessed 27.02.04).
 - 8 The Office of Science and Technology, part of the Department for Trade and Industry, is reviewing the ways in which government departments use and manage scientific research – an exercise intended to 'bring about the same sort of rigour and improvement as has been brought about in the university sector by the Research Assessment Exercise' OST (2003) *OST Science Review. Steering panel for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Background to the OST science reviews*. SR/DCMS/SP/0903/2 (unpublished).
 - 9 DCMS (2001) *Culture and Creativity. The Next Ten Years*: para 2.13.
 - 10 Jowell T (2004) *Government and the Value of Culture*, p. 8.
 - 11 Ibid. p.5.
 - 12 Ibid. p.9.
 - 13 Ibid. p.18 (my emphasis).
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3. Who owns public art?

Josie Appleton

Of all forms of art, public art has perhaps been the most strongly affected by the new cultural policy climate. New Labour has politicised art, demanding that it build communities, regenerate economies and include marginalised groups. Public art – an inherently political form – has proved an ideal candidate to wield towards these ends.

Art that sits in a square or street is different to gallery art. Gallery art can be justified on the basis of individual free expression, aesthetic criteria, or the proclivities of the art market. The gallery's partial isolation from society provides a natural defence, a moat that slows down the march of politicians. New Labour can write as many statements about access and inclusion as it likes but this isn't going to determine who wins the Turner Prize or who gets a retrospective at White Cube gallery. The contemporary art scene has its weak spots, but it has a relative immunity to dictat from the DCMS

(Department for Culture, Media and Sport). Public art, by contrast, should be accountable to the public, and so lacks the defence of the gallery. A Turner Prize artist can claim that he or she was just trying to be 'provocative', or pose an 'interesting question'. A public artist has to be socially useful – to express a community's hopes, values or anxieties.

Over the past few years, government policy has led to a new breed of public art, which is leaving its mark on cities, towns and villages across the UK. Small market towns are now getting their own sculpture; run-down seaside resorts will generally have several; metropolitan areas such as Manchester are experiencing a public art renaissance, with Victorian statues of royalty and politicians now jostling for space with modern artworks. This new breed of public art is different to public art of the past, and indeed from other forms of contemporary art. Today's public art has new funders: state and quasi-state bodies, such as local authorities, the Arts Council, the National Lottery, development corporations and arts consultancies. Together, this group could be described as 'the regeneration industry': it funds public art on the basis that it will help regenerate communities, by forging new connections and public identities, and improving local economies. Contemporary public art is developing its own aesthetic, and there is a new generation of artists who are sustained by public art commissions.

However, today's public art is not really the expression of community values or desires: it's driven by officialdom, and its spirit springs from the policy specifications of bureaucrats. Such art is about officialdom's *image* of the public, not real communities of living, working men and women. It's anodyne, New Labour art: offering a soothing kind of participation and the affirmation of local

identities. Just because an artist has proved to the Arts Council that he or she has consulted a community about a sculpture, that doesn't mean that it genuinely represents that community. No wonder that many of these new artworks go almost unnoticed. They are often local curiosities, obstacles that pedestrians have to navigate like a lamppost or a tree, but rarely the focus for public passion.

Some artists manage to break away from the influence of the regeneration industry and make public art that actually means something. In these cases, public art manages to both have a strong personal identity, and capture something of the zeitgeist. Such work tends to become a genuine focus for public interest and affection, which provides a glimmer of the potential for public art. Once it is unhinged from official specifications, public art can help to humanise our towns and cities, and express public desires. It also provides new aesthetic possibilities, and potential for a more productive relationship with an audience. I will consider this potential in the final section of this chapter.

The regeneration industry

Public art today is funded by a network of organisations, which collaborate closely in the funding and organisation of projects. This network has come together over the past few years. At the end of the 1990s, there was a boost in public art thanks to cash flow from the Millennium Commission, which was channelled through the Arts Council. The situation is different today. A spokesperson for Commissions North (a body overseeing public art commissioning in the north-west) told me in a recent interview, 'the vast majority of projects aren't being funded by arts bodies; they are being publicly

funded by regeneration funds, health trusts and local authorities'. Public art becomes an accepted adjunct to building new buildings, smartening up an area, or giving the local hospital a facelift. Case studies on the Commissions North website include a sculpture built by Barratt Homes to go with new estate houses, an artwork on the top of Newcastle's Metro Centre, and a floating structure in the river funded by the City of Sunderland.

A variety of public bodies siphon off a portion of their budget for public art, from housing organisations to hospital trusts. Councils also encourage companies to set aside one percent of their capital investment for art – which, for a multimillion-pound project, is quite a lot of art. Officials promote public art as a matter of social responsibility, of giving something back to the community and winning locals over to a new development. Often different bodies will cooperate over the funding of a sculpture. For example, a series of bird sculptures at Morecambe Bay were funded jointly by Arts Council England, Lancaster City Council, Morrisons Supermarket, Lancashire County Council and the Northwest Development Agency. Meanwhile, new artworks in the redeveloped Exchange Square in Manchester were funded by the Millennium Commission, the ERDF, Manchester City Council and the Northwest Development Agency; and 'Outhouse', a new public artwork for Liverpool, was funded by the Liverpool Housing Action Trust, the Guinness Trust and Arts Council England.

There are other forms of collaboration, too. Tees Valley Regeneration has partnered Arts Council Northeast to fund a full-time public art officer. Networking bodies have sprung up to advise on public art. There is a network of consultancy organisations, such as The Public, Free Form, Modus Operandi, Fashion Architecture

Taste (FAT), and muf art and architecture. These either design public artworks themselves, or they perform an advisory role - linking clients up with artists, or writing public art strategies. The 'Outhouse' public art project was run by Modus Operandi, for example. Local authorities that are new to public art and want to get in on the game call in the consultants. Free Form cites among its recent commissions the Mayor of Lewisham, Southwark Council, and Reading Borough Council.

Though they are coordinated at putting public art up, these organisations are not so coordinated at keeping track of how much they are putting up or how much they are spending. All the indications are, however, that it amounts to big numbers and big bucks. A spokesperson for Commissions North told me in an interview that he estimates that at any one time the organisation is overseeing 40 decent size projects; since 1999, there has been around £4 million spent on public art in the region, and around £2 million is being spent on current projects. In 2002, the National Lottery reported that in the previous six years it had spent £72.5 million on 1500 public art projects (this figure included public art in its broadest sense, not just permanent sculpture).¹ High-profile projects come with chunky price tags. £986,500 was spent on public art for Bridlington promenade alone; Coventry's nine-piece Phoenix Initiative cost some £1 million; the Irwell Sculpture Trail north of Manchester cost £2.3 million.

For a national picture, we have to rely on patchy surveys from art research bodies. These suggest that the numbers of public artworks started increasing dramatically in the mid-1980s. In 1984, there were an estimated 550 works of modern art in Britain; by 1993, it was estimated that 750 public art installations had been created over the previous 10 years.² One of the few decent surveys covering the 1990s

is a database built up by the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association (PMSA) – and this suggests that the present boom in public art is unprecedented, bigger even than the ‘statuemanía’ of Victorian times. The PMSA has documented the type, date and sculptor for permanent public sculptures across the country (using data gathered by 14 regional archive centres, which amounts to coverage of around 60 per cent of the UK). Coverage is thorough up until 2001. Here are the decade-by-decade results for the number of public sculptures erected, when the date of the sculpture is known:

Decade	Sculptures	Decade	Sculptures
1870-9	85	1930-9	74
1880-9	95	1940-9	11
1890-9	84	1950-9	58
1900-9	106	1960-9	117
1910-9	73	1970-9	84
1920-9	52	1980-9	185
		1990-9	659

This suggests that in the decade of the 1990s there were over six times more sculptures than there were at the high point of statuemanía, between 1900-9. Even if we allow for the fact that more nineteenth century statues will be of an unknown date, and so will not register in the statistics, the 1990s still come out on top. In fact, these results may even be an underestimation of today’s obsession with public artwork, given that many public artworks today are temporary, use digital media, or are a staged ‘event’, rather than a permanent sculpture.

The official aim is to regenerate communities, both economically and socially. Indeed, the hopes for public art often verge on the delu-

sional, with claims that these sculptures will, like a magic wand, transform the area – creating cohesive communities, conjuring up a new image and a vibrant economy. An Arts Council report argued that public art can ‘help to forge a new identity’, ‘create a sense of ownership’ of public space, and be ‘a driver for social renewal’.³ Bristol Public Art Strategy said that public art could be used to enhance ‘identity and distinctiveness’, ‘civic pride’, and ‘community involvement and empowerment’.⁴ Derby Public Art Strategy aims towards ‘repairing or regenerating communities... restoring a sense of worth, or achievement and value’.⁵ A writer on public art said that the role should be: ‘to assist in the production of a public – to encourage...a participatory audience where none seemed to exist’.⁶

The hope is that art will humanise public spaces, sparking debate and becoming a focus for the community. One writer on public art lamented the ‘alarming inhumanity’ of public places, ‘a feeling that ordinary people have no claim to the spaces of daily public living’, and posited art as the solution: ‘the role of art is to transform spaces into places, the public into people.’⁷ Joe Docherty, director of Tees Valley Regeneration, told me in an interview that ‘high-quality buildings are only half the story’, and that public art could help to ‘change the narrative of what Tees valley is’: ‘the aim is to create places, not buildings; to change the narrative to an ambitious, outward-looking confident area.’ City councils seem to hope that by getting their very own star sculpture they will be transformed into an equivalent of Barcelona. Wembley Council hopes that its public art will show the area is ‘interesting and fashionable’, and in the end lead to ‘national and international profile’. Southend-on-Sea plans to use art ‘to signal Southend’s new identity as a vibrant and creative town’, and wants a ‘landmark

piece of public art which will create a national profile for the town'; while Swindon sees public art as a way of fulfilling its 'ambition to be a city for the twenty-first century'.

Today's public art is very much led by an elite – much more so than in the nineteenth century, when it was largely funded by public donations and campaigns - but that elite doesn't have any substantial political agenda. Artists are told to go and create public identity, or encourage participation, however they see fit. Neither are public artists under much pressure from local communities, most of whom did not even know that they wanted a public artwork until they got one. As a result, the regeneration industry has become a law unto itself, developing its own standards and methods for evaluating public art.

At times, the business almost becomes self-justifying. Some projects have the express aim of increasing collaboration between different agencies, as if the regeneration industry was its own end. One project, funded by Art Plus, an award scheme for art in public places, involves creating dance in response to a new gallery in Woking. The funding report highlighted the creation of a 'very exciting partnership': 'The process has contributed to staff professional development in all the partner organisations, increasing their understanding of making site-specific work in the context of a new building. They have found cross artform working immensely valuable, and have many ideas for future collaboration.' It wasn't mentioned what the people of Woking thought of that. Another Art Plus award, for 'Remapping High Wycombe', cited one of the project's results as 'Both Cathy and John [the artists] have developed negotiation skills and confidence in their work during the process' – as if the project was just a way to boost their self-esteem. Meanwhile,

Chester City Council noted that one of the benefits of public art funding is that it ‘provides employment opportunities for artists and creative industries’.⁸

Public art policy in context

Today’s public art policy is a historical novelty. Broadly speaking, we can divide British public art policy into three periods: art as propaganda; art as beautification; and now, art as regeneration. I will take these in turn.

