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21st century enlightenment

Arts Funding,
Austerity and
the Big Society

*Remaking the
case for the arts*

John Knell
and Matthew Taylor

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for the arts?*

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RSA

8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
+44 (0)20 7930 5115

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The RSA

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This pamphlet will be published to coincide with the second annual State of the Arts conference on 10 February 2010, organised by the RSA and Arts Council England. This brings together a wide range of creative voices to debate issues around resilience, audience and the value of arts and culture and seeks to explore some of the key questions addressed in this pamphlet: in a time of austerity, what are the priorities now? What is our vision for the long term? What imaginative and practical approaches are needed to sustain the arts through this period? What new opportunities are there to deepen the value of the arts to individuals, to society and to the economy?

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support of Arts Council England. This pamphlet has benefited from the incisive comments made by those who read an earlier version. We are very grateful for their input, which has improved our argument. Any errors or omissions remain our own. With thanks to: Hasan Bakhshi from NESTA, Dr Eleonora Belfiore from Warwick University, Anne Bonnar, Catherine Bunting from Arts Council England, Mick Elliot from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Anna Jobson from Arts Council England, Dave Moutrey from Cornerhouse, Stuart Mullins from TheatreIs, Andrew Nairne from Arts Council England, Dick Penny from Watershed, Marcus Romer from Pilot Theatre, Prof Sara Selwood, Virginia Tandy OBE from Manchester City Council.

Biographies

John Knell is one of the UK's leading thinkers on the changing face of work and organisations, and has worked as a consultant to a wide range of corporate and public sector clients. John's recent client work has focused on strategic reviews, thought leadership and high-level public policy work, particularly in the cultural sphere. He has authored numerous reports on work, organisational change and public policy including *The Art of Dying* and *Whose Art Is It Anyway*.

Matthew Taylor has been Chief Executive of the RSA since 2006. Prior to this, he was Chief Adviser on Political Strategy to the Prime Minister. Matthew was appointed to the Labour Party in 1994 and during the 1997 General Election was Director of Policy. Matthew was the Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research between 1999 and 2003. He has written for publications including *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *New Statesman* and *Prospect*.

Remaking the case for the arts

The global recession that we have entered will not just knock the froth off things; it will permanently reconfigure the cultural landscape. This may happen more slowly and the events may be less flamboyantly newsworthy than the bankruptcy of Iceland, [or] the collapse of the international banking system . . . but the underlying forces at work are just as strong – indeed – they are the same forces.¹

The scale of the UK's fiscal squeeze is going to cause some permanent shifts in the arts, amplifying both challenges and opportunities. Austerity will put brutal pressure on all calls for public investment and the arts will have to revitalise their case.

Many of the experts we consulted in writing this pamphlet have stressed how difficult the next three years are going to be for the arts. Insolvency is a 'trending topic' across some arts boardrooms and the sector is facing some very tough choices.

A driving force behind this pamphlet is the concern that some of those choices will be insufficiently radical unless the arts develop a deeper shared purpose about how they are aiming to create value in the longer term. This will require the arts to improve existing rationales, but also embrace new ways of telling a richer story about how they create value. The Commission on 2020 Public Services at the RSA has called for more public investment to be evaluated in terms of a 'social productivity test': whether it builds individual and community engagement, resilience and reciprocity. How can the arts best frame and pass that test?

Perhaps your reluctant instrumental heart is sinking already. There are many in the sector who are deeply sympathetic to

1. Adrian Ellis. "The recession and US museums" *The Art Newspaper*, Issue 200, March 2009. www.theartnewspaper.com

the view that if too much of the case for the arts is made on the basis of their so called instrumental effects, the true power and potential of the arts will be obscured.²

Indeed, we are acutely aware that some people in the arts regard the language of instrumentalism as rather toxic, as something the arts have ‘moved beyond’. Certainly this is not new territory; we will be revisiting some familiar arguments about value, whilst assessing the impact of the Big Society discourse for making the case for the arts.

We think this re-articulation is essential and timely. All publicly funded art has a responsibility to give a clear account of its value to the society that funds it. All allocations of public funding, especially at a time of fiscal constraint, involve deciding between competing priorities. The argument is not simply whether arts are virtuous but whether they are more virtuous than other claims on the public purse.³

When voices in the cultural sector rail against demands for evidence of impact they are implicitly asserting that their sector alone should be exempted from the demands of accountability placed on other recipients of taxpayers’ money.

Part of the problem is that the rhetoric of debates about arts funding too often implies a choice between the case for intrinsic value made in terms chosen by the arts community, and a case for instrumental value made in terms chosen by the policymaking community. Here we suggest a different possibility; making a robust instrumental case for arts funding but in terms that recognise what is different and special about artistic participation and appreciation.

We need to reinvent and strengthen instrumentalism, breaking through some of the messy compromises and anaemic logic models that underpin the overall rationale for

2. See McCarthy, K.F. et al (2004). *Gifts of the Muse: Reforming the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts*. RAND Corporation; Holden, J. (2004). *Capturing Cultural Value*. Demos.

3. Belfiore, E. (2004). "Auditing Culture: The subsidised cultural sector in the New Public Management," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol 10, No.2, pp183–202.

arts funding.⁴ This reinvention is vital if the sector is to expand the scale of its ambitions and place the arts at the centre of our everyday lives.

It is these aims that this paper seeks to progress. We hope it helps the sector to develop a more compelling public story about what the arts achieve and why they matter.

Reinventing instrumentalism

*On the one hand, political pragmatists seeking to bring the arts into a broader public policy discourse will be accused of philistinism, while on the other side, those arguing for a return to the intrinsic or absolute values of culture will be labelled elitist and self-serving. In a rational world neither side should hold sway; rather in this area, as elsewhere, a sensible way forward would seem to rest on a recognition of the multiple dimensions of artistic experience.*⁵

We are clearly aiming to tread the rocky road between philistinism and elitism: our starting point is that whilst we are hugely supportive of the arts, we are frustrated by the weaknesses that continue to pervade the case made for the arts and their implications for the allocation of public funds.

These weaknesses matter. They stand in the way of a deeper appreciation of the value of the arts, and leave the sector ill prepared for the ways in which the fiscal squeeze is changing the rules of public engagement.

