No strings attached! Why Arts Funding should say no to Instrumentalism

Claire Fox

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Preface
Colin Tweedy

Claire Fox is the director of the Institute of Ideas (IoI), which she established to create a public space where ideas can be contested without constraint. Claire initiated the IoI while co-publisher of the controversial and ground-breaking current affairs journal LM magazine (formerly Living Marxism). The IoI has since worked with a variety of prestigious institutions in Britain and abroad. The most high profile of these is the Battle of Ideas, which falls in the last weekend of October, and I heartily recommend it to anyone with an appetite for wide-ranging, serious and free-thinking debate. Arts & Business always welcomes such debate, hence this series of Future Culture essays.

Claire has a particular interest in education and social issues such as crime and social exclusion. Claire is also a passionate supporter of the arts, and strongly believes that they should be valued for their own sake.

At a time when even Bryan Appleyard confesses he is finding arts funding an interesting debate, it was only right to invite one of the UK's most dynamic commentators to contribute the fourth essay in A&B's Future Culture series.

Claire argues that efforts to dilute the arts for the benefit of the socially excluded are patronising rather than democratic and questions why we have become so obsessed with the instrumental arguments. Why aren't we investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself far more? If it is all about the money, would this confident approach lead to better funding possibilities for the arts as a whole?

Fox questions who it is setting these targets, or in turn making the policy? If it is the Treasury then to who is this Governmental Department ultimately accountable? Is the electorate asking them how to run arts policy or indeed aware that they are more or less doing so? If they are providing or agreeing PSA targets how can any locality really specify what they want the arts to achieve in their own patch? Yes, she recognises, there has to be a culture of accountability, a mechanism whereby people can ask and see how a democratically elected government is spending their money? But has it gone too far? Some sense there is a troubling trend at play and Claire presents this in a compelling and fiery way.

As she acknowledge, hers may be a dissident voice, but I doubt this troubles her. Claire makes valid points and her counter-blast should not be ignored, though I sense investing in the arts may always involve self interest, from buying a ticket, positioning a brand, to achieving immortality by having a wing named after you.

The funding environment is changing and Arts & Business has to be receptive to a critique and increase the circle of discussion. There are serious issues at play here. The recent Taking Part survey, a study of how people spend their leisure time, revealed that a massive three quarters of the population are attending arts events or enjoying artistic activities. This is good news, but the scale of the private sector contribution to make this happen is too often neglected.

Arts & Business is not looking to minimise the need for public sector funding for the arts. We believe categorically in a plurality of funding. A&B's research proves that there is more than an association; there is a causal link between increased public subsidy of the arts and a healthy private sector contribution. With the immediate future of public subsidy for the arts unknown, there is still time to influence policy and win the argument this time around for the arts.

By recognising and celebrating the role of the commercial sector and the role of individual supporter, we can avoid any dependency on a single line of finance, and find more effective ways; new ways — be they showcasing artists as cultural entrepreneurs, making venture philanthropy work for the arts, new tax policies, sign posting responsible cultural business practice — to bring better resources to the arts. Indeed in the next two months Arts & Business will launch a major initiative to stimulate major giving in the City of London. Arts & Business has the crucial knowledge, pioneering ideas and research capability to show us all how to embed a corporate cultural responsibility.

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www.AandB.org/futureculture

Essay
Claire Fox

This essay is intended as a provocation, an attempt at reposing and opening up the debate about arts funding. It is to Arts & Business' credit that they invited me to write it, knowing as they do that I may well critique some sacred cows and challenge some of their own core practices and arguments. I hope readers — including politicians and business leaders — will congratulate them for allowing a dissident voice into the debate rather than holding them responsible for any of my arguments.