Art as propaganda

This lasted between the early nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, and resulted in statues of royalty, local philanthropists and military figures. Monument building had a very direct political aim, and there were highly charged debates about who or what should be represented. For example, in Manchester business leaders proposed a statue to Gladstone, signalling their opposition to the trade-restricting Corn Laws. Meanwhile, in Bolton, Conservatives raised a statue to Disraeli. One recent review noted that ‘unveiling ceremonies took on the tenor of political meetings’.⁹ On occasions, the country’s top political figures went out on a limb to push a proposal for a statue through. The committee to erect a statue to Admiral Lord Nelson in Trafalgar Square, formed in the late 1830s, included the establishment politicians the Duke of Wellington and Robert Peel, both of whom had previously been prime minister, and a number of Dukes and Earls. When Wellington was pushing to get Nelson’s column up he overruled the concerns of the artistic community (an angry Art Union said that it hoped that

a strong wind would blow the column down on top of the National Gallery, which it also disliked).¹⁰

Though it was developed by the elite, nineteenth century public art also had a wider resonance. Many works were funded by public donation. The Albert Memorial was paid for by public subscription, and Nelson's column was largely paid for by donations from the City. A monument to Wellington, representing him as the naked allegorical figure Achilles, was (to the amusement of some) paid for out of donations by British countrywomen.¹¹ If somebody wanted to put up a statue, he or she would often call a public meeting and open an account for subscriptions.

Art as beautification

This view held sway from the early twentieth century onwards, but particularly between 1945 and the 1970s. Art was used to enhance the public environment: it was promoted as a sign of the good times, and a source of aesthetic development and general pleasure. This was the era of Henry Moores outside every important building: by 1984, there were forty five Moores in Britain.¹² The aims were more purely artistic than they were in the nineteenth century, or today. Greenwich Park bought a Moore with the aim 'to show the work of a great artist in a great place'¹³, and the Arts Council promoted open-air sculpture as a 'test of sculptural quality'.¹⁴ Art was also seen as a marker of economic prosperity. Some classical military busts were put up in Trafalgar Square in this period - in 1948, to the First World War admirals John Jellicoe and David Beatty. However, more attention was paid to the general improvements in the square that were unveiled at the same time, including fountains with 'impressive water displays' and lighting, and an address system for use at public meetings.

Art as regeneration

A new approach to public art emerges in the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas in previous periods art was seen as the expression either of political values or economic self-confidence, now art was invested with the power to create new identities, and spark economic development. In the post-industrial cities of the 1980s, in wastelands, former docklands and manufacturing districts, public art was promoted as a cheap way of papering over the cracks. For some on the right, these cities' problems were seen as habits of mind: the view was that 'Liverpool and Marseilles are mainly suffering from a problem of poor self-image'.¹⁵ There was an idea that public art could change people's sense of themselves; give them a suitably strong self-image, and project that image to others.

There was another use of public art, though, this time from the left. Left-wingers disappointed in the working classes' failure to revolt looked on public art as a way of animating the masses into action. By getting a community's creative juices flowing, artists hoped, their political juices might start flowing too. One outline of community arts said that it 'attempts to give people the tools to be active, confident participators'.¹⁶ A promoter of 'concrete sculpture', where a community collaborated on building an artwork, said that she aimed towards 'developing a sense of identity and community' and 'stimulating a sense of being able to create something in an increasingly frustrating and alienating society'.

Today's public art policy has absorbed the policies of both right and left – it seeks both to stimulate the economy, and to stimulate political action. It has boomed in the 1990s and 2000s, a time of growing public disengagement from politics and political life. This was also a time, too, when there was money sloshing around for regeneration budgets and

development agencies. When the elite was at a loss about how to reach a sullen and atomised electorate, public artists offered their services as mediators. Artists claimed to be ‘specialists’ at keying into community aspirations and relating to different groups. As the business of political engagement began to seem like a highly complicated task, public artists said that it was only their special brand of ‘creativity’ that would work. I will now look at how public art stands up to scrutiny: from the stand-points of democracy, and of art.

Evaluating public art

Democracy

Artists take a number of different approaches to trying to reinvigorate public life. Some will just try to come up with a sculpture that encapsulates public identity, which will give people something to group around. The result of this tends to be cutesy references to local history or the environment. Sarah Cunnington’s statue for West Malling is of a woman striding forward with a dove in her upraised hand; the statue’s cloak is marked with a pattern depicting the history of West Malling. Woolston’s Millennium garden in Southampton has brick pavers inscribed with key dates and events in its history, including a list of the local people who served on the Titanic. In a public art project organised by the University of Plymouth called ‘window sills’, artist Edwina Fitzpatrick reintroduced species of local plants that had been lost to the area. Meanwhile, public art projects in seaside towns almost without fail depict waves, fish, dolphins, sea birds and so on. Morecambe Bay is littered with sculptures of local birds, including seagulls, coots and terns. Whitehaven in Cumbria got fish sculptures, a bench framed by

a whale's tale, and leaping fish sculptures. The series of sculptures on Bridlington promenade all dealt with the themes of wind and water.

Yet these kinds of artworks fail to hit home. Artists can't just conjure new identities out of thin air; they can only express something that already exists. These postcard versions of community identity bear little relationship to living, working publics. After the decline of fishing industries, most residents of seaside towns will get their fish from Sainsbury's – why would they identify with a fish sculpture on their seafront?

Another approach to reinvigorating democracy is the participatory model. Jochen Gerz designed an artwork for Coventry city centre called 'public bench', a 45-metre-long bench covered with plaques featuring the names and dates of local people. Another Gerz work, Future Monument, also includes a public poll – this time through a daily newspaper and community workshops, asking people to name a former enemy of the past, eight of which are inscribed into glass plates in front of the monument. Another section of the monument focused on the causes, hopes and beliefs of the present-day city: forty signatures were required in order to assign a plaque to an individual or cause. Other public artists carry out community consultation, working with schoolchildren or community groups to come up with proposals for an artwork. Some artists do not even make the artwork themselves; they are merely a facilitator, supervising the community group and advising them on materials. For example, Lucy Orta put a public artwork, Dwelling X, in Nottingham Market Square in October 2004 – the result of 'co-creation workshops', which apparently 'allow for culturally diverse individuals to recognise their importance in a community structure and discover the uniqueness of their personal and cultural individuality'.¹⁷

But this approach is no more effective. The public is responding to public polls on the artist's terms – Gerz is asking people to fill in the gaps of his monument, specifying the questions asked, and how many people it takes to 'win' a plaque. It is a plebiscite that the artist is conducting; the public 'participates' but it doesn't dictate the terms. This is unlike Victorian campaigns for monuments, when the artist was at commissioners' beck and call. The public poll method can't create a common identity: it tends to just result in a list of different people's different views, rather than forging these into an image or sculpture that could mean something to everybody. Meanwhile, community sculpture is based on the mistaken assumption that just because somebody from a community made an artwork, it is a satisfying representation of that community's aims and desires. Nothing could be further from the truth – as evidenced by the dire paper mache models and children's pictures on banners that are now carpeting run-down communities.

Art

In a few cases, public artists are coming up with interesting and engaging work – a rarity that I will discuss in the conclusion. But in general, the funding set-up by the regeneration industry encourages a phoney, bland form of art practice. Prime among these are the sculptures of fish and waves; and of course the clumsy atrocities that go under the banner of community art. The prime problem is that the funding set-up encourages a new set of aesthetic and political criteria, based on how many of the Arts Council's buttons you push for measures of 'public engagement', not on the quality of the work or how much it really appeals to people. Brownie points are awarded for innovative methods of

consolation, such as leaving calling cards in cafes – sidelining the actual work that results.

This arrangement favours PR types, not serious artists – the kinds of people who can hold smooth workshops and keep everybody on board, while making them feel that their opinions are being valued. For example, only one of Bristol Council's criteria for commissioning public artists included 'conceptual skills towards the production of original artwork of high quality' – other criteria included 'the ability to communicate with a variety of different people', 'an understanding and experience of different methods of community consultation', 'experience of setting up and running workshops and events with people of different ages and abilities'; 'experience of working with and or commissioning other artists'.¹⁸ This will favour the talkers and collaborators, not those able to produce a high-quality work. Indeed, it's possible to get a public art award while possessing only vague qualifications as an artist. Take the Art Plus Award given to Lizzie Patel and Katie Lee at Whitchurch Silk Mill, in Hampshire. Lizzy, who had worked as head art therapist at an NHS trust, won an award to: 'work with the Whitchurch Silk Mill to design and weave large silk banners for events at the mill; working...to bring together young and older people to create river banners for bridges; stage a promenade installation with film projections and sound performed by Katy Lee wearing a specially designed "river costume"'. It's the 'working with' that's key here, not the end result.

What public art can do

Public art does have a role today, though it is hampered from playing this role by the patronage of the regeneration industry. Our cities are indeed empty and soulless, made up of too many anonymous

streets, traffic islands and walkways. Mostly we pass through space without thinking, or while plugged into our iPods. A good public artwork can interrupt you, make you think; and perhaps represent something of what you feel or believe.

This also provides new opportunities for artists – opportunities that perhaps Antony Gormley, of all artists, has exploited to the full. Making art in public is an antidote to the often self-indulgent and introverted contemporary art scene. You can't just throw your knickers on to a pedestal, or engrave a column with lists of everybody you have ever slept with. Public art should provide the disciplining and sobering pressure of making art for an *audience*, a group of people who have to live, work and play around your work.

Public sites also offer a whole new series of aesthetic possibilities; not only good light, but an opportunity to play off and express a whole variety of different landscapes, from woods and cliffs to public squares. I recently came across an untitled sculpture on the South Downs way, for example – a mesh of woven trunks, in a wavelike form. This is sculpture about the natural environment, which is best viewed with the wind in your ears and the coastline curving into the distance. Similarly, one of Gormley's recent works – a series of human figures standing on the beach, who are submerged then re-emerge as the tide rises and falls, achieves an effect that would be impossible in any art gallery. It's elemental – about man bearing up to the elements, stuck fast but looking out to sea in expectation.

The reason why Gormley succeeds, and has become so popular, is that he doesn't make phoney attempts to create public identity. He does work that is both personally meaningful and keys into the zeitgeist. Though most of his sculptures are of himself, he is anything but narcissistic. His work seems to capture the state of

today's psyche: reaching upwards, trying to fly, but as yet unable to take off.

We should break up the cosy consensus that has emerged around public art between the state and quasi-state bodies in the regeneration industry. Then we might see the production of more public art that actually means something.

Recommendations

Cut off regeneration industry funding for public art. Rather than fund art from a distant state bureaucracy, how about restarting the habit of public subscription? This would mean artists appealing to the public to gain support for their work, rather than just pressing the right buttons at the Arts Council.

Make public art funding voluntary. The Percent for Arts schemes make public art into a burdensome duty for corporations, demanding that they show how 'socially responsible' they are. If companies fund art, they should do it because they want to - not because they have to.

Get real about public art. Everybody should be realistic about what public art can and cannot do. It can't give people identity, or make up for the lack of neighbourhood services; it can make streets more attractive and meaningful. Popping the delusions of the public art promoters is the first step towards finding public art a better role.

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4. A business solution for creativity, not a creativity solution for business

James Heartfield

Fortunately, Britain is regarded as a world leader across all creative disciplines. However, too few UK manufacturing companies draw on and benefit from this excellence that exists on our own doorstep. So the challenge is about how UK businesses as a whole can be more creative, not simply about the creative industries.¹

On 17 November 2005, the Design Council Chairman Sir George Cox reported to the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown on how best to enhance UK Business Productivity by drawing on ‘our world-leading creative capabilities’. According to Tony Blair, the world’s new knowledge economy pushes you further up the value-added chain all the time.²

It is, of course, true that Britain’s creative industries have a track record of which they can be proud. In 1985 Richard Seymour and

Dick Powell thought again about the kettle, and took its cord away. James Dyson's 1993 invention pretty much took Hoover's name off the vacuum cleaner. John Brazier's computer modelling of the Swiss Re building at 30 St Mary Axe for engineers Ove Arup is the kind of innovation that made Sir Norman Foster's Gherkin possible. It has helped make Arup a 7000-employee company, with a £400 million turnover worldwide.