A good starting point as always is a dose of sharp honesty about the sector's current performance and trajectory. Enhanced

4. We make no claim in this short paper to have reviewed all of the rationales for public funding of the arts. Some we barely mention: for example the market benefits that flow from investment in the arts. This is not because they are not important but because they have been thoroughly covered in treatments of arts funding.

5. Throsby, D. (2010.63). *The Economics of Cultural Policy*. Cambridge University Press.

levels of public investment into the arts over the last fifteen years have produced some impressive results.⁶ This includes a greatly improved cultural infrastructure, some outstanding cultural output and a renewed confidence amongst a generation of artistic leaders. These successes have been deservedly celebrated.

But there also needs to be some sober reflection about the place of the arts in the UK; the balance sheet is in the red as well as the black. First, access and diversity battles have not been won (particularly not for all publicly funded arts organisations). The people who benefit from the public funding of art are still, overwhelmingly, the well educated, who tend to be middle class. Second, excellence is more visible across our cultural output, but patchy across different cultural ecologies and regions. The best remains spatially concentrated. Third, too many of the hard won gains in arts funding have been, in part, as a result of aggressive but shakily-grounded lobbying.⁷

For some these weaknesses in the balance sheet of the arts have resulted in a public and political debate about their value that is the wrong side of duplicitous. As Belfiore puts it:

*... a whole range of measures introduced with the aim to improve transparency and accountability in the public sector – might have resulted, in reality, in more bullshit being produced and injected in public discourses around policies for the cultural sector, and in opaque political messages amounting to little more than doublespeak.*⁸

Of course, as the arts steel themselves for the impacts of cuts, these thoughts are not to the fore. Politicians will be condemned as the cuts bite into our arts infrastructure, but the sector will

6. Arts Council England's total investment in regularly funded organisations has grown in cash terms by 130 per cent from £149m in 1996/97 to £344m in 2009/10 alongside grants for the arts programme awards totalling £64.9 million. See *Achieving Great Art For Everyone*. Arts Council England 2010.

7. Ellis, A. (2004). *Valuing Culture*. Demos.

8. Belfiore, E. (2010). "On bullshit in cultural policy practice & research," *Variant*, Spring/Summer 2010

not rush to acknowledge the degree to which it has failed to make a better and broader case for greater investment and support. Nor will everyone across the arts recognise that a much better case needs to be made.

Some in the sector are so certain of how they serve the public interest, and therefore of their moral claim on public support, that all too often they underestimate how unconvinced some public decision makers remain about the arts. The consequence, as Bill Ivey notes, is that:

*... case-making arguments are often delivered into an unreceptive void. If we want to modify this reality, our sector needs research that links citizen contact with a vibrant arts system to overall quality of life, so the health of our cultural, transportation, and health care systems are one day considered to be of equal value by policy leaders. This is a daunting task but I have come to see it as essential.*⁹

This of course poses a standing challenge to arts leaders about their broader role in civic life, which has been amplified by Arts Council England in their recently published ten-year strategic framework, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*. One of Arts Council's new priorities is to build a network of arts leaders who value sharing their knowledge and skills for the benefit of the arts and civil society. This implies that arts leaders will need to accept that:

*Being prepared to discuss why the arts improve the quality of lives, why they create societal value, should not be a matter of whining or banging the drum. It should be part of the lexicon of every arts leader who wants to have a place at the civic table.*¹⁰

9. Bill Ivey, "Let's Get Real," *The Arts Journal.com*, 8 March 2005.

10. Russell Willis Taylor, President, National Arts Strategies. *Arts Journal.com*, 6 March 2005.

Arts leaders in the UK do espouse these views, but not as enthusiastically as more traditional rationales for arts funding. Instead, for the most part, the UK arts sector seeks to stand on a charter of artistic excellence as its first line of defence and first justification for continued support. We do not deny the importance of this rationale – indeed we are keen to strengthen its purchase – but are perplexed at the reluctance of the sector to emphasise equally strongly other rationales which are no less powerful.

In terms of making the best possible case for the arts it is not that we have had too much instrumentalism in the arts in the UK, rather we have not had an intelligent enough debate about the role of different instrumental logics and how, if reframed, they might deepen our understanding of the ways in which the arts create value.

Rather, the unedifying reality is that for the last two years the sector has been fleeing in relief from instrumentalism – hugging the McMaster report to its chests¹¹ – using the shield of excellence to assert the death of ‘targetolatry’ in the arts.¹² It is rather like watching an army – albeit a disorganised one – flee over the hill from an adversary that never really existed, or at least, has rarely taken up arms.

Indeed, despite the apparent emphasis on instrumentalism in arts funding, there is very little evidence that this has led to major changes in the character of arts funding, or indeed the practice of arts and arts organisations. As Bunting notes:

. . . the received wisdom is that over the last decade government has placed greater emphasis on instrumental outcomes. While there have been new, targeted initiatives in areas such as education, there is little evidence that any prioritisation of social or economic objectives has had any substantial impact on the decisions that

11. McMaster, B. (2008). *Supporting excellence in the arts: from measurement to judgement*. Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS).

12. The phrase used by the then Secretary of State for Culture, James Purnell, in announcing the McMaster Review.

*have been made about mainstream arts funding, or indeed on how artists and arts organisations go about their work.*¹³

So how have we arrived at a point where the case made for the value of the arts is too narrow and the arts community continues to make spurious complaints about crude instrumentalism?

The great conflation

The root cause has been the great conflation perpetrated by the arts sector; the tweedledee and tweedledum pairing of the intrinsic and the instrumental. Central to the sector's advocacy case for funding has been the argument that the scale of instrumental benefits depends wholly on the scale of the intrinsic benefits of the arts. So for example, Lowry notes that:

*Common sense suggests that the instrumental value of the arts is in direct proportion to their intrinsic value and the greater the former the more significant the latter.*¹⁴

And in a similar vein, Ellis observes that

*. . . the impacts of arts organisations on the economy, on social diversity, and indeed on educational attainment are largely epiphenomenal – incapable of full realisation unless their cultural purposes are effectively fulfilled.*¹⁵

These arguments are neat and elegant but patently untrue once we start to define rather more precisely the relationship between particular sets of intrinsic and instrumental outcomes.