The Olympics challenge

The Times' Ben Macintyre put the boot into philistine politicians when he wrote "Ministers are only too happy to be spotted at sporting events, and use political rhetoric... peppered with cheap references to the latest football or cricket match. But when did you last hear a Labour politician refer to the ballet?"[1] Macintyre is not alone in suggesting that populist politicians are happy to move money from artistic projects to sport because the latter is more in tune with popular taste than opera and ballet. There has been much chagrin in the arts world at Tessa Jowell's announcement that lottery funding to the arts and heritage is to be slashed by £190 million to pay for the ever-spiralling costs of the Olympic Games. The prevalent explanation for what Macintyre describes as, "robbing artistic Peter... to pay sporty Paul" is that this government has never believed in the arts in the same way they believe in the power of sport. But this is a misguided assessment. In fact, government is looking to the Olympics to deliver almost identical outcomes as those they have demanded of the arts over recent years.

Let me introduce people in the arts to a little noted phenomena. *Sport for sport's sake* is as unpopular in policy wonk circles as *art for art's sake*. When you look at the Mayor of London's website promoting the positive benefits of the Olympic Games — 'sport' is not mentioned. Instead the arrival of the Olympics is presented as a chance to bolster policing, education, housing, planning and development, transport, the health of the nation and even a reduction in CO2 emissions. Sport doesn't get a look in. Meanwhile Gordon Brown has proclaimed his "great ambition for 2012" is "a nation fitter in health and stronger in civic spirit", suggesting the Games are an ideal way to tackle youth obesity and to increase volunteering[2].

The treasury has regularly heralded 2012 as a means of achieving a whole range of 'non-sporty' ends from urban regeneration to economic prosperity; indeed it lists many of the same outcomes that the arts have tried to claim as their own over recent years. Therein lies the rub. In publicity for this year's Museum and Galleries Month (MGM), we are told "new museums and galleries have contributed to the economic and social regeneration of industrial cities". But if the millions that have been spent on Tate Modern or the Lowry Centre in Salford or the BALTIC in Gateshead are justified less as arts projects and more as keys to regeneration, how can the arts world object when another competing bid to regenerate a different desolate inner city area comes along? Hence arts and sports find themselves competing — not as discreet public goods or ends in their own right — but as interchangeable instruments promising to deliver on a set of identical priorities laid down by government diktat.

In 2005, a series of publications spawned by a rather unwieldy partnership of: Sport England/ the Home Office/ the DCMS and the Local Government Association (LGA) entitled Sport playing its part was published. They were aimed at "guiding and supporting policy makers and practitioners" to use sport more "proactively" to support "the delivery of the shared priorities of central and local government". And guess what? These had little to do with sport per se. Rather sport is described as a useful "engagement mechanism, to build relationships with hard to reach individuals and groups". In a quote that bodes badly for those who dream of breaking records or winning gold, government quango Sport England declares that "Sport isn't just about winning medals, scoring points and lifting trophies... it has a much larger part to play in building stronger, safer communities, strengthening the economy and developing the skills of local people, meeting the needs of children and improving everyone's health".

A flurry of similar central directives have all pushed the same message, such as the ODPM's *Teaming Up — How joint working between sport and neighbourhood renewal practitioners can help improve deprived areas and Sport Activities and Youth Offending*[3], while the Sports Council for Wales was given £8million of lottery funds over 5 years to set up a Social Inclusion in Sport forum.

Sound familiar? Of course it does because this litany of social engineering priorities set for sport is almost identical to those demanded from the arts. The elephant in the room is instrumentalism. From the early days of New Labour's reign, the arts have been asked to deliver on a range of economic, social and political ends. Policy documents such as the 2001 *'Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives for All: Co-operating Across the Sectors to Tackle Social Exclusion'* made the approach explicit. In the same year the new utilitarianism was summed up by Tessa Blackstone, in her first ever speech when Secretary of Arts. She asked, "Can the arts be more than just frivolous, trivial, irrelevant?" She then went on to present ever more instrumental social demands: "I am in no doubt that the arts can contribute to improving healthcare outcomes... better employability and employment... the position of disadvantaged groups... there's increasing evidence that the arts can play a role in both crime prevention and reducing re-offending..."