Britain's creative achievements are not behind us, either. They are contributing to Britain's balance of payments right now.

- In 2002, furniture makers the AKA Group, based in Wood Green, launched a range of flat-pack edit suits for television production companies. Design Director Anthony Haston explains that the company transformed its sales, two thirds of which now are abroad or in the rest of the UK, compared with one twentieth before. The units, which sell as far afield as Russia, Australia and America, save production studios the cost of individually crafted suites.
- Jasper Morrison's Low Pad chair for Italian firm Cappellini are just part of the portfolio that has made him the 'designer's designer' whose products are being made all across Europe. 'It may be the designers duty to suppress any desire for self expression' was how he explained the emphasis on usefulness and discretion that people have seen in his work.³
- Seeing Nasa's scientists improvise an air pump out of scrap in the film Apollo 13 inspired RDF Television's Eve Kay to develop the format *Scrapheap Challenge* for Channel 4, sold to the US as *Junkyard Wars*. That and other formats like *Wife Swap* have earned RDF foreign sales of £9M – after Chief Executive David Frank renegotiated export rights with Channel Four.

- In 1998 British Airways challenged the London based product design consultancy Tangerine to give business class passengers a six-foot flat bed with minimum impact upon the overall seat count. Tangerine scrapped the received wisdom that seats face forwards, and proposed interlocking forwards and rearwards facing seat pairs, which allowing 8, rather than 7 passengers to be seated across the plane. Designers worked alongside BA's engineers for 15 months. BA launched the first business class flat bed in the sky and boosted sales.
- Based in St. John's Square, London, Samsung's European Design Centre was launched in 2000 to recruit British designers to overcome cultural barriers to the company's goods. Design Manager Clive Goodwin called in Seymour Powell Foresight to help develop the 'emotional minimalism' concept of 'cool, sparse designs with little ornamentation, the very antithesis of the Korean idea'. One spin-off, the XGH – X800 fashion handset became a best-seller in the ultra-competitive Korean market.

That is the good news. Sadly, these stories are the exception, not the rule.

The Design Council claims that its 2002 *Survey of Firms* has 'shown for the first time the link between growth and design'.⁴ Has it?

The Council makes two arguments. Its first is that there is a correlation between the importance that firms put on design and the share prices they enjoy on the Stock Exchange. Unfortunately, both are falling. Over the three years 2000-2002 firms questioned put less importance on design each year. And over the same period, share prices fell, and have continued to fall since.

The Design Council's second argument differentiates between

‘static’ and ‘rapidly growing’ firms, and hails evidence suggesting that rapidly growing firms value design more than static ones. Even here, though, the picture is a varied one. While rapidly growing firms did think design had helped make new and better products and services, and nearly half thought it had improved productivity, only a third thought it had increased their bottom line. Even fewer praised it for reducing their costs.

Perhaps the Design Council puts the cart before the horse, for the real logic of economics is not so favourable as it would like to have us believe. When things are going well for them, employers invest more, in design as in other things. Conversely, those ‘static’ companies that see less value in design tend to cut back on general costs, including design, in a less favourable economic environment. Perhaps their attitude is that design is a luxury they cannot afford.⁵ Design spending is the dependent, not the independent variable.

To isolate *spending* on design from other economic factors is always foolish. But the Design Council’s error is bigger than this. It tries to draw a media-friendly correlation between *the importance that firms claim to attach to design* – a fuzzy variable, if ever there was one – and *the prices of their shares* among dealers in the City.

After all, there is usually a time lag between being convinced of the merits of design, and getting a pay-off from spending money on it. In fact the *fall* in share prices in 2000-02 came after a massive *increase* in spending on design.

The rest of the Design Council’s National Survey of Firms reveals a very different economy from the one Tony Blair talks about. Most companies have a very low opinion of design: two thirds think it made no contribution at all to their turnover or their profitability.⁶ More than half made no use of design either with staff, or with consultants.⁷

The finding that gives the game away is this. A massive 58 per cent of all the firms surveyed in 2002 had neither developed nor introduced any new products or services in three years (p 12). This contrasts sharply with the three years preceding, when two-thirds of firms surveyed by the DTI were found to be actively innovating.⁸

Only 11 per cent of firms increased spending on R&D. They preferred outlays on marketing (34 per cent of firms) and sales (29 per cent). In Britain, as ever, effort is being put into getting goods off the shelf and into people's hands, but not into new goods. As James Dyson says, the reason that Britain's trade is in the red 'is that we're not investing enough in R&D, we're not developing the intellectual property, so people don't want what we do'.⁹

Not for nothing do we find that design, when it is invested in, becomes a *substitute* for innovation. Where technology has stagnated, businesses put a greater stress on brands to differentiate products. If you cannot build a faster chip, you can always stuff the competition by tapping into the public's psyche. That can mean good work for designers, but it does not necessarily lead to better products.

Of course, style and utility need not be mutually exclusive. Jonathan Ive's celebrated iPod MP3 player and storage device combines (1) firewire and flash memory (2) a single scroll-wheel for navigation – a near-perfect simplification of the controls (3) dedicated but Windows-compatible iTunes software (4) the signature elegance of the iPod itself. But just as important as Jonathan Ive from Newcastle Polytechnic has been hard drives from Toshiba.¹⁰ Here design is the proper *accomplice* of investment in new technologies, not a faddish attempt to circumvent that investment.

Good business may lead to more and even better design. But more

and better design does not, by itself, lead to good business. To imply as much is just hyperbole.

But then the design business has never been short on that.

Déjà vu, all over again

The Treasury's interest in the contribution that creative industries can make has a familiar ring. That is because it is not the first, or the second, but the third 'creative industries' policy Government has pursued.

In the heady days of the first Blair administration, the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), under Minister Chris Smith transformed the standing of the arts and the government's relation to them. The ground was laid for Smith by the outgoing Minister for National Heritage, Virginia Bottomley, who was not averse to claiming the credit for the success of British artists and designers. Also, Labour's network of writer's, actors and artists, mocked as 'Luvvies for Labour', helped to draft a new policy for a new arts ministry, the DCMS.

Policy wonks at the DCMS, like John Newbegin and Ben Evans developed their ideas working for David Puttnam's Enigma Productions. It was there that the basic proposition that the creative industries were Britain's future was developed. 'Our rock musicians contribute more to the balance of payments than the steel industry' wrote Puttnam. 'The audiovisual industries employ about 220,000 people in the UK – considerably more than the number of people making cars and vehicle components'¹¹

It was a theme that the DCMS took up forcefully. According to the DCMS, the 'Creative Industries' were Fine Art, Advertising, Design, the Performing Arts, Music Publishing, Publishing, Television and Radio. In defiance of the accepted view of the arts as a drain on the exchequer,

the DCMS insisted that these (more broadly defined) creative industries were the ones that showed how to generate wealth for Britain, while the older, smokestack industries belonged to the past.

Smith's *Creative Industries Mapping Document 1998* and his *Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001* seemed to show growth rates for the sector that would be the envy of any Minister. Employment in the arts and cultural industries had been estimated in 1995 at 648,900.¹² By 1998 the DCMS had found 1.4 million jobs there; by 2002, Smith's Department was certain that 'creative employment' totalled 1.9 million jobs.¹³

The purported growth in creative industry income was even more dramatic. While the 1998 *Mapping Document* estimated that income to be £57 billion, the 2001 edition went on double the figure to £112.5 billion, or five per cent of Gross Domestic Product. These impressive growth statistics were buttressed with an increase in museum attendance from 25.4 million in 1999 to 32.7 million in 2001.¹⁴

Sadly, much of the growth could be explained by different methods of counting. The DCMS boosted employment by 500,000 and income by £36.4bn by adding in the UK's software sector – the biggest single contributor to employment and earnings, but precious little to do with the arts. (Pointedly, the DTI now excludes computer software from its estimate of the earnings of the creative industries, which in any case it refuses to see as a sector in its own right.¹⁵) The doubled earnings of the creative industries between the 1998 and 2001 versions of the *Mapping Document* were at least partly due to the fact that the two were 'not directly comparable': the Appendix to the later one suggested that 'extreme caution' be used when attempting to draw conclusions from the data. The sudden growth in museum attendance could largely be explained by the abolition of attendance fees.

Much of the cultural sector's statistical expansion is a matter of adding in more jobs and businesses in such a way that boosts the numbers. Still, there can be no doubt that Chris Smith raised the profile of the arts. The problem with his case for the arts was that it confuses two very different things.

One is the *subsidised cultural sector*, which *consumes* a subsidy of £4.9bn, and includes the loss-making performing arts (the national theatre, orchestras and opera) as well as libraries and museums.¹⁶

The other is the *profit-making*, creative components of the British economy. That would break down further into cultural goods and services – whether popular, like commercial television, or appealing to small market segments, like the fine art market. It would also include those commercial goods and services that have a creative component, like designed electronic goods or advertising. These are the ‘creative industries’ that feature in the DCMS case for the economic contribution of the arts; but it is the former, subsidised sector that gets the benefit from the DCMS’s pro-se-lytising.

Knowledge-driven economy?

In the autumn of 2002, Trade and Industry minister Patricia Hewitt was out to correct a misunderstanding

Quite inadvertently we let the impression build up that we were only interested in something called the “new economy” – the dotcoms, the internet and all that. And that we weren’t interested in traditional manufacturing – which was part of the old economy. With no future in the modern economy. This is nonsense.¹⁷

But where did Hewitt's unhappy 'impression' come from? The answer is: from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

In 1998 DTI minister Peter Mandelson published a paper written by Charles Leadbeater and titled *Our Competitive Future: Building the Knowledge-Driven Economy*. That paper explicitly dismissed 'old models' in economics – ones that took seriously 'labour effort and physical capital'.¹⁸ Its positive examples of economic success were pointedly divorced from traditional manufacturing:

In many aspects of the knowledge economy, the UK is already in a strong position. In areas such as media, advertising and entertainment, financial services, pharmaceuticals and Formula 1 cars, the UK has a worldwide reputation as a leader of the field.¹⁹

A sometime contributor both to the Communist Party of Great Britain monthly *Marxism Today* and to the *Financial Times*, Leadbeater stole the idea of the knowledge economy from US management guru, Peter Drucker, going on to popularise his version of it in *Living on Thin Air: the New Economy*.²⁰ There, Leadbeater expanded on his DTI thesis. 'The critical factors of production of this new economy', he argued, 'are not oil, raw materials, armies of cheap labour or physical plant and equipment'.²¹ Instead, we were 'all in the thin air business'.²²

This was a Third Way. This was what Dick Morris, Bill Clinton's electoral adviser, notoriously termed triangulation. Neither labour nor capital created wealth, but knowledge and, in particular, creativity. Economic writer Larry Elliott sounded a much-needed note of scepticism: 'Britain's recent performance in manufacturing has indeed been poor but the idea that the creative industries are so

dynamic and unstoppable that they can plug the hole in the balance of payments is fanciful in the extreme'.²³

Like Patricia Hewitt, Leadbeater had soon to back off. Speaking at a conference in London on 27 September 2001, he admitted that 'we can't all live on thin air'.²⁴

Today the mood of sobriety has deepened. NESTA warns that exceptionalism – the assumption that creative businesses are not like other businesses – is self-defeating. It will only add to the 'alienation' of potential investors.²⁵

The remarkable thing about the Trade and Industry policy was that it was not an industry policy at all. It was an arts policy. Mandelson had wanted Chris Smith's Arts brief until Tony Blair persuaded him industry was more important. It was even planned that the Culture ministry would be subsumed into the DTI.²⁶ Yet even after that, the Prince of Spin went on to model DTI policy on ideas generated at the Department of Culture Media and Sports (DCMS). The result was official sanction, by a department with no fewer than 10,000 employees, of the 'knowledge economy'.