13. Bunting, C. et al (2010.11) *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A review of research and literature to inform the Arts Council's ten year strategic framework*. Arts Council England. www.artscouncil.org.uk

14. Glenn Lowry, Director MoMA. "Is there a Better Case for the Arts?" Arts Journal.com. 7 March 2005.

15. Ellis, A (2004) *op cit*.

So, for example, a traditional intrinsic ‘art is beauty’ justification for funding a production at the Royal Ballet, and the decision of a local authority to fund a people’s orchestra in a deprived area of a major metropolitan city, might share some common rationales, but the relative importance and emphasis of particular rationales will be different in each case.

The funded Royal Ballet production will predominantly stand or fall on relatively narrow judgements about its artistic excellence, the development of the artists and the impact on the audience. The local authority’s decision to fund a people’s orchestra will be seeking to secure a wider range of outcomes; a cultural product yes, but in addition an excellent artistic experience for all of those people who choose to participate, with possibly important positive impacts on the self-confidence and cohesion of the communities involved.

In the case of the people’s orchestra example – our experience of evaluation evidence suggests that these outcomes will be more powerful if the participants have an excellent experience – lively, creative, and artistically rewarding. But clearly the artistic outcome (the performance) may not be excellent when judged in any traditional peer artistic review sense. Or perhaps more importantly, if the performance failed this test, this would not negate the success of the project or the rationale for funding.¹⁶

Therefore whilst both projects have powerful rationales for funding, these are different and should not be conjoined by conflating intrinsic and instrumental benefit. Indeed the arts should be seeking to make these different ‘logics’, and their relative weight and inter-relationships, more distinct and transparent.

16. As Belfiore notes: “Should community arts projects with a social aim be evaluated on the grounds of the same criteria of excellence and quality that inform Arts Council’s relationship with its traditional client organisations or should they rather be assessed merely on the grounds of their positive effect on the participants, with little concern for their artistic merit?” Belfiore, E. (2004) *op cit*.

The conflation is so attractive because it allows the arts to frame its instrumental responses solely through the non-negotiable prism of intrinsic benefit and artistic excellence, without ever really defining what this might mean. Better still, these intrinsic benefits are difficult to measure and highly subjective.

There is also a value judgement being displayed here, with many in the arts implicitly valuing the intrinsic outcomes arising from the art itself more than the instrumental outcomes arising from its effects.¹⁷ The conflation has proved so durable because it keeps the lid on some uncomfortable truths. If we were to give more equal weight to some of these ‘instrumental outcomes,’ achieving those ends might produce markedly different patterns of investment, challenging incumbent artistic organisations and activities. Moreover, the traditional, aesthetic value system governing arts funding is *inherently* contested. That is the nature of any value system: value is attributed to something; it is not part of its essence.¹⁸

The first step towards a positive reinvention of instrumentalism would be for the arts sector to work much harder at disentangling the various arguments made for public investment in the arts.¹⁹

From a public policy perspective, this would allow greater clarity about the kinds of claims and evidence that best fit with different arguments. But more importantly, it would drive a more transparent public debate about the overall criteria that should be employed in making funding decisions about any arts organisation or activity, and about the balance to be struck between different priorities.

17. See Bakhshi, H. et al (2009.8). *Measuring Intrinsic Value: how to stop worrying and love economics*. Mission Models Money.

18. Lewis, J. (1990). *Art, Culture, Enterprise: The Politics of Arts and the Cultural Industries*. Routledge.

19. Instrumental cultural policy is the label that refers to the growing popularity of policies for the cultural sector that conceive the arts not as the end of policy, but rather as a means towards the fulfilment of other, not artistic, policy objectives. See Belfiore, E. (2006). “The Unacknowledged Legacy: Plato, the Republic and Cultural Policy,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 12, No 2.

Whilst it may be uncomfortable for the arts community, it seems that the general public, local authorities and other parts of the third sector tend to place greater emphasis on access, reach, and tangible economic and social outcomes as the most important criteria that should drive public funding of the arts. In contrast artists, and those working in arts organisations without a particular social remit, tend to prioritise artistic excellence.²⁰ It is then hardly surprising that the conflation of intrinsic and instrumental rationales proves so attractive to the arts community.

A spectrum of instrumentalism

The other deeply paradoxical outcome of this traditional conflation is that it has served to weaken the power of intrinsic arguments for funding.

The intrinsic argument is that good art is just a good thing, like green spaces or clean air. However, if we think about it, there are reasons why we think green spaces and clean air are good, which reflect views about the good and healthy life. In a similar vein, the view that the ‘arts are good for you’ reflects longstanding intellectual traditions that date back to Plato. Belfiore has noted the longstanding influence of:

*. . . the Platonic idea that the worth of culture lies in its capacity to educate the citizen and therefore bring about all sorts of beneficial social and political impacts.*²¹

20. Bunting, C. (2007.23). *Public value and the arts in England: Discussion and conclusions of the arts debate*. Arts Council England.

21. Belfiore, E. (2006.239 *op cit*). Although as Bennet and Belfiore note in their excellent historical review of the impact of the arts, this Platonic notion is contested and there is a vibrant intellectual discourse around the ‘negative influence of the arts on individuals and society as a whole. See *The Social Impacts of the Arts* (2008.191).

So, in public policy terms instrumental rationales drive intrinsic claims for the arts.²² This means there is in effect a spectrum of instrumental arguments which range from ‘great art makes us better people’ through to a specific art intervention having a specific impact on a particular individual outcome (such as pupil attainment).

The ‘art makes people better citizens’ argument is premised on some idea of the good citizen in the good society. The strength here is that it combines idealism with a case for art being a public good. The weakness is that those who make this argument are usually very wary either about saying what they mean by this good life, or by providing much evidence of the connection between art and higher citizenship.

The ‘art improves pupil attainment’ type of argument is simple, with research evidence suggesting a clear link between the two.²³ The strength is that there is a clear public good case. The weakness is that this is not always an argument for arts funding. Moreover, if these interventions work, shouldn’t they be funded by the parts of government trying to achieve the various outcomes concerned (for example, the Department for Education or Ministry of Justice)?