The instrumental trap

Since then, instrumental demands from government and its agencies that the arts deliver measurable results for a range of non-artistic agendas, have dominated the arts debate and the allocation of funding in a wholly malign way. The problem is well described by Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell in her 2004 mea culpa: *Government and the Value of Culture*. Jowell admitted that too often culture has been debated "in terms only of its instrumental benefits to other agendas... explaining — or in some instances almost apologising for — our investment in culture only in terms of something else". She also conceded that: "We have avoided the... difficult approach of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself". While it is not clear whom the "we" in this refers to, it is true that New Labour in general, the DCMS specifically and even arts institutions, have fought shy of arguing for the arts in their own terms. Those of us who have put the case for 'art for arts sake' have been accused of elitism and dismissed as cultural snobs, out of tune with the new order.

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Unfortunately, Tessa's remarkable recantation did not inspire the arts to come out fighting. Instead arts organisations continue to speak the same instrumental language back to government to stake their claim for money. In 2007 seven major arts bodies teamed up to produce *Values and Vision: The Contribution of Culture*. In this statement they cravenly propose a new settlement that means even more of the same: "We demonstrate... our contribution to the public realm, and the national economy, and show how we have responded to the cultural investment that the government has already made. More importantly, we show what we can do if the government is prepared to increase its commitment... In return, we are seeking commitment from government that it values the contribution that culture makes to learning and education, creativity and economic vitality, social regeneration, health and community cohesion and that it will place the cultural sector closer to the heart of public policy"[4].

This subservience by the arts to external demands may appear to be a canny way of accessing funds, but it means walking straight into the "instrumentality trap". This approach to funding is short-sighted and will inevitably backfire. It is often assumed that those of us who argue against instrumentalism — what Peter Hewitt, Chief executive of Arts Council England (ACE) has described as an "old sterile" debate — are driven by abstract principles. I make no apology for being

principled. But the problem is that the very orthodoxy of instrumentalism is counter productive, and allows the arts to be cast to one side when a better offer comes along. This is the instrumental trap.

Competing instrumentalities

The new 'favouritism' shown towards the Olympics gives us an insight into the problem. Once the arts are merely a tool for delivering prescribed economic or social outcomes, there are not obvious reasons why *they* rather than their competitors — who invariably claim to deliver the same ends — should be favoured. We have the unsavoury spectacle of competing instrumentalities.

To illustrate this point, let's take a specific example. Which agency can best deliver on the healthy communities agenda? According to the DCMS website "engaging with the arts can impact on the health of individuals and communities, reducing recovery times and preventing illness by improving quality of life". Needless to say the same claims are made for sport. The Department of Health's *Football and Health* guidelines suggest that the 'mass appeal' of football "can be utilised to reinforce health messages and build upon football's track record of involvement in promoting healthy lifestyles" because "Encouraging participation in football, whatever the player's ability, is a way of contributing towards health improvement to reduce the risk of chronic diseases and can have a positive effect on mental health by boosting self esteem".

Whatever we think about this joyless, puritanical, indeed anti-sport approach to sport ("whatever the players ability"?), it doesn't take a philistine to note that sports activity is likely to be better for your health than watching the ballet or visiting the British Museum. Moreover, if politicians are strapped for cash and want to improve health-care, they'd probably be wiser to invest in medical staff rather than to rely on the local football coach, never mind the local curator in Egyptian antiquities[5].