At first Number Ten was cautious. 'The Prime Minister was unlikely to give us much support' the DTI's man Stephen Hadrill reported back. But Leadbeater's *Thin Air* rushed into a policy vacuum. 'Apart from the knowledge driven economy theme', reflected Geoff Norris of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit, 'the proposals did not contain a big idea'.²⁷

Creative Regeneration

Local authorities have also turned to cultural regeneration as a phoney substitute for real economic revival.

Two models have shaped policy. The first is the success of Glasgow's nomination as European Capital of Culture in 1990; the second was the emergence, in the 1990s, of Shoreditch and Hoxton Square, the 'City Fringe' abutting the financial district, as London's bohemian quarter. The Glasgow Smiles Better campaign worked because it wittily overturned the unspoken assumption that Edinburgh was Scotland's cultural capital; similarly, East London's emergence as the stomping-ground of a new generation of Young British Artists eclipsed Hampstead's reputation as home to the intelligentsia.

Actually both of these blossoms grew in the dung of deindustrialisation. Glasgow writers such as James Kelman, Alasdair Gray and Agnes Owens, and Glasgow painters such as Ken Currie and Peter Howson plumbed the depths of the city's industrial wreckage for themes – eventually falling out with the Council's upbeat champion, Pat Lally. In the nation's capital, artists have gravitated to the 'City Fringe' to take advantage of large and cheap industrial spaces ever since Bridget Riley first squatted the abandoned Ivory Shed in the West India Docks in 1967.

According to Liz Malone, of the City Fringe Partnership, about 1550 of 7000 businesses listed in Yellow Pages for the Shoreditch and Spitalfields areas could fit the very broadest definition of creative industries, from 18 Art Galleries, through 180 ladies clothing wholesalers, 42 internet services and 125 graphic designers. Characteristically, such businesses have a short-term approach: their leases generally run to less than five years. They are lean businesses, occupying on average 1-2000 square feet and employing five people. Just over half recruit by word of mouth, and virtually none use an employment agency (though employment agencies themselves

amount to 110, in number, for this part of the ‘fringe’). They are businesses with turnovers of between a quarter and a half a million pounds.

City planners have tried to replicate the success of both Glasgow and Hoxton. But they have failed to ask whether these are appropriate precedents. Following Glasgow’s model, Belfast, Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Cardiff, Canterbury, Inverness, Milton Keynes, Newcastle-Gateshead, Norwich and Oxford all competed for Britain’s nomination as European Capital of Culture in 2008, losing out to Liverpool. (‘If you don’t pick Belfast’, joked the former paramilitary leader Gerry Adams to Miranda Sawyer, ‘don’t come back.’²⁸) But Liverpool’s bid document makes it clear that the nomination is not about the city’s dynamism so much as its dependence on government subsidy. Noting that ‘Objective One’ European funding will run out, the document argues that ‘Capital of Culture status would be the perfect exit strategy to Objective One’. Instead of celebrating Liverpool’s contribution to culture, its award was overshadowed by the perception that the city still wallows in its victim status.

Charles Landry took up the Hoxton model of development in his *Creative City*. Despite pointing to ‘formula thinking’ as chief among the barriers to regeneration, he subtitled his book ‘A toolkit for urban innovators’. Landry’s kit has been applied as far afield as Adelaide, Salem and Albania, as well as to Manchester, Newcastle and Birmingham. City grandees were even persuaded to market Newcastle as ‘a top international holiday destination in the specialised gay market’ – though if an analysis of the census by Sussex University researcher Darren Smith is to be believed, Newcastle turns out to be straightest town in England.²⁹ Questioning the branding of Newcastle-Gateshead, local playwright Alan Plater

points out that ‘if you cover your waterfront with wine bars, you’ll make it look pretty much the same as anywhere else’. Meanwhile *Viz* creator Chris Donald insists that Newcastle is closer to Blackpool than Bilbao: ‘most of the money comes in through beer tourism’, he says, and if you ask people who live here, lots of them haven’t been to the new arts centres’.³⁰

Justin O’Connor is head of Manchester’s Creative Industries Development Service. Gamely, he talks up window-shopping as a creative industry

Shops, cafes, bars, restaurants, clubs – people watching, people meeting; the construction of lifestyle identity through consumption; postmodern flaneurs – whatever we call it – these are as essential an indicator of a lively city as the large cultural institutions. (Manchester City Council Economic Initiatives Group, *The Cultural Production Sector in Manchester, research & strategy, summary*, 2001, p xxxi)

Even less convincing, though, is Manchester’s claim to any substantial slice of the country’s creative industries.

O’Connor’s estimates show just 5310 people working in cultural industries in Manchester, one twentieth of the number working in London. And even using his own ‘expanded definition’, as a share of Manchester’s workforce, cultural jobs are just 2 per cent, less than in London (3.3 per cent) Cardiff (2.1 per cent), and just a little higher than in Southampton (1.9 per cent). As a share of industry and services output as a whole, the cultural industries sector is just 3.7 per cent of the North West region, compared with proportions of 5 per cent of the South East, and more than 7 per cent of London, but the same as Yorkshire and Humberside. And where other regions’

cultural industries sectors, like East Anglia's or Humberside's, were growing, the North West's was contracting.³¹ Most painfully, Manchester's share of UK television production has been slashed with the demise of *Brookside*, the merger of Granada with Carlton and the closure of Granada's Quay Street complex. Even the BBC's decision to move 1800 people out to Manchester has been marked by staff unwillingness to take up the relocation package.

Manchester is not the only regional centre that likes to exaggerate its contribution to the creative sector. At Scottish Enterprise, a creative industries team has discovered that 'Scotland may be UK's main creative industries region outwith London/SE'.³² The Department of Trade and Industry's research on business clusters puts it kindly 'for most of the creative industries, any regional presence must be considered embryonic'.³³ In fact employment in creative industries declined between 1995 and 2003 in Scotland, the North East and the North West.³⁴ Regional burghers continue, like central government, to confuse subsidised arts provision with profitable private sector firms. Author James Kelman's take on Glasgow's elevation to City of Culture is pertinent: 'Art is not the product of "the cultural workforce", a term I first discovered in 1990 and which seems to refer to those who administer public funding and/or private sponsorship for "arts initiatives"'.³⁵

Just because new media took off in East London, it does not follow that other cities in the UK should try to do the same thing. Yet for the residents of those cities, much-needed economic regeneration has been put on hold. Aerospace is a lot more important, and distinctive to the North West, as is industrial equipment and chemicals to the North East, and oil and gas exploration and computer manufacture to Scotland.³⁶ Instead of renewing infra-

structure, every municipal government has prettified cities with flowers, festivals, paintings and sculptures – and then gone on to mouth off about how its offering is, of course, unrivalled, completely unique and all that.

The Creative Ghetto

When Josiah Wedgewood established his pottery business at Etruria, he initially had the artists who designed the illustrations and the draughtswomen who hand-painted them onto the tableware all working under the same roof. He quickly learned that the artists were a bad influence on the workforce, rolling in at all hours, chatting away, with their feet up on the table, and tossing balls of paper around. The reflective side of the creative process and the hard grind of painting the designs on did not mix. The artists were given their own annex, away from the rest of the workforce.

Sadly, that is where the creative industries are today, after eight years of promoting Creative Britain, in an annex, off to one side, away from the main body of British business. The overselling of the dot.com bubble had a lot to do with industry's distrust of 'creatives' today. Then over-hyped new technology companies dressed up their tenuous business propositions by getting in a couple of designers to dress the whole thing up.

According to research by the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) there is an 'investment gap' for new creative businesses, which 'many private investors still perceive as being full of "lifestyle businesses" which are unlikely to produce desirable returns'. NESTA's report highlights a telling problem: 'some creative businesses can find it difficult and expensive to locate and

protect the commercial value of the content they create'.³⁷ NESTA warns that exceptionalism – the assumption that creative businesses are not like other businesses – is self-defeating. It will only add to the 'alienation' of potential investors.³⁸

The creative industries themselves, however, are responsible for the aura of 'exceptionalism' that surrounds them. For years self-styled creatives have looked down their noses at the more mundane business of money, as though the rest of the productive economy was not creative. 'Creativity' has become something of a mantra. In America, the influential urbanist Richard Florida later put things even more sharply. Florida's specially narcissistic category, the Creative Class, was, he argued, 'the norm-setting class for our time'.³⁹

The ambition to be creative, however, might be seen as the individual employee's strategy to cope with a relative lack of control over work. In *Flow*, his pioneering study of creativity, the Chicago psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was surprised to find that (1) people were at their most creative at work, but (2) while they were at work, they did not want to be there.⁴⁰ That basic contradiction is hardly new to us. In the past, employees coped by trying to retain control over their working skills, before Mrs Thatcher swept away such customs. Today, employees express their frustration with the relative lack of inspiration at work more speculatively by dreaming of another, creative working life. As James Woudhuysen points out, a key moment came in 1999, when the US management guru Peter Drucker proposed that bored knowledge workers should prepare for the future by *planning to do stuff very different from the work in front of them*.⁴¹

It used to be said that every waitress in New York was an out-of-work actress. Today the joke is 'you're writing a book? Neither am I.'

The ambition to become one of the select few, today's aristocracy of labour, 'the creatives', is what has driven the massive expansion of courses in art and design, of book clubs for would-be authors, and, in the musical domain, of bedroom bands. But there are uncomfortable truths to reckon with. Less than a quarter of graduates in design actually start work as designers. The manuscripts are mostly unreadable, the bedroom bands unrecordable. Those ambitions are exploited to draw on the free ('work experience') and underpaid labour of runners, web-content writers and office dogsbodies throughout the cultural sector.

Despite the attempts to big them up, the creative industries are in a ghetto of their own making. 'Creativity' seems too much like a formula to avoid work. Creative businesses have forgotten Edison's formula that genius is one percent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration.

Can Cox Fix the Mix?

At BMP, a prominent UK advertising agency, James Best and Chris Powell maintained in 2000 that creativity was all too easily seen as the preserve of 'creative' firms. Rather, they argued, the commercial success of all businesses 'depends on creativity'.⁴² Gordon Brown agrees. 'Of course', he wrote in a move to reassure the UK's manufacturing sector that the Government had not abandoned it, 'creativity is not confined to any one sector of the economy'. Creativity was, in fact, 'essential in business today' - an understanding that informs the commissioning of the Cox Report.⁴³

One proposal that has come out of the Cox Review process is a greater instrumental role for the Design Council. The Council already

operates the Design Immersion programme, matching designers to manufacturers. Under its aegis, Sam Hecht's designs for Sheffield Cutlery maker Harrison Fisher, in particular an award-winning knife sharpener have improved the company's fortunes: £60 000 of investment in design are forecast to generate extra sales of £800 000.⁴⁴

The changes at the Design Council have raised some eyebrows. Eleven years ago, chairman John Sorrell's report *The Future of the Design Council* led to a significant down-sizing of an organisation that was spending a £7.5 million grant from the Department of Trade and Industry each year, and employing 200 people. Sorrell wanted the DC to take a more strategic role as a think-tank and champion of the industry, and slimmed it down to just 40 people in new offices in Bow Street.