Reinventing instrumentalism

So, what are the implications of all this? We need to disentangle these different rationales for the value of the arts more distinctly, and then seek to strengthen the whole spectrum of instrumental arguments.

22. Selwood notes how despite its emphasis on intrinsic value, DCMS’s understanding of the inherent value of culture appears to have remained synonymous with what it credited as its ‘transformative power’ and, therefore, with instrumentalism. See Selwood, S (2010.20) *Making a difference: the cultural impact of museums: An essay for NMDC*. Sara Selwood Associates.

23. Bunting, C. (2010). *Culture and Sport Evidence programme: The impacts of engagement: a systematic review of the research on learning outcomes for young people participating in the arts*. Arts Council England.

Some in the arts would probably be happy with a categorisation of high (arts for arts sake) and low (economic and social outcomes) instrumentalism. We think it would be preferable to talk about a spectrum that spans *artistic instrumentalism* and *public good instrumentalism*.

Artistic instrumentalism would embrace excellence in terms of raising artistic standards and a better understanding of the value of the artistic experience for producer and consumer. Public good instrumentalism would focus on the wide range of positive economic and social outcomes flowing from the arts, and active participation in the arts. Sometimes these logics will overlap. Sometimes they will not. Both are united by a common interest in the quality of the experience for audience members or for those actively participating in the arts.

Whatever language we adopt, what is striking is how much needs to be done to strengthen the various instrumental logics across this spectrum and in turn build a stronger case for the arts.

Artistic instrumentalism

The case for artistic instrumentalism will become stronger and more self-confident if it addresses three issues.

First, it must develop a *clearer rationale for excellence*. As Arts Council England's recent ten-year strategic framework makes clear, excellence is a difficult term to define, yet is central to the funding of the arts. Dame Liz Forgan, Chair, Arts Council England defines excellence as:

simply the bravest, most original, most innovative, most perfectly realised work of which people are capable – whether in the creation of art, its performance, its communication or its impact on audiences.

This is a good starting point but public funders of the arts will need to keep sharpening their definition of excellence during a time of public funding restraint. Is it important to focus

on new art and artists, irrespective of audience? Could we begin to formulate notions of 'adequate audiences' for particular forms of investment and output?²⁴ What types and form of innovation are most needed to sustain excellence in the future?²⁵ Should the innovation focus be on art form development and audience reach?²⁶ Any self-confident claim to care about excellence needs to develop sharper answers to these and other questions.

Second, remaking the case for artistic instrumentalism requires a *commitment to measure artistic (intrinsic) value more effectively*. We strongly support calls for the more effective measurement of intrinsic value, which connects that measurement directly to the public's experience of culture and what they value. Otherwise the danger is that difficult to measure benefits – such as the aesthetic, spiritual or social – will continue to be under-emphasised in policymakers' cost-benefit calculus.²⁷

Bakhshi et al recently made a powerful case for how the tools of cultural economics and the study of rational choice can help to objectively establish the public's own estimate of the intrinsic value of the arts: for example, Contingent Value (CV) and Willingness to Pay (WTP) estimates, which ask the public what they would be prepared to pay, faced with a choice of spending the money on something else.²⁸

24. See King, K. and Blaug, M. (1973,121) "Does the Arts Council Know What It Is Doing?" in Blaug, M. Ed (1992). *The Economics of the Arts*, Gregg Revivals for an interesting discussion of the notion of 'adequate audiences'.

25. It is important to note that the respondents to the Arts Council's 'Arts Debate' came to a shared sense that innovation and risk-taking are not a privilege but a responsibility of artists, arts organisations and funders of the arts in all aspects of their work. See Bunting, C (2007) *Public Value and the arts in England: Discussion and conclusions of the arts debate*. Arts Council England.

26. This issue is of particular importance given that arts funders and others rarely offer definitions of what they mean by innovation. For an excellent discussion see Bakhshi, H. and Throsby, D. (2010). *Culture of Innovation: An economic analysis of innovation in arts and cultural organisation*. NESTA.

27. See Bakhshi, H. (2010.6). *Beauty: Value Beyond Measure*, CABE for an excellent discussion of these issues. Bakhshi notes that the Treasury's Green book recommends that a range of techniques be used to elicit these 'non-market values'.

28. Bakhshi, H et al (2009.10) *op cit*.

They cite the example of the British Library, which in 2003 used Contingent Value techniques to estimate that it provides over £363 million in value each year, the bulk of which is value enjoyed by non-users. In 2005, a CV study of museum, library and archive services in Bolton found that users and non-users valued the services at £10.4 million, 1.6 times the value of their public funding.²⁹ As Bakhshi et al note:

*... such results demonstrate just how much the arts have to lose by turning their back on economic methods which may provide clear and authoritative support for public funding.*³⁰

This is a call to arms that extends beyond the subsidised arts sector. Much of the arts engagement in the UK is not publicly funded but is transacted commercially or voluntarily. If we are concerned with the overall impact of the arts, measurement tools should be extended across this whole ecology, with evidence for artistic instrumentalism garnered, for example, from active citizens whose creativity and cooperation are fuelled by attending great productions unencumbered by subsidy, or by discussing texts bought or borrowed in a book club.³¹

Clearly, it is hardly novel to support calls for more investment in specialist economic and research expertise to underpin these attempts to better capture the value creating activities of the arts.³² Yet despite these calls, neither intrinsic nor instrumental rationales have spurned a robust and rigorous research and evidence base that could better underpin the allocation of resources to the sector.

29. Figures such as these would of course be more valuable if we had a database of comparators. So for example, if we carried out a similar exercise for the top 20 regularly funded arts organisations in England.

30. Bakhshi, H et al (2009.13) *op cit*.

31. We would like to thank Anne Bonnar for her input here.

32. See Selwood, S (2010) *op cit*, for an excellent discussion of the ebbs and flows of attempts to understand how best to value culture and assess its impacts.