Arts sidelined and defensive

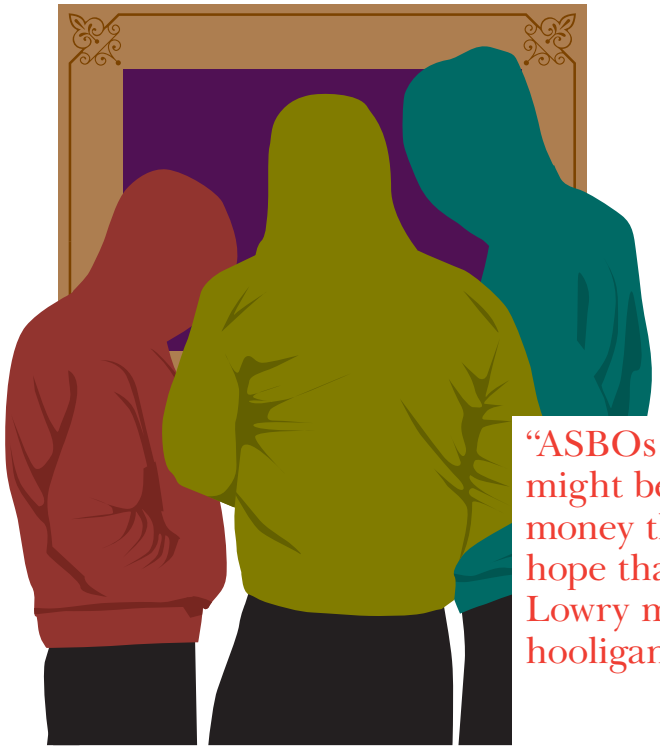
How did competing instrumentalities become so embedded? Perhaps surprisingly, what has amounted to a sustained attack on the intrinsic value of the arts has created little backlash from those at the heart of culture. Of course many in the subsidised cultural sector have reacted against the more crass attempts at casting arts' institutions in this new role. There is particular resentment at the more heavy handed monitoring mechanisms used to collect evidence of social inclusion effectiveness. But while arts organisations have grumbled about excessive government interference, we have not seen a concerted rebellion from this quarter. This muted response is because at root, many who work in the arts seem to have accepted that instrumentalism is the only way they can justify their work, even though they would like to put a brake on its more unpalatable philistine consequences. Instrumental arguments express the arts world's lack of confidence in itself.

When Tony Blair wrote in 2001 that the arts were part "of the core script of this Government" in his foreword to *Culture and Creativity: the Next Ten Years*, many felt relieved. Perhaps the philistinism of Thatcherism, with the demand that the arts offer value for money and deliver the so-called 3 Es: economy, efficiency and effectiveness, might be at an end. Even when it became apparent that the newly formed Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), would not champion the arts per se, but would rather make its own demands, the arts were grateful that at least they were being courted by the political elite.

Under the leadership of Culture Secretary Chris Smith, the explicit market-orientated bean-counting became cloaked in the radical language of social policy. This chimed with the arts' own preoccupations. Interestingly back in the 1980s and before through such bodies as Theatre in Education, it was cultural bodies themselves who began to promote the arts as tools for new political and social ends, partly as a defence against Thatcher. More significantly, many in the arts establishment have rather relished their new role as "potential... agents of social change". Having felt under-appreciated by the previous regime, they welcomed the unprecedented interest from government in their organisations. Here at last was a modern mission that made them feel radical and important. Peter Jenkinson, erstwhile guru of the government's multi-million pound Creative Partnership scheme, and before that Director of the multi-million pound New Art Gallery in Walsall summed up the elation: "Suddenly we are able to think that museums and galleries are not sad, marginal locations of dust and decay and heritage gloom but alive and connected and critical to the futures of communities the length and breadth of the United Kingdom"[6].

More broadly, unclear how to justify the value of art for its own sake in the face of cultural relativism, cowed by the accusation that high art is elitist and wracked with angst and self doubt about how institutions conceived in the enlightenment tradition could face down post-modernism and relativism, the role as social includers provided a dynamic raison d'etre[7].

It could be argued this strategy — however defensive — worked. Certainly money has poured in to the cultural sector during the Blair years. But at what cost? It is true that £150 million has been invested in English regional museums through the government's *Renaissance in the Regions* programme. But why? The programme amounted to patronage with strings and needless to say these had little to do with treating these institutions as museums or storehouses of objects of historical or artistic interest. If government has generously given out money to arts projects, we need to be honest that museums, theatres and orchestras often got that money *not* because of the quality of creative output, or for the acquisition of new art works, or for nurturing new Beethovens but rather by promising to solve a myriad of social problems. It is certainly arguable whether it was the arts that attracted the money or their promised results. This has proved to be a self-defeating strategy.



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Money for what?

While there has been plenty of money sloshing about the arts world, a key question is, what has the government or indeed business been paying for? As the emphasis of funding has been in delivering instrumental outcomes, with little support for the idea that the arts have a value in and of themselves, one has to ask whether what funders were more interested in. Was it the arts per se or reducing crime, improving health or tackling illiteracy? Where they merely funding the arts as one of many devices to tackle these problems?