But since the Sorrell Report, the Design Council has once again enlarged its operations. The Design Immersion programme is financed through the DTI's Regional Development Agencies. The Council has been instrumental in re-launching a Design trade association, the Design Business Association. In April 2005, the Council announced that, in association with the DBA it would create a Design Matching Service for designers and industry, and back it up with major research on the state of the design industry - with the DC's Chief Executive taking a seat on the DBA's board to seal the deal.⁴⁵ On top of that the Council took on the job of administering the Sector Skills Council for the Creative Industries on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills. Today, the Design Council's budget is once again over £7.5 million, coming from the DTI and to a lesser extent the DfES, with not 200 but 66 full time staff.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, some of these new activities the Council has moved into were already being provided by the private sector. The Chartered

Society of Designers has a membership of 3000 designers, compared to the DBA's 230. The British Design Initiative - now British Design Innovation (BDI) - has a register of 4500 designers, from which it generated its 'Valuation Survey' for the Design Council for many years before they reproduced those efforts with the 2005 survey *The Business of Design* and its own register. Maxine Horn of BDI points out that since there are only around 5000 design consultancies in the UK, it is questionable whether they can support the extensive governmental bureaucracy that has been built up around them.⁴⁷

The Design Council's ambition to act as an agent of change in the relationship between creativity and industry is laudable. Their stated aim of connecting 'the world of creativity and production' seems to make sense.⁴⁸ But the Council is as capable of reproducing the underwhelming ambitions of British industry as it is of revolutionising them. In 2001 the DTI complained that 'the UK's more risk averse approach generally contributes to lower levels of entrepreneurial activity and affects the early adoption of new technology'.⁴⁹ The Design Council's most recent promotion of the role that Design can play in industry is to appeal to that risk-averse approach, by promising to 'Futureproof' British business. But then image consultants have preyed upon industry's fears of the future for decades, offering to guarantee the one thing that can never be guaranteed, future sales.⁵⁰

The 'creative industry' policies pursued by the DCMS and the DTI, as well as the regional development plans that emphasized creative industries have all suffered from the problem of elevating 'creativity' into an other-worldly activity. In doing so, they only created a ghetto where creativity was seen as something outside of the real business of British business.

The Treasury's Cox Report is a recognition that strategy did not work. But it is not clear whether the lesson really has been learned. Fetishising creativity, ironically, has become one way of making sure that the plain business of developing new products and services plays too small a role in the British economy. The idea that there is a design solution to the problem of British industry is itself part of the problem. Instead we should entertain the possibility that there is a British industry solution to the problems of the creative sector. That might mean that a more innovative industry left less room for an independent creative sector, but instead incorporated creativity into its everyday business.

Recommendations

We need transparency and clarity in funding creative industries and cultural activities. Supporting social goods, like libraries and art galleries should not be confused with promoting export industries. Funding agencies should avoid fudging the two, however tempting. Government aid to industry needs to be transparent, not disguised under the ideological rubric of 'knowledge economy' or 'creative Britain', useful as that might be for political promotion. The same safeguards against creating dependency or promoting bureaucracy need to be observed with the creative industries as with any other.

Rationalise the burgeoning bureaucracy surrounding the creative industries. The government agencies dedicated to these seem to be in danger of dwarfing the very industries that they are supposed to serve. There is a real problem of reproduction of effort among the DCMS, Design Council, NESTA, Local Authorities' Cultural Task Forces and so on.

The greatest challenge is to address the problem of Britain's risk averse investors and CEOs. Design and the other creative industries could play a part, especially where they are dedicated to processes as well as packaging. But in the long term, the very existence of a discrete 'creative sector' is a sign that creativity is not central to British business.

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5. The arts as painkiller

Munira Mirza

It is a longstanding cliché in our culture that ‘the arts are good for you’. However, in today’s subsidised cultural sector, this idea is being taken quite literally, in the sense that the arts are seen to be good for one’s *health*. On the website for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), it reads, “Engaging with the arts can impact on the health of individuals and communities, reducing recovery times and preventing illness by improving quality of life”.¹

The Chief Executive of Arts Council England, Peter Hewitt, echoed this sentiment in a recent review of the medical literature linking the arts and healthcare, “Artists have long been aware of the benefits of their work in healthcare settings and we know from evaluation reports that the arts can have a positive impact on health”.²

In local government, one of the largest funders of the arts in the UK, the connection between arts and health is widely accepted. In a report commissioned by the Local Government Association, the author asserts that the ‘contribution which participative arts projects

can make to increased self-esteem, the reduction of social isolation and improved social networks is linked directly to issues of health and wellbeing³ The Scottish Executive is no less effusive about the link between arts and health, arguing that the research (including clinical research) shows that participation in cultural activities “has led to improved physical and mental health”⁴

As well as claims that the arts improve our health generally, more specific claims have also been made about how the arts can play a more important role for those diagnosed with short or long-term illness. The Department of Health has been keen in recent years to emphasise the importance of arts and cultural policy in patient healthcare. As the former Minister for Public Health, Hazel Blears MP stated at a conference in February 2003, “I know in the Department of Health alone that across the NHS and Social Care contexts there are many ways – over many years – that the arts have made direct and indirect contributions to individual and community health”⁵

Such rhetoric about the healing powers of the arts may seem like nothing more than the usual fuzzy sentimentality from politicians and policy-makers, but in fact, it reflects the growing scale of arts funding linked to health benefits. In ‘Ambitions for the Arts 2003-2006’ Arts Council England states that ‘being involved in the arts can have a lasting and transforming effect on many aspects of people’s lives’ and then goes on to outline its plans to work with other government agencies, including the Department for Health and healthcare professionals.⁶ Local authorities such as Knowsley, Bolton and Salford have developed partnerships with Primary Care Trusts to work with participatory arts organisations in engaging with vulnerable groups.⁷ The NHS has initiated new schemes, such as the

Environment for Care programme through which it promotes best practice in employing arts in large-scale capital investments.⁸ The managing team for Liverpool's status as European Capital for Culture in 2008 has appointed a Creative Health and Well-Being Manager, who will develop partnerships 'across arts and health boundaries in Liverpool'. Perhaps most controversially, spending on paintings and sculptures in 2003-2004 by NHS Trusts was estimated at £9 million. Although it was explained by a number of the Trusts that much of this funding was from charitable donations not public funding, it seems remarkable that there should be money available for arts in hospitals when according to the British Medical Association, three out of four NHS Trusts in England was experiencing a funding shortfall during the current financial year.⁹

The possible health benefits of the arts to individuals and communities have received increasing attention over recent years and numerous initiatives have been set up in this area by government, public health agencies, charities, and arts organisations. Whilst there is a long tradition of providing art and sculpture in the healthcare environment (see for instance the work of charities like Paintings in Hospitals, founded in 1959) and many hospitals have always made an effort to make their buildings attractive and welcoming places for patients, there is also a clear qualitative shift towards the perceived power of the arts to actually *improve* health and health care. In a report commissioned by Arts Council England and the Public Health Directorate, written by the Centre for Arts and Humanities in Health and Medicine (CAHHM) the authors argued that "we need an arts in health workforce".¹⁰ As the well-known advocate for the social value of the arts, Francois Matarasso, puts it, "In fields like health...where the use of the arts was wholly excep-

tional only ten or fifteen years ago, it is now common and not so far from being normal”¹¹ The Faculty of Public Health Medicine made arts in health a connecting theme in its 2003 annual science meeting. In some cases, the arts even being seen as *clinically* important, perhaps even as much as other methods of care. The editor of the British Medical Journal, Richard Smith, even suggested in one provocative editorial in 2002 that the central funds for healthcare ought to be reduced slightly in return for a substantial increase in arts subsidy.

Although Smith may have been half serious in his suggestion, changes that reflect his thinking are afoot within the healthcare profession. For example, Great Ormond Street has commissioned new pieces of art at the entrance to the operating theatre in order to reduce patients’ stress and provide comforting distraction in the recovery room.¹² University College Hospital in central London recently put on display its newly acquired piece of art, costing £70,000; a polished piece of granite dubbed by critics as ‘the pebble’. In responding to complaints about the purchase, Louise Boden, chief nurse and ‘design champion’ for the hospital’s Trust, said, “A healing environment is crucial to positive patient experience. There is increasing evidence that a welcoming and interesting atmosphere improves both patient well-being and staff morale, even speeding recovery in some cases”.¹³

The claim that arts in healthcare can speed recovery is indeed a dramatic one but how accurate is it? There are many new projects and initiatives being developed around arts and healthcare but in examining the sheer range of activity, it is clear that claims that the ‘arts are good for your health’ are so vague and inconsistent that they are at best just common sense, or at worse, misleading. This chapter

aims to clarify some of the statements made about the arts and health, and assess the evidence base for the claims.

Arts and health – confusing claims

“The evidence that art promotes public health and enhances social inclusion remains elusive” according to one academic review.¹⁴ The Arts Council, DCMS and NHS Health Development Agency (HDA) have all commissioned numerous reviews into the available research and have discovered that there are many different ways in which arts activity might improve healthcare – although some ways have a more robust evidence base than others. A recent review commissioned by Arts Council England of 385 medical papers published in specialised journals in the last decade concluded there were some definite health benefits arising from the introduction of arts practice and participation but on closer reading, it is clear that these effects vary significantly and the definition of ‘art practice’ is itself wide-ranging.¹⁵

There is a broad range of arts activity designed to improve public health, but at present, these are confused with each other and create an impression that all arts activity must have positive health benefits. It is therefore useful to separate out the different modes of activity and the asserted claims made for each.

1. Clinical research on the effect of arts participation and practice to achieve health outcomes in relation to specific conditions.

There is compelling evidence to suggest that certain kinds of arts practice can lead to specific improved health outcomes for patients with certain conditions or need, in particular, for mental health. For

instance, recent reviews by the world-renowned Cochrane Collaboration have examined the effectiveness of arts interventions as part of reminiscence therapy for dementia and chronic mental illness, pain management for neurological disorders and more specifically, the effect of music therapy through psychophysiological pathways.¹⁶ The medical literature to date is not conclusive (often because arts and music therapy is so varied in practice), but there is some evidence to suggest that the therapeutic use of music, visual arts and literature can enable patients with mental health problems to express themselves emotionally. These are very targeted uses of 'arts' practice or participation, and are intended to achieve a particular health outcome. Music therapy in particular has been developing in the US and Britain for a number of decades. However, as it is still a relatively new profession, there is a recognised need - even among music therapists - for better quality research on a larger scale.¹⁷

2. Clinical research on the effects of arts participation and practice within a health setting to improve patient 'well-being'

There is some evidence to suggest that certain types of arts provision in hospitals can help take patients' minds off their medical problems, to reduce stress, depression and anxiety, and in some cases, even reduce blood pressure, pain intensity and the need for medication. The overwhelming emphasis is on the value of music, often self-selected by the patient, to create a relaxing environment which can lead to reductions in heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure and increased muscle relaxation, for example in cardiovascular units, intensive care settings, and pre and post surgery.¹⁸ The effect of music in relieving the anxiety of cancer patients undergoing

chemotherapy has also been observed, although it has been suggested in one study that this effect is not dissimilar to simple distraction and that patients' preferences should therefore be taken into account.¹⁹

3. The effect of arts practice and provision on staff outcomes

It has been argued that the introduction of art and music into hospital settings can improve staff retention and the working environment more generally. There is certainly evidence that nurses and doctors value the importance of working in a pleasant surrounding that is clean, welcoming and suitably designed for their needs. The stated importance of the arts is part of a wider recognition in the public sector that job satisfaction is not determined solely by salary levels, but by broader concerns over workload, training, stress levels, career choices, management structures and staff relations. The degree of job satisfaction can also have an impact on the quality of care and staff turnover.²⁰ Hospital design is likely to contribute in some ways to staff morale, for instance the provision of communal areas, daylight, air conditioning, and cheerful interiors.²¹

However, it is not entirely clear from the evidence how importance the arts are to this measurement of job satisfaction. Whilst hospital staff may welcome the introduction of new paintings in their staff room, we cannot judge for certain whether this has a greater or lesser effect than the introduction of fresh flowers, or a better coffee machine. The painting may have less support than the purchase of more sophisticated medical equipment, or even the introduction of facilities like a gymnasium. Asserting the importance of art in this 'holistic' approach to job satisfaction is therefore more difficult. It is also unreliable to state as fact that art in hospitals

can reduce stress and improve staff relations. Any number of employment considerations – management expectations, staffing structures, financial and human resources, – can affect the emotional life of people working in a hospital. Not only would it be extremely difficult to isolate the impact of a particular painting or recital of music from these broader factors, it might be reasonably argued that the emphasis on art is perhaps a distraction from other pressing concerns. Also, if studies do show there is a correlation between job satisfaction and arts provision in a particular hospital, this might simply reflect a more responsive and ‘holistically’ focused management style just as much as the impact of a particular art work.