If the arts wish to make a serious case about their value, they will have to become more serious about measurement. Against a background of funding cuts, not just in the arts, but also in research institutions, this needs to be a visible priority for the Department of Culture Media and Sport and Arts Council, which must both do more to ensure that the impact of the arts becomes a mainstream concern and a focus for other partners such as the National Audit Office.³³

In making the case for artistic instrumentalism, the third challenge is the need to tackle the regressive ‘deadweight burden’. Traditionally, the implicit underlying approach of most arts councils around the world has been to operate a supply push approach to meet the twin objectives of artistic excellence and extending public reach and participation. In others words, if we continue to strengthen the producer and supply side of the arts, more and more people will come to discover and appreciate their value.³⁴

From an efficiency and public benefit perspective, the problem with this approach is what economists call the ‘deadweight burden’ of general subsidies for the supply of cultural goods. The burden arises because the public purse is often subsidising the consumption of cultural goods by relatively affluent consumers who benefit much more than those on lower incomes. This is regressive, effectively subsidising the cultural consumption of those who would be willing to pay anyway.

As Van der Ploeg notes:

. . . This is known as the Saint Matthew effect: those who already have, will be given more. The deadweight burden of general subsidies for the supply of cultural goods may be very high indeed. Much more efficient is to boost demand among lower incomes or children through education, vouchers . . .

33. We are grateful to Sara Selwood for her insights on this.

34. This segment draws on Knell, J. (2007). *The Art of Living*. Mission, Models Money.

*or other means. This way people can choose themselves which culture they want to experience.*³⁵

If the supply side push model is slowly being rejected, not least by the Arts Council itself, now is a good moment for UK cultural policy to become much more innovative in boosting demand for cultural experiences amongst the whole population. The Arts Council is therefore to be commended for announcing a stronger commitment to tackling so-called ‘cold spots’ of non-engagement, by developing arts opportunities for people and places with least engagement.³⁶ However, with falling funding levels, meeting these aspirations whilst maintaining artistic excellence will involve tough funding choices. For example, it may require the Arts Council to expect its larger funded organisations, such as the National Theatre, to work directly with arts organisations and communities in these ‘cold spots’.

This will be part of an inevitably more demanding negotiation with bigger arts institutions over their funding agreements and their share of public funding. At the very least, parts of the funded sector will need to accept that the balance of funds from the public purse, and the balance of funds from the other main funding communities, might have to flow in different directions. More public money would be directed to tackling market failure and under-provision, ensuring that people can engage with art in a wider range of ways. Other major funding communities (philanthropists and corporate donors) will face the choice of whether to shift some of their funding to those parts of the established cultural infrastructure that may as a consequence require additional support. This is a moment when some of the bigger cultural institutions need to step up to the plate and accept that they will get a smaller slice of a smaller cake.

35. Van der Ploeg R. (2002.12). “In Art We Trust”. <http://www.iue.it/Personal/RickvanderPloeg/inart.pdf>

36. Arts Council England (2010/44) *op cit*.

Public good instrumentalism

The case for public good instrumentalism requires similar rigour around how best to understand the relationship between artistic participation and individual and societal outcomes.

In terms of the latter we suggest that one of the challenges for the arts sector is to explore the applicability of a social return on investment (SROI) model, which is low in regulatory burdens and well suited to the types of impacts the arts are best at producing.³⁷ If the arts can make a powerful SROI case there should be scope for growing the share of mainstream public service funding that is used to support arts based interventions.

Measures of social value that take into account wider ‘value added’ impacts and softer outcomes are likely to grow in importance as funders and commissioners seek ever more ‘bang for their buck.’³⁸

We do not underestimate the difficulties of achieving this, not least the resource challenges, but the experience of organisations which have experimented with the SROI approach, is that it usefully focuses attention on the perceived, actual and measurable benefits particular interventions and investments can achieve. So for example, the arts sector would need to specify and measure its desired outcomes, which deliver value to society, rather than just outputs.

There is already much good practice across the arts on which to build these efforts. For example, Arts For Health at Manchester Metropolitan University has done excellent work with a wide range of partners to better understand the impact of creativity, culture and the arts on health and wellbeing. One of its most interesting findings is that, in addition to positive mental health benefits, people who took part in arts activities

37. Leighton, D & Wood, C. (2010) *Measuring Social Value*. Demos.

38. *Ibid.*

were more able to cope with life situations, or to change them, and had more choices.³⁹ As Clive Parkinson notes:

*These elements of wellbeing are significant to the Big Society agenda, because marginalised people who take part in these inspirational projects are more connected, more active and critically, more able to engage with life beyond the boundaries of illness. If the Government genuinely wants to engage with diverse communities across the UK . . . grass-roots cultural engagement like this will offer genuine opportunities for dialogue.*⁴⁰

Similarly, the Culture and Sport Evidence Programme (CASE) is beginning to generate powerful evidence about the broader impacts of cultural participation and engagement, with recent CASE research confirming a statistically significant relationship between sports and arts engagement and increased subjective wellbeing,⁴¹ and between arts participation and educational attainment.⁴²

With regard to the latter, the review found that arts participation improves secondary school students' academic attainment and young people's cognitive abilities and transferable skills such as communication and creativity. Perhaps more importantly, the authors suggest that the *nature* of arts participation by young people does create variations in the type and depth of outcomes. The idea of the 'intensity' of the experience appears to be key, particularly in relation to attainment, a point to which we return in the next chapter.

39. See Clive Parkinson (2010) "Big Society: Arts, Health and Well-Being". www.artsforhealth.org; and *Invest to Save: Arts in Health Evaluation*. Manchester Metropolitan University.

40. See Clive Parkinson (2010) *op cit*.

41. CASE (2010). *Understanding the value of engagement in culture and sport*. DCMS.

42. Bunting, C. (2010). *Culture and Sports Evidence Programme: The impacts of engagement: a systematic review of the research on learning outcomes for young people participating in the arts*. Arts Council England.

A spectrum of experiences and value

We do not expect the arts sector necessarily to welcome the language we have used here to frame the debate. We acknowledge that reinventing instrumentalism is complicated; our intervention is a starting point not an end point, which needs to be resolved through practice rather than theoretical discussion.

But we are confident the sector will engage with our central propositions. Many across the arts are not resistant to instrumentalism in the terms we have described, recognising that the deeply ingrained conflation of intrinsic and instrumentalist rationales has obscured long-established tensions in the arts between funding 'excellence' in traditionally defined artistic terms, and supporting more 'community based' artistic traditions.⁴³

Drawing on the title of Art Council England's new ten-year strategic framework, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*, this conflation, if unaddressed, will ensure that the 'art' will continue to trump the 'everyone' in the allocation of funding resources.