The 'instrumentalist trap' has been a problem not just in public patronage, but also in the private and non-statutory sector funding of the arts. In John Holden's A&B essay, he tells us: "Business support for the arts is... notoriously fickle" [8].

But maybe there has been confusion about what private support for the arts was 'buying'. The A&B *Private Investment Survey* report notes that businesses have increasingly aligned their funding for charitable causes more "closely with the government's social agenda". Many arts projects seeking funds are directed from marketing to Corporate Social Responsibility fund-holders. However as A&B chair Helena Kennedy states: "The ethos of corporate social responsibility mean businesses want to see their contribution make a difference to the wider community as well as the quality of the arts" [9]. This can mean that community trumps art. The Smart Company, in their report for A&B, advises "If you are engaged purely with the creation and / or production of art, it is unlikely that you will able to access funding through corporate CSR schemes" [10].

All this begs the question, what does business think its money is supporting? Is it the arts themselves or the socially worthy ends the projects promise to deliver? This is undoubtedly one reason why the arts are vulnerable when competing for CSR funds. If their support for an arts project was presented as aiding the socially disadvantaged, might there not be more direct ways of achieving such an objective? As Sarah Selwood has pointed out in her A&B essay in this series [11], if support for culture is merely about meeting CSR targets, there may well be other more obvious initiatives "far more pressing in terms of social need" or with more obviously provable benefits to disadvantaged communities.

Instrumentality is certainly backfiring at local authority level. Too many local councils see the arts as low down the pecking order when prioritising its allocation of funds. One LGA report tells us that nationally "revenue... is budgeted to fall significantly by over one fifth (21%)" [12]. In the 2006 survey of the National Association of Local Government Arts Officers (NALGO), 75% of respondents reported cuts in real terms. NALGO's Paul Kelly has predicted, "incremental cuts over several years are now threatening the very fabric of local authority arts provision" [13].

Why has this happened? It is popular to argue this is because there is no statutory obligation to fund the arts locally. But this explanation is too technical, and avoids a more likely conclusion. Art's inability to stand on its own two feet means it is constantly propped up by other agendas. In practical terms, selling the arts to local authorities as useful for non-artistic ends has resulted in culture having to find funding from other budget holders, rather than having an autonomous budget [14]. In local areas, culture is not established as intrinsically a public good in its own right. As Eleonora Belfiore has argued "cultural projects with explicit social aims are often funded in the context of anti-poverty strategies or urban regeneration projects" so "aesthetic preoccupations are not always the primary reason why the projects were funded in the first place" [15]. Such funding of art through the back door of social policy or other services' agendas, means that art itself is expendable.

Infamously last year Bury council sold its Lowry for £1,408,000 to plug a financial gap in its other services. While arts leaders were outraged, surely their criticism is unfair. After all local authorities have had years of listening to arts organisations telling them that funding everything from concert halls to museums will help them deliver local service agreements, CPA priorities or the more recent LAA outcomes such as helping vulnerable young people. So when Wayne Campbell, the leader of Bury, explained that his council was selling off its Lowry because of "the real decisions faced by a poorly-funded public authority, anxious to ensure it's spending was directed to vulnerable children" [16], he was being logical. If the core outcome is helping vulnerable young people he made the right choice. After all no-one had bothered arguing for the artistic value of the Lowry.

The arts are forced on the back foot. Rather than arguing for themselves per se, they desperately plead that they can do as good a job of delivering local services

as other — arguably more appropriate — agencies. But this is rarely convincing. When ACE's Chief executive Peter Hewitt, claims that "the arts and culture... militates against anti-social behaviour, vandalism and violence" and says that "investment in the arts and creativity is a good investment that will deliver, over time, a return many times greater than its original cost"[17], it is obvious that shrewd municipal bean-counters could point out that ASBOs — even prison — might be better value for money than the forlorn hope that gazing on a Lowry might reform hooligans.