It has been suggested in some studies that art appreciation and teaching drawing to medical staff can significantly improve observational skills, particularly in neurosurgery.²² It is unclear what kind of art would be suitable to achieve this outcome but it appears oriented towards improving medical training, rather than the appreciation of art in itself.

The other, often emphasised, outcome discussed in the research is the importance of using the arts to improve staff patient relationships; creating a more therapeutic environment and improving sensitivity towards gender and cultural differences. The review by Staricoff states, “Another interesting approach consists of introducing students to selected works of art in a gallery. The participants have to provide health assessments of the mental, physical and environmental activities of the characters in the paintings. This exercise develops skills of observation, increases trainee awareness of dealing with health problems across cultures and strengthens confidence in their own nursing abilities”.²³

The value of art and culture to teach us about fellow human beings and ourselves is undisputable. We can learn significant amounts from literature, poetry, painting and music about the motivations and emotions of people. However, it is difficult to claim this knowledge can bring about 'better nursing' in any immediate or predictable way. Presumably, by making us more sensitive and empathetic people, we could all benefit from a visit to an art gallery now and then. The implication of this kind of argument is that the world of medicine is finally beginning to realise that healthcare is not solely about drugs or surgery. In the words of former Minister for the Arts, Estelle Morris, "There is now a feeling that health is more than technology and measurements and targets. That mood change is very important".²⁴

Morris' claim implies, perhaps unfairly, that the medical world was previously ignorant of the therapeutic and subjective factors involved in healthcare. It also implies that the medical establishment was too concerned with 'measurements and targets', resulting in an insensitivity to patients' emotional concerns. But as one nurse, Brid Hehir, recently reflected about her early career, "I certainly remember a midwife encouraging women, averse to the use of pain relief in labour, to bring in favourite pieces of art or music that they could focus on as the contractions strengthened." But she adds, "Neither I nor the women I cared for believed that the piece of art/music was as important as my professional expertise". Patients and staff have long valued art and good design in the healthcare environment, but they have always assumed secondary importance to expertise, technology and resources. The exaggerated importance of art in relation to achieving health outcomes may reflect a wider lack of confidence in the medical establishment in asserting the

superiority of science-based medicine over complementary and holistic treatments.

5. Community based arts projects and health

At the primary care level, with regards to mental health conditions, there seems to be evidence and, to some extent, a common sense acceptance that involvement in arts related activity could bring positive benefits. Since the 1990s, some Primary Care Trusts have developed 'art on prescription' schemes, arranging client referrals from GPs (where most mental health problems are identified) to local arts organisations. This approach understands art to be a kind of therapy for specific mental health problems, and recognises that factors such as social isolation can play a part in relapse.

The use of arts in health promotion has also been developed in recent years. Cultural institutions, including libraries, museums, and galleries, are all becoming seen as conduits through which health agencies can communicate issues like sexual health advice, parenting issues, smoking, and obesity to the public. 'Partnership working' has been encouraged in order to promote 'joined up thinking' between different policy areas. In some cases, this can be as straightforward as displaying leaflets about local health services in a library, in other cases, it may be more complex engagement, using media like drama or dance workshops to communicate sensitive issues like teenage pregnancy or drug use to designated vulnerable groups. Again, this approach is very clearly oriented towards health outcomes and the artistic quality of the project is considered important only in terms of how well it delivers the intended health outcome.

However, the major shift in the discussion is how general community arts activity can improve the health of participants,

regardless of whether they have reported a specific problem to a health professional. That artists are increasingly moving between healthcare and community settings is welcomed in the official policy literature.

Many of the claims made about the impact of general arts activity in public health are unspecific and are about increasing a sense of 'well being'. But these claims lack a strong evidence base and the tendency is to rely on anecdotes. The Health Development Agency's review in 2000 of community-based arts projects and initiatives concluded that "it was impossible to give precise details of improved health, particularly in light of the fact that so few projects directly provide information on health, or social matters related to health, which are based on formal instruments of measurement".²⁵

The concept of well-being, one which is increasingly used in policy discourse throughout local and national government, is vaguely defined in much of the literature and implies a therapeutic understanding of health, based on emotional or subjective states. Whilst the subjective side of health cannot be disputed, we might question whether this is as important as other objective lifestyle choices, such as diet, exercise, environment, as well as objective social factors, such as innovations in clinical research, and the quality and provision of healthcare in the locality.

The widely cited health effects of community arts projects are *increased confidence and self-esteem*, often through self-expression, the acquisition of new skills and interaction with other people. However, this objective is quite different to the use of arts for specific conditions, as considered in the clinical research. The kind of art practice is usually very different and is much more reliant on

achieving an emotional or psychological outcome, rather than a medical outcome. This kind of therapeutic engagement is more about personal development as a route to creating social capital, regenerating communities, and dealing with social exclusion. While it is true that some arts activity can bring social benefits, these have traditionally been provided by voluntary sector organisations and have been informally developed, rather than in accordance with government policy objectives. Once the government and public bodies use the arts to address social exclusion and create social capital, a number of questions come to mind. We might question whether art subsidy is the most effective, 'value for money' way for government to achieve these particular aims. Any number of sociable or educational activities, for instance, in sport or education or community work, might be more effective in building social capital or addressing social exclusion. This would lead to a further question about what role government should take in recreating social activities and civil society, which have traditionally been handled by community groups and the voluntary sector?

Yet, the major issue to address is not the amount of money spent on such community projects, or even who is in charge of them, but their intentions. The model of urban regeneration, health and social inclusion that is being developed is 'therapeutic', in which social problems become repackaged as individual, psychological problems that require therapy. People feel dissatisfied with their lives, not because they live in poor housing, face low employment prospects and feel disengaged from the political frameworks in society, but because they suffer from a lack of 'well being' or 'self-esteem'. Once social issues become understood in this way, the focus of policy

turns to people's emotional states and responses to the social world, rather than on improving the social world itself. Likewise, there is a corresponding concern that the elevation of people's general unhappiness into a significant mental health problem risks 'medicalising' individuals, and exaggerating the degree of mental illness experienced by the population at large.

In terms of how artists themselves are affected by the 'therapeutic' model of arts subsidy, there is always a risk that their work is tied down by the demand to produce positive mental outcomes. A poet was recently recruited in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to help reduce the local suicide rate which is the highest in the country.²⁶ Whether the artist is suitably qualified to deal with people in such severe mental states is another matter, but the project will require an artist to achieve a particular target (presumably, it will be quite easy to judge his or her success).

Finally, we know that the subjective effects of art practice cannot be predicted in any scientific way and in some cases might be counterproductive. After all, great art is often unpredictable by its nature and the creative process at its finest has been known to nurture more negative emotional states, such as anger, depression and, in the cases of some of the greatest artists of all, suicide. If an artist working with the local community is truly enabling people to express their emotions and empowering them to act for themselves, who is to say they would not unleash feelings of anger or frustration against their close friends, family or even the authorities? If art is truly doing its job, might we not also see more rioting in the streets and social unrest? Of course, this possibility does not even enter into the discussion, because the implication for arts and health projects is clear: they are not about using the arts to express a greater truth

about ourselves, but to manage our emotional lives and even perhaps, to placate us.

But is it art?

In reviewing the evidence, there is clearly scope for further research into the positive health effects of certain types of art intervention. However, it is also clear that these activities and effects vary widely and to group them together as ‘arts and health’ is misleading. Much of the research discussed in this chapter is focused on specific interventions produced by the music or art people already like, and it is unlikely that other kinds of art or music will achieve the same effect. For instance, as one study showed in relation to mental health, “Interestingly, playing classical music was less effective in reducing psychotic symptoms than using familiar tunes of non-classical music.”²⁷ The kind of ‘arts’ practice that is being drawn upon in health contexts is subservient to the needs of patients and not that of the artist. It can be understood primarily as a leisure activity, intended to distract people and make them happier, or a cognitive activity, designed to induce specific mental effects. Whilst both are clearly valuable lines of medical research, it is ambiguous how much *artistic* value such programmes have. Public arts providers such as the Arts Council play a role in nurturing the artistic and cultural life of the nation, rather than producing specific health outcomes. That these two objectives might conflict is barely acknowledged in any of the literature.

Yet, it is a concern that some people working in the arts will be very aware of. The small arts organisation looking for public subsidy knows it is more likely to attract the interest of funders if it can talk

up the health impacts for its participants and audience. Arts providers are also encouraged to look to other pots of government funding, such as healthcare budgets, to fund their work.²⁸ Opportunities for finance abound in the arts and health industry, but the quality of art becomes secondary to the social policy objective. If a participant in an amateur arts workshop is producing mediocre work, does the professional artist risk damaging his or her self-esteem in order to give an accurate appraisal? Which outcome is more important; the artistic quality or the mental health outcome?

Even more challenging, the need to produce evidence that complies with the rigorous demands of clinical research forces arts organisations to come up with some proof of their added value. Artists, quite rightly, complain that what they do cannot be easily measured in a scientific way. In some cases, the intrusive form of the evaluation questionnaire for patients counteracts the very intention of the exercise.

Conclusion

There has been a significant shift in thinking about the power of the arts to address health issues and health inequalities. There are some interesting areas of medical practice that require further research and the Government should support this. However, the expansion of 'arts in health' activity has led to a confusing and almost misleading impression that the arts *in general* are good for our health, and that they should be supported on this basis. As many other reviews commissioned by public bodies have argued, many claims made for the health benefits of the arts require further quantitative and qualitative evidence, not just anecdotes. The desire for health professionals to develop 'humanised' health care is laudable but we

must remind ourselves that there is an objective medical basis to illness and that whilst improving subjective factors can be complementary, this will always be a limited way to improve healthcare overall. The interest in artistic activities is no substitute for sustained research in medical science and improved health facilities or employment conditions for staff.

We must also consider the political and social implications of the move from arts in a medical setting, to arts in the wider social sphere. The findings in the former are often used to justify spending in the latter. Not only should we ask if the 'mental health' model in different policy areas is an effective way of dealing with pressing social problems, but we should be aware that it encourages a view among funders, providers and participants that the arts are only worthwhile when they make us feel physically or mentally better. When the arts are turned into a healing instrument, they may lose the capacity to shock, surprise, disturb and challenge our worldview.

Recommendations

There needs to be more clarity about what 'arts and health' actually means. At present, this is a vague category and confuses different areas of practice. If there is to be research into the specific medical benefits of the arts, this should not be led by the Arts Council but by appropriate healthcare agencies and professionals. Too often, exaggerated claims about the health benefits of the arts are used in advocacy documents without proper substantiation.