We have sought to argue that the traditional intrinsic argument for the arts – the so-called arts for arts sake plea – is a form of instrumentalism and that understanding the deeper value of the arts is better advanced by envisaging a spectrum of instrumental arguments that can be made, rather than a polarity in which one pole always trumps the other.

The final challenge for the sector is to develop a deeper understanding of the artistic experiences and practices that sit along this spectrum, allowing us to better appreciate the full value of the arts and how to make a better case in support of all these instrumental logics.

Clearly different projects and different arts organisations will sit on different points of our spectrum; not all forms of artistic innovation are alike. Nor do we think that all arts organisations should necessarily be clustering in the middle, or that they are

43. Belfiore, E. (2004.198/199) *op cit*.

‘superior’ if they lie at one end of the spectrum or another. They are all seeking to create value after all. However the totality of the public funds they receive could be directly linked to their ability to make a contribution across the whole value spectrum.

The reality is that the conflation of intrinsic and instrumental rationales has meant that the overall value case for the arts has been weakened, and that more lip service than strategic investment has been deployed in strengthening outcomes at the public good end of the spectrum.

Given the potential for the arts to help us re-imagine the good life in the good society, this is not a mere oversight but a bear trap for the sector’s ambitions to be at the centre of our everyday lives. The Big Society discourse offers an interesting new terrain for this debate.

The arts and the Big Society

*In enshrining art within the temples of culture – the museum, the concert hall, the proscenium stage – we may have lost touch with the spirit of art: its direct relevance on our lives.*⁴⁴

After a period in which cultural relativism dominated on the left and hyper-individualism on the right, recent years have seen debates about civic virtue re-emerge in politics. Whether the frame is rights and responsibilities, Britishness and social cohesion, civic engagement or happiness and wellbeing, the question of what citizens need to believe and how they need to behave for society to flourish has become more central to political debate. The Big Society debate promoted by David Cameron is the latest manifestation of this trend.

But it was not just in the world of politics that the questions ‘what is it to be a good citizen?’ and ‘what is the good society?’

44. Larson, G.O. (1997.59). *American Canvas*. National Endowment for the Arts.

seemed too difficult and dangerous. For most of the long history of Western art it would be taken for granted that artists had in mind either some notion of human flourishing ('eudaimonia') or have seen their art explicitly in service of a set of moral – faith based – values. These assumptions were already crumbling with the assault of modernism. However, the crude and oppressive attempts of totalitarian regimes – most notably the Soviet Union – to use art as propaganda, created a strong and understandable antipathy amongst artists to the idea of art in service of a political project, especially a project espoused by those in power.

But if political discourse invites questions about individual wellbeing and the good society, surely artists should have the confidence to engage? The idea of what might, for the want of a better term (and we do want a better term), be called 'eudaimonic constructivism' encompasses a series of important and potentially inspiring debates.⁴⁵ If the Big Society requires citizens to have strong critical faculties and a capacity for empathic imagination, what connections – theoretical and empirical – can be made between artistic participation and appreciation and engagement in civic life? If the Big Society involves – as the Prime Minister has implied – an ability to develop conceptions of the good life which go beyond possessive individualism, artists are well placed to explore such ideas in their practice, indeed artistic appreciation and participation can in itself exemplify a different account of fulfilment.

The invitation here is not for the arts community to succumb to crude instrumentalism (although, as we have said, this has been an exaggerated threat), nor for it to reject accountability in favour of a bland assertion that art makes the

45. Eudaimonia has variously been described as a form of wellbeing (for example, feelings of personal expressiveness, interest, meaning, transcendence), and/or a way of behaving (for example, living in accordance with values, using the best in oneself, seeking personal growth, caring for entities beyond oneself, being deeply engaged, being true to oneself). See *Book of Abstracts* from the European Conference on Positive Psychology, Copenhagen 2010.

world better. Rather it is to develop coherent (and challenging) accounts of the role art does, can and could play in helping us imagine and create more fulfilling lives in a better society.

This is hardly unfamiliar territory for the arts. If you review the cultural strategies of local authorities, they have long placed an emphasis on how cultural participation can help build the good society, using the language of strong and cohesive communities in which individuals have a sense of connection with other residents and a pride in their neighbourhoods.

Our account of a strengthened public good instrumentalism for the arts serves to underline the potential of the arts to have a powerful impact on citizen engagement and pro-social behaviour, behaving in ways which strengthen society, contributing to what the writer on social capital, David Halpern, calls the hidden wealth of nations: our capacity for trust, caring and co-operation.⁴⁶

The scope for linking the case for arts with Big Society aspirations is being made concretely in the RSA Citizen Power project in Peterborough. The project, which is funded by the Arts Council's East office, Peterborough City Council and the RSA, is seeking to enhance civic capacity and identity through a series of parallel interventions, ranging from an area based school curriculum to an innovative civic commons. The Arts and Social Change programme involves a range of activities. These include creative gatherings, which seek to develop stronger networks among creative practitioners, experiments in place making, which involve local artists in exploring neighbourhood identity, as well as artists' residencies and commissions based on the mission of Citizen Power.

It is worth noting that debates about the instrumental value of arts in society tend to focus exclusively on what communities might gain from the process. Jocelyn Cunningham, who leads on the project for the RSA, says that one of its key assumptions is that the connection between the creative artist and society

46. Halpern, D. (2010). *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*. Polity Press; Taylor, M. (2010). *Twenty-first century enlightenment*. RSA.

is genuinely a two-way process. It is not just communities that benefit from creative perspectives but also artists who develop insights and new forms of practice from community engagement.

A growing body of research suggests that the arts can be a valuable engine of civic renewal, in nurturing social capital and trust by strengthening friendships, helping communities to understand and celebrate their heritage, and in providing a safe way to discuss and solve difficult social problems.⁴⁷

These findings have been underscored by a recent study by Selwood on the cultural impact of museums.⁴⁸ Her study explored how their museum experiences had impacted on audiences, in terms of what they have been prompted to think about, and why. Impacts included: people opening themselves up to different attitudes and perceptions, envisaging potential and revisiting personal histories; and the generation of a sense of belonging and integration within local communities and society.