A proper discussion is needed about the 'value' of the arts and why they should be subsidised. This need not rely on 'impact assessment' or social benefit measures. Numerous surveys show that the public

supports the idea of subsidy and can see why the arts are beneficial without the empty promises.

We also need to challenge the increasingly popular notion that social problems can be dealt with through therapeutic arts projects or by simply improving ‘wellbeing’. This approach ends up reducing problems to individual psychology, and steers policy-makers away from more making more ambitious improvements in our quality of life.

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6. Consumed by the political

The ruination of the Arts Council

Andrew Brighton

The principle of arm's-length funding has been undermined to the extent that ACE is now considered as merely an extension of Tessa Jowell's Department for Culture, Media and Sport.¹

Sir Christopher Frayling, chair, Arts Council England

The Arts Council of Great Britain has declined over sixty years from an independent and authoritative body to a conduit of government policy. This politicisation is politically objectionable. The relative autonomy of domains of thought and action is a fundamental characteristic of a liberal society. For instance, that the principles of legal, medical and scientific judgements should be determined by political discourse is obviously objectionable. The arts have mixed economies; they are not entirely dependent on the state. Nevertheless, the erosion of the integrity of the public sector culture

institutions should be opposed for a number of reasons including that it is an erosion of liberty.

The years of autonomy

John Maynard Keynes set out to create an institution which would distribute public money to the arts on the recommendation of expert advisors without political interference. The Arts Council of Great Britain was established without parliamentary debate in an annex of the 1946 budget bearing grants to scientific and other autonomous bodies. Independence from government was at its core.

In April of the previous year Sir Alan Barlow, a senior civil servant at the Treasury and collaborator with Keynes, met R A Butler, then Minister of Education to discuss the transformation of the war-time CEMA, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Art, into a new, as yet un-named post-war body. Rab Butler, a sophisticated collector and an arts attendee, had supported the proposal up to then. The conversation consisted of the Minister saying what he had expected to happen and Barlow telling him what was going to happen. 'It became apparent, at the very beginning of the discussion, that what is really at issue is the relationship between the State and the new body,' wrote Barlow in a memorandum.²

The intention of Barlow, *et al*, was to create distance between the new body and political management, answerability and the cultural ignorance of most politicians. Butler thought it would be like the British Council and subject to ministerial 'control'. Barlow replies that the British Council is carrying out government policy, 'CEMA are not'. Butler is surprised that it is be under the Treasury and not under his own Ministry as CEMA was. It will not be in education,

says Barlow, because any Minister of Education would want to have a close involvement with the body, 'whereas any Chancellor of the Exchequer would have too many preoccupations to intervene in its affairs'. Few future ministers would have Butler's credentials to answer questions on art and the theatre. It is to be guarded against too much scrutiny by political guile. Questions in the House of Commons must be avoided and Parliament 'would more readily accept an aloof attitude from a Chancellor of the Exchequer than from a Minister of Education'. Anyway, a connection in the public mind with education might not be an advantage, the things the body had to offer 'should make an appeal as being pleasant rather than wholesome'. Further, it will be given a quinquennial grant, 'otherwise leaving it a pretty complete autonomy'.

For the first twenty years of state support for the arts in Britain no government published a cultural policy and no minister had functional responsibility for the arts. Apart from determining on advice the membership of boards and councils of various arts bodies and the amount to be awarded to them, publicly supported arts organisations were not the object of sustained ministerial attention and ambition.

It is pretty clear that relatively small amount of taxpayer's money spent by cultural experts with little or no democratic control over the period was for good or ill disproportionately effective. It was in the subsidised sector that most innovative theatre and music was performed and it was in the public art institutions that international modernism established itself in this country. The kinds of art that undermined traditional values were given recognition. For instance, the rise in importance of the Arts Council exhibitions was matched by the decline in status and influence of the self-supporting Royal

Academy of Art. Public subsidy served to make the culture of the British educated more international and liberal. It changed what they saw, read and listened to. However, the Council had little or no influence upon working class culture.³

In part, the success of the Council can be attributed to its autonomy. Expert judgement on aesthetic grounds, on the grounds of the experience of works of art, was given its head. Its influence was amplified by the respect for its choices.

This autonomy was strengthened by the Cold War. The battle with communism for the political loyalty of intellectuals was in part conducted internationally by both overt and covert subsidy of culture.⁴ Professional expertise free from political manipulation as against the subordination of the both arts and sciences to Marxist-Leninism in the Soviet Union served as an exemplar of intellectual liberty. In the wake of Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 speech denouncing Stalin, the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the growth of the New Left, the autonomy of the arts and sciences became less important as an anti-communist weapon. It ceased with the fall of the USSR. The erosion of autonomy and the growth in politics and the media of the use of 'elite' and 'elitist' as terms of abuse is a feature of the period when the battle for the hearts and minds of the educated in Europe declined in importance.

Autonomy was breached in principle before it was breached in practice. In 1964 a Labour Government was returned to office. Responsibility for the Arts Council was moved from the Treasury to the Department of Education and Science. Jennie Lee became the first minister with responsibility for the arts. She published a white paper, *A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps* in 1965.⁵ It argued that working class people had been conditioned by their education to

consider the best in music, painting, sculpture and literature outside their reach. By increasing funding of the arts and in particular expenditure on the buildings that housed them, the audience for the arts could be expanded. In the next financial year the Arts Council's budget rose by nearly £2 million pounds. The audience for the arts did continue to grow. There is no evidence that the working classes increased as a proportion of that audience.

Politicising art: creating fallacies

Advocating public funding for the arts on the grounds that it benefits the working class was both effectual and dishonest. It was not new. That public museums, galleries and libraries would better the lower orders was argued in the nineteenth century. It is a claim that returns again and again in differing forms to justify arts expenditure. But there is a truth near universally known but near universally denied that makes art problematic as an object of support from general taxation. Art is made by and for people who know or want to know about it. Further, these people tend to have had more formal education than most. Length and level of education is the predominant characteristic of audiences for the arts rather than class origin or wealth. Politicisation is seen to be a solution to the problem.

I want to distinguish between political support or interference and politicisation. (Political, committed or tendentious art is another story.) Political support or interference is part of party political jostling for power, the courting or avoidance of newspaper headlines, an extension of patronage and the granting of favours and all the small change by which political influence is sought, secured and used. Politicisation is something else. It is a re-shaping of the

culture of production and reception of the arts within a political logic. In this story it is the attempt to make the claims for social benefit of the arts *politically* true.

To make art the object of policy is to construe it within political discourse. There is an ontological conflict, it is necessarily a misconstruction. Political discourse is polemical. It speaks for a collective, a *polis*, against whatever is deemed to threaten the values of its collective.⁶

Carl Schmitt in his critique of liberalism, *The Concept of the Political*, observes that liberalism brings on recognition of autonomous domains of thought and action:

Let us assume that in the domain of the moral the ultimate distinction are good and evil, in the aesthetic domain beautiful and ugly, in the economic useful and harmful, so the specifically political distinction ... is between friend and enemy.⁷

For Schmitt the political is not an autonomous domain amongst others, it is the ultimate domain, it is fundamental. The 'exaggerated' autonomy of other domains is at the core of the de-politicised liberal state. It is the erosion of the political, it is what he opposes.

What the politicisation of the Arts Council shows is the development of an account of the value of the arts in terms of enemy and friend. The implicit enemy in Lee's declaration, for instance, is the limitations of working class culture. Modern political managerialism tends to name problems rather than people, it still must, however, have enemies without and within. There are always those who resist the problem's solution. It still requires a 'we' and a 'they'. Lord Goodman, the chairman of the Arts Council, appointed like Lee by Harold Wilson, made the enemy more explicit by arguing that the

arts were a means of rescuing young people from their 'lack of values, lack of certainties, lack of guidance'.⁸

In contradistinction, art does not need enemies to be art. It does not speak for a defined collective. Rather, art claims transcendence, a potential universality. It claims to speak beyond its particular culture and time.⁹

The arts' claim to transcendence is nowadays more habitual than a declared idea. It is, however, to put it at its most mundane, imbedded in their everyday treatment and political economies. Why else is popularity not the sole measure of the financial value of the arts? The millions of people who visit the great galleries of historic painting and sculpture with an expectation of being affected by what they see are assuming that art can transcend historical period. Similarly, attending to music and literature from the past and/or different cultures for the experience they offer assumes transcendence. To treat artefacts in this way is to treat them as art.

There might seem to be a contradiction: on the one hand, the insistence that art is made by and for people who know about it (the educated) and on the other hand, art's claim to universality, its address to every person. The contradiction is resolved by restating the proposition in another way: the kind of culture that claims universality is made by and for people who value context-free knowledge. To be educated is to have knowledge, skills and, in the case of the arts, sensibility that has currency beyond the local and particular. Transcendence is a core value in the ideology of the educated.

By educated I mean people whose sources of income and status comes from cultural capital. They are that massively expanded strata, sometimes called the professional classes. The continuing rise in the number of people attending the arts since the war is primarily

due to the increasing proportion of people who have undergone post-school education.¹⁰

The arts are not just artefacts they are also cultures of reception. Like a competent boxing fan, the arts aficionados will be familiar with certain ideas, histories, social spaces, modes of attention and so on. They are part of a form of life. The propagating of serious art amongst people who are relatively un-educated is an act of cultural aggression. It is requiring people in one form of life to adopt the values and sensibility of another. It is to conceive of their culture and way of life as other, as an enemy to be vanquished.

Art as the enemy

When in a 'personal essay', *Government and the Value of Culture*, to which I will return, the current Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Tessa Jowell looks back to Jennie Lee's white paper she reports that after Lee, ministers reverted to 'a more elitist line'.¹¹ In fact, until the election of New Labour, under Lee and subsequent ministers with responsibility for the arts, both Labour and Conservative, the Keynesian model was eroded but still held. The Council was still supporting arts organisations and artists on the recommendation of people with aesthetic expertise. It continued with the election of the Thatcher government in 1979.

Under Thatcher the subsidy for the arts did, however, recede. The arts were expected to increase box office and other income from their audiences, develop private and business sponsorship and become more efficient. 'We fell into a spiral of decline' says Jowell. She does not mention that for some arts activities and institutions the chance to develop multiple sources of funding, in addition to public subsidy, was

liberating and enabling. It gave then more autonomy. She does not say that it was under John Major that the Lottery was introduced opening up a new level of capital funding for the arts. Nor does she say that it was under the Conservatives in the 1980's that the arts were first required by central government to serve specific social goals. The arts were to revive inner cities and rural communities, to help develop the talents and skills of ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups and they were to create employment.¹²

New Labour came to power in 1997 with a debt to management training rather than Methodism or Marx.¹³ They re-described and intensified the Tory's social requirements. They did so within the terminology of, on the one hand, social exclusion and inclusion, and on the other hand, managerialism. Like Marxist-Leninism, managerial discourse assumes omni-competence. It can direct all human activities: science, culture, education, industry or whatever. The arts were a weapon against social exclusion. There were to be performance indicators, aims and targets. This was evidence based policy, there would be proof of positive social impact. Under secretary of state Chris Smith, the DCMS gained additional funding from the Treasury on these grounds.

This policy required that art serve the polis, the political 'we'. That in art which resists the political 'we' must become an enemy. Chris Smith made art and its audience villains. The narrative of his speeches suggested that art had been stolen by its practitioners and audience. '...perhaps most important is that the arts are for everyone. Things of quality must be available to the many, not just the few. Cultural activity is not some elitist exercise that takes place in reverential temples aimed at the predilections of the cognoscenti', he declared at the beginning of his reign at the DCMS.¹⁴ A host of other quotations from Smith and his appointees could illustrate the point.