In a similar vein, drawing on the capabilities-based approach associated with Amartya Sen, Jones highlights the role of cultural participation in giving people the capabilities to lead the lives they want.⁴⁹

Whilst more research is needed, there is also some evidence of the link between cultural participation and broader civic engagement. An IPPR study concluded that individuals who are involved in cultural organisations, both as members and as participants, are more likely to vote, contact a politician and sign a petition. There is a strong correlation between membership of, and participation in, cultural organisations with higher levels of social trust and faith in parliament and the legal system (although not the police or politicians). The impact on social and political trust remains statistically significant even

47. The Arts and Social Capital, Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America. John F Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA.

48. Selwood, S (2010.35) *op cit*.

49. Jones, S. (2010.12). *Culture Shock*. Demos.

after controlling for other factors, including gender, education, income, age and ethnicity.⁵⁰

What is particularly interesting about successful art interventions in pursuit of these ends is the emphasis they place on participation as opposed to spectatorship. Attending (watching art together) is important but is less effective than participation (doing art together), which requires ongoing interactions, coordination and trust, building richer social capital ties.⁵¹

This is simultaneously rather good news, and yet very challenging for the arts. It is clearly good news that there is an emerging body of evidence underlining that active participation in the arts – particularly where there are high levels of ‘intensity’ in terms of the quality and immersion in the artistic experience – unlocks a wider range of valuable outcomes for individuals and communities. The evidence case to support efforts to place the arts at the centre of our everyday lives would appear to be strengthening.

But any celebrations should be put on hold: public funders of the arts are yet to respond decisively to these opportunities. Indeed these findings throw down a direct challenge to all funders and arts organisations if they are committed to ensuring that the arts exploit their full potential in encouraging active citizenship.

Firstly, it is no longer enough to express commitments that more people ‘experience’ the arts. The sector needs to be explicit about their ambitions in terms of raising not just audience figures (in particular new audiences for the arts) but also increasing active participation. What is certain is that we need a tide that lifts both ships, which is likely to sharpen the trade-offs between funding across the spectrum of artistic and public good instrumentalism.

50. Delaney, L. and Keaney, E. (2006.28). *Cultural Participation, Social Capital and Civic Renewal in the United Kingdom: Statistical Evidence from the National and International Survey Data*. Institute for Public Policy Research.

51. The Arts and Social Capital Saguaro Seminar *op cit*.

What does this mean in practice? The Arts Council England's ten-year strategic framework outlines five long-term goals for the sector. We won't repeat these here; suffice to say that if you examine the priorities under each of the goals, it is clear that Arts Council England shares with this paper a similar spectrum in terms of how they envisage the arts can create value. There is a stress on artistic excellence as you would expect, but also on a range of instrumental public good outcomes, including developing arts opportunities for people and places with the least engagement. The critical test for the Arts Council, and indeed other funders, is whether these goals and priorities carry equal rating. If they did, this would suggest that the next round of resource allocation decisions will place more stress on the 'everyone' than in previous investment rounds.

This would imply that these types of interventions should become a mainstream priority for arts organisations both big and small, not an area in which only small specialist arts organisations are seen to make a difference. All arts organisations need to think of themselves as community institutions, where people connect socially as well as culturally, with arts spaces being used as public spaces as much as possible.⁵² This will help encourage arts organisations to build new relationships between communities and artists living in these, and will build new audiences. As Diane Ragsdale has suggested, attracting and retaining new audiences in the future may require arts organisations to stop selling excellence and start brokering new relationships between people and art.⁵³

For Darren O'Donnell these developments mean that arts organisations need to embrace 'beautiful civic engagement' in the process redefining the criteria for successful artistic initiatives.⁵⁴ Some of his suggested criteria include:

52. *Ibid.*

53. See Diane Ragsdale (2009), 'Is your arts organisation a broker or barrier between artists and audiences,' Arts Marketing Association Keynote Speech.

54. O'Donnell, D. (2007). "Greasing the Glue and Gluing the Grease: Beautiful Civic Engagement with Kids, by Kids, for Kids." *New Quarterly*, Issue 101, Winter 2007.

- *Inversion of Hierarchies* (those who normally have the power to give it up, or participate in, service to other less powerful participants).
- *Offering Agency* (creating a context that provides agency to those who would not ordinarily have it).
- *Fruitful Antagonisms* (triggering friction, tension and examining the ensuing dynamic in a performative arena where all is easily forgiven).
- *Volunteer Ownership* (providing opportunities for volunteers to participate to foster a wider sense of ownership).

For O'Donnell, artists acting in this way are social impresarios:

*... keen on generating beauty and amazement, wanting to dazzle, but seeking the civic sphere as the challenging arena for these encounters, anxious to make the world a better place while still providing the requisite thrills, spills and chills demanded by good art.*⁵⁵

All of which implies that any dynamic definition of engagement cannot equate 'active involvement' with a narrowly controlled stream of activities designed and run by subsidised arts professionals. We need to think more deeply about how to re-imagine engagement. Engagement can take many forms, from the determination of what art to commission, to participation in production, to strengthening the networks that link elite arts producers to amateurs and fans (art should be like athletics where the best rub shoulders with the rest, not like professional football which is cosseted and aloof).

This last dimension poses a potentially uncomfortable question for the arts sector concerning its own spirit of mutuality. A crude typology can be overlaid on any sector of

⁵⁵ O'Donnell, D. (2010.7). *Dodging Instrumentalization: Social acupuncture, the social impresario, the grease and the glue*. See www.farnhammaltings.com/news/reflections

arts practitioners comprising the paid professional, the ambitious amateur/apprentice and the hobbyist. Anecdotally some sectors seem to demonstrate stronger links than others between those at different levels of the hierarchy. Dance, for example, has a more egalitarian feel to it than visual art. This may reflect little more than the group nature of the former and the individual nature of the latter. In difficult times, and with the sector needing to show that it is helping itself before demanding help from others, the question that needs to be asked is ‘how much of a community is our sector and how could it be more of one?’ The fact that support and solidarity can flow up and down a hierarchy is important and under-explored. If the arts community is serious about helping more people make more art more often, it is going to need to deepen these sources of mutuality.

Finally, if the sector is serious in these aims – helping to fuel the public good benefits we have described – the next ten years need to bring a deeper democratisation of culture, changing the ways in which the public can actively shape their arts and cultural provision.

Incredibly instructive here is the experiment carried out by Arts Council England in its ‘arts debate,’ a public value exercise in which the public were invited to frame what they value about the arts and how they thought the arts should be funded.⁵⁶

Particularly interesting were the deliberative exercises, where members of the public were facilitated to make funding decisions against projects with competing rationales and priorities.⁵⁷ The exercise showed that people were able to make sophisticated judgements on arts funding decisions when provided with the facts and the trade-offs, and expert support.

The arts debate’s deliberative research also confirmed that the public and arts professionals believe that the primary aim for a future Arts Council should be to develop greater public

⁵⁶ Keaney, E. et al (2007). *The arts debate: Summary and analysis of consultation responses*. Arts Council England.

⁵⁷ Arts Council England (2007), *Public Value deliberative research*. Opinion Leader.

participation and involvement, making the arts available for as many people as possible. To achieve these ends, they believe that funding criteria should include the ability to generate a new enthusiasm and motivation for participation in the arts.⁵⁸

The exercise showed there was an appetite for more opportunities for the public to shape their arts and cultural provision. The arts sector needs to respond to these aspirations by, for example, using deliberative methodologies to involve people in decisions over local funding decisions or public art commissions.

The public should also have the opportunity to be direct commissioners of art and cultural activity, what Francios Matarasso has dubbed 'Distributed Culture'.⁵⁹ This is a model in which local communities are given public money to invest in local cultural production, supporting a cultural programme of their design and choosing. The result might be that cultural organisations large and small would be competing by tender to create vibrant cultural programmes for communities.

None of this requires the arts to be altruistic, just to directly encourage their own interests. If the arts fuel the Big Society more directly, they will also be fuelling the arts. We are already seeing social networks used by artists, musicians and writers to aggregate small donations to fund their work – so called crowdfunding – in which artists would raise money for a well-defined project within a specified time limit and with the goal of raising a particular minimum sum.⁶⁰

A more democratised cultural sphere will help support these developments and open up the exciting possibility that the philanthropic future of the arts will be much less dependent on the intentions of a few high net worth individuals and much

58. *Ibid.*

59. Matarasso, F (2010). 'Distributed Culture,' presentation to the Manchester Cultural Partnership Annual Conference held at Band on the Wall, 25 June 2010.

60. For example see the social networking tool, Kickstarter (www.kickstarter.com), which now claims to be the largest funding platform for creative projects in the world.

more reliant on the intentions of every citizen fully engaged in a cultural life.⁶¹

Arts funding, austerity and the Big Society

In this pamphlet we have aimed to be pragmatic and idealistic; pragmatic in the sense that the arts urgently need to correct the lack of clarity that pervades the value and resource case made for the arts. Our argument has been that the sector must work harder to disentangle distinct and equally valid rationales for public funding of the arts, escaping some of the conflation that currently inhibit wider understanding of the value creating potential of the arts.

We make no apologies that a litmus test of these efforts must be whether they equip the arts to punch above their weight in making a claim on the public purse in the future. We are confident that this process is likely to sharpen the clarity with which artistic and public good outcomes can be pursued, as well as provoking a more transparent debate about how best to allocate public funds to competing claims for cultural investment.

Our argument is also deeply idealistic. Not only do we believe that the sector can make a much stronger ‘arts for arts’ sake’ case for funding, but that the arts over reliance on a narrow artistically instrumental case for funding has actually helped impoverish the place of the arts in everyday life and may actually be weakening the sector’s ability to respond to the public’s aspirations for fully engaged cultural lives.

61. For an interesting review of giving patterns in the UK see *Giving – Green Paper* (2010.35), the Cabinet Office, which talks about the importance of everyday giving and the enormous potential to increase the number of people who give, with donors on below average incomes contributing the most as a proportion of income.

We have put forward a case that by reinventing instrumentalism, owning more powerfully and enthusiastically the spectrum of instrumental rationales we have described, the sector can expand the scale of its ambitions and place the arts at the centre of our lives. This requires placing the role of the public as consumers, producers, collaborators and commissioners of culture rather more firmly at the heart of the arts, and to adjust funding decisions accordingly.

This will challenge funding practice and arts leaders alike. Funders will need to be clearer about their rationales, and more committed to building an evidence base that can decisively display the spectrum of instrumental value created. Arts leaders will have to become more comfortable with playing expanded roles in civic and public life, the most important part of the arts mixed economy.

The prize is worth struggling for; helping us to redefine ourselves, our possibilities, and our sense of progress. Fiscal austerity alongside rising social needs, concerns about individual wellbeing and social cohesion and the need to shift to more sustainable models of economic activity: these are all factors encouraging a different perspective on progress. The economist John Kay has urged us to see the purpose of economic growth not as the consumption of 'stuff' but as the expansion of individual and collective choices brought about through technological progress and investment in human and physical capital.

If progress is measured – as it surely should be – by more people having more enjoyable and fulfilling lives, then public funding for the arts is not simply about investing in opportunities and experiences today, it is about creating the infrastructure of aspirations and expectations for the social economy of tomorrow.

Art is not just there for itself. Nor is it there just to deliver other kinds of social good: it helps us to re-imagine the good life in the good society. The idea of the good life and enhanced citizenship must include challenge and edge. Active citizens

are difficult, demanding, and idealistic. We must never lose a willingness to fund art that is too.

RSA pamphlets

This is the fourth in a series of short essays that the RSA will be publishing over the coming months and which will explore the concept of twenty-first century enlightenment. The RSA is interested in ideas and action and the complex links between the two. With this in mind, we have commissioned a series of essays from leading thinkers and practitioners, looking not only at the history and theory that lies behind the notion of twenty-first century enlightenment, but also at the practical implications of what this may mean today.

All pamphlets will be available online at www.theRSA.org and we would welcome ideas from Fellows and others to:

nina.bolognesi@rsa.org.uk



RSA

8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
+44 (0)20 7930 5115

www.theRSA.org