His successor, Tessa Jowell took up Smith's polemic. In her first speech to the Labour Party conference as secretary of state, she declared her commitment to 'building access to excellence in all aspects of our cultural life. For everyone, not just for the privileged elite.' In *Government and the Value of Culture* she refers to 'the privileged few' and 'the "cultured" wealthy'. (Are the inverted commas meant to indicate spuriously cultivated in the same way as Senator Joe MacCarthy used 'pseudo-intellectuals' when attacking the educated?) The point, she tells us, is to give people access to what was 'hitherto the preserve of the middle and upper classes'.

When it was published in 2004, James Fenton and others saw *Government and the Value of Culture* as 'a pretty major sea change' from the social instrumentalism that shaped and justified New Labour arts policies until then.¹⁵ They were wrong. A sea change will have begun only when the DCMS's funding agreement with the Treasury has ceased to require increased arts attendance by 'priority groups', that is, C2DE and black and other ethnic minorities and the disabled. These are people defined directly by lack of education, social classes C2DE, or are people 'underrepresented' amongst the educated. The present funding agreement runs from 2005 until 2008. It came after the publication of Jowell's essay. The surprise is that her essay was so misunderstood. Without endangering the current level of DCMS funding, Jowell cannot escape requiring of the arts institutions that attendance by these groups increase.

Art is us

What reveals the ontological divide between art and politics most clearly is when Jowell sets out to praise the arts. When she appropri-

ates it as a friend. She dissolves the 'we' of art into the political 'we' and demotes the aesthetic.

By culture she tells us she means art. Art is, she suggests, complex culture that makes demands upon maker and viewer. It is to be distinguished from entertainment. So far so good, I can think of no utterance by the Arts Council in the last ten years with as much intellectual spine as this. But she then says:

Culture gives us a national identity which is uniquely ours. Culture defines who we are, it defines us as a nation. And *only* culture can do this.

This is daft. How often have you been asked for a list of films, plays and exhibitions attended when crossing a national boundary? What do my love of Cervantes, Malevich and Billie Holiday say about my national identity? But as a politician she cannot speak for the undefined, self-selecting republics of art and letters. She is obliged to impose the political 'we'. As a result aesthetic experience and judgements become like the disposable local language of some invaded tribe. It is inconsequential.

Value judgements, when fine judgements are required, are certainly to some degree subjective. But the kind of value judgement we make when we allocate millions to the Royal Shakespeare Company cannot be justified on subjective grounds: we need to explain why it is right to do so to a critical bystander or a sceptical voter.

A seminal construction of art's universality argues that the subjective in aesthetic experience is universal; it is a defining characteristic

of the experience of art as art. It is at core an intuitive experience. The idea has become a presupposition of much modern art even to those innocent of Kant's accounts of the human faculties from which it comes. The idea presupposes inter-subjectivity. When something is put forward to be experienced as a work of art, it is bit like saying, is this object cold or hot or is it red or blue or does it smell of coffee or nutmeg? Trying to describe the difference between red and blue, et cetera, is near impossible. But the difference in experience is very clear. For Kant the question would be, is this beautiful, or in more current terms, is this art? The question presupposes that all people have common capacities of feeling. When, for instance, Cezanne struggled to render his *petit sensations* it was not an act of solipsism, he presupposed their universality.

The aesthetic judgements of the director, producer, designer and actors that go into the making of a production, the subsequent experience of the audience and professional critics of that production or of the RSC productions in general cannot be recognised in political discourse. Aesthetic experience is as nothing. What does matter is that the arts be demonstrably socially wholesome.

Art as a weapon

As part of Jowell's attempt to extend the grounds for public support she sets out to show the 'personal value added' of the arts. Without art people do not reach their potential, 'with a consequent loss of human realisation'. Art, she claims, is at the heart of being 'a fully developed human being'. From which it must follow that those without art are less than fully human.

The idea that people without art are lesser or inferior beings is a ridiculous assumption, a piece of moral vanity akin to a religionist's belief that only those of their faith or sect are capable of real virtue and walk in the true love of God. People who have little or no interest in the arts are not deprived, they do not think of themselves as suffering. They are not a problem to be solved by the state. They can be good mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. They can be great scientists or dustmen, bank managers or taxi drivers, doctors, nurses or even politicians. You don't have to be un-educated to be un-interested in the arts and you don't have to be educated to make a good job of being a human being. Some of the scum who ran the Nazi concentration camps loved Schubert.

However, Jowell's seeming incidental attack upon those without art is not a departure from the political logic of her essay. Given she has said art defines national identity, people without art are either not 'we' or an inferior 'we'. This particular otherness for attack is declared at the beginning of her essay.

Sixty years ago Beveridge set this country a challenge; slaying the five giants of physical poverty – want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness...it is time to slay a sixth giant – the poverty of aspiration.

Decoded, this means the enemy is the culture and way of life of the unskilled, of the welfare or crime dependent, of the school, police and social worker-resistant individuals, families and communities that refuse to aspire beyond their condition and hand on their resistance to their children.

'Culture can help to alleviate this poverty of aspiration.' This assertion rests on the weird and wonderful history of community

arts. There is a vital moment in the history of the Arts Council decline when in 1974 it allows its charter commitment to 'increase accessibility of the arts to the public' to mean not just geographic availability and financial affordability for those who want the arts. It comes to mean the funding of people, who call themselves artists rather than educators, to propagate the arts amongst those who have no interest in them.¹⁶

Community art was a child of left politics. An art, the argument ran, grounded in working class life and culture could be liberated from the bourgeois art market, it could serve to empower the exploited and give rise to a truly democratic culture. Since when it has undergone a revolution. It is now advocated as a tool for embourgeoisment, a means for abolishing the underclass, for including the excluded or as in Jowell's nomenclature, propagating aspiration.

The most influential advocate for the beneficial social impact of art upon the un-educated in the UK has been a former practitioner of community art, François Matarasso. His study, *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation Art*, published in 1997 was formative of New Labour policy. He became a government consultant, served on quangos, and was cited in speeches by Chris Smith. His research has subsequently been described by Paola Merli as 'flawed in its design, execution and conceptual basis'. Sara Selwood in a 2002 survey of research into the social impact of the arts, *Measuring Culture*, described Matarasso's and other research intended to support the claims of social benefit as methodologically flawed and spurious.¹⁷ In a 2004 Arts Council survey of impact studies there is no reference to Matarasso's research.¹⁸ Mr Matarasso, however, is now a member of the council of the Arts Council England. He was appointed in October 2005.

Tessa Jowell is still chained by promises to the Treasury made by Smith in the light of Matarasso claims. 'We need to keep proving that engagement with culture can improve educational attainment, and can help to reduce crime.' The function of the words 'keep' and 'can' is to hide that there is no proof. Public money is being spent to 'keep on proving' the social impact of the arts. Both independently and with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Arts Council England is 'committed to strengthening the existing evidence base on the impact of the arts'. ACE and the AHRC are giving and university departments are taking money to deliver new methods and tools for impact assessment specifically developed for the arts. In as much as they presume the arts should be subject to impact studies they have conceded and are aiding and abetting the use of art as a social weapon and the usurpation of each art's own cultures if production and reception. They are, in other words, taking money to service the government's political managerialism. That other omni-competent discourse Marxist-Leninism, it should be remembered, recast the language of evaluation when it turned its attention to the arts.¹⁹ (As to the rigour of their studies, I know of no research that compares the cost-effectiveness of arts expenditure against other ways of addressing the same social ills.)

The art of cohesion

The implication of Jowell's essay is clear. The experience of a Shakespeare production or any other aesthetic experience is marginal. It carries no weight in political discourse. However, doubtful claims that art is a weapon against the un-aspiring, that it has *polis*-serving impacts upon the un-educated can, has and does increasingly determine what is funded.

There has been a major shift of resources to these ends. For instance, in their financial years 2000 to 2002 the ACE spent £5 million on ‘decibel’ an initiative to raise the profile and develop further arts opportunities for people from Asian, African and Caribbean backgrounds, invested £30 million in a capital portfolio of ‘BME’ (black and minority ethnic) and disability-led organisations as well as creating a Diversity Department.²⁰ These decisions create a distinct institutional stratum, BME culture. It creates a context where appointments and decisions are made for political ends. Claims to universality are voided. While artists may try to use these contexts and funds to make serious art, the framework in which they operate will signify a pre-determined meaning and value. This is art for social cohesion, this is *polis*-serving.

The Council has become the primary agent of replacing the aesthetic ‘we’ with the political ‘we’. Since 1997 it has appointed to itself and required of its client institutions that they recruit people whose terms of appointment commit them in principle and practice to art in the service of the political ‘we’. In other words, a generation of appointments have been made in which the job description requires the holder to commit to politicisation.²¹

The Council has abandoned art as a distinct category. Tessa Jowell’s notion of art as culture that makes complex demands and as something different from entertainment is more specific and serious than any you will find in its utterances. The Council sells itself as a *polis*-ising weapon. Rather than rely on expert aesthetic judgements it runs a ‘research’ department that carries out ‘strategic research and evaluation that provides solid evidence of what Arts Council England’s funding achieves’.²² It talks in Millennium Dome-speak. ‘Our ambition is no less than to place the arts at the heart of national

life, reflecting the country's rich and diverse cultural identity as only the arts can.²³ What and where is our national life? Do they mean everything that goes on in England? If so, what do they mean by its heart? Mass events? Last night of the Proms? The crowd in Trafalgar Square after winning the Ashes or the Rugby World Cup? Behind these metaphors of national anatomy there is a promise. It is to the Council's political masters and it is to deliver a cohesive national 'we'.

What are the principles and observations that should be extracted from the story of ACGB/ACE's decline?

'What is really at issue is the relationship between the State and the new body' wrote Sir Alan Barlow in 1945. The history of the Arts Council - particularly in recent years - has changed the nature of this relationship, raising the question of whether the arts can exist within the public sector if they do not comply with political discourse. The autonomy of expertise, which is crucial to the integrity of the arts, has been undermined by the managerial state. Part of the solution must be to show the limits of political discourse in general and political managerialism in particular. After all, one reason why the arts have audiences is because they can offer experience, values and ideas other than those possible in political discourse and that is at the core of their political importance.

Recommendations

Abolish the Arts Council as it is now constituted. Replace it with bodies responsible for different arts: art; theatre; literature; and music. Each of these bodies would receive government funding to support a national network which makes their particular art form and its attendant activities financially and geographically available to

the public. Any other demands would be ruled out. They would distribute monies to major independent institutions. The ruling council of each art form body would be made up of persons elected by their client institutions.

The client institution would be strategically chosen to cover the country. The particular policies of each major institution would be largely up to the institution. However, part of their income would depend on the ability to build audiences and upon their performance as assessed by peer review. It would be possible for the central bodies to remove funding altogether. The regional institutions would be enabled to seek additional funding from sponsorship and contract to provide education or any other service from public bodies if they so wished. They may gain funding from more than one of the national art bodies.

Why art form based funding? The various arts have different histories, ideologies and political economies. General 'arts' policies have always been either homogenising or vacuous as a result.

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Politicians and policy-makers take every opportunity to talk up the arts' importance to society. The Arts Council and Department for Culture, Media and Sport insist that the arts are now not only good in themselves, but are valued for their contribution to the economy, urban regeneration and social inclusion. Arts organisations – large and small – are being asked to think about how their work can support government targets for health, employment, crime, education and community cohesion.

Is there actually any evidence to support them? Also, does the growing political interest in the arts compromise their freedom and integrity? *Culture Vultures* brings together a panel of experts who show that many official claims about the economic and social benefits of arts are based on exaggeration, resulting in wasteful and ineffective social policies. Even worse, such political intrusion means that organisations are drowning under a tidal wave of 'tick boxes and targets' in an attempt to measure their social impact.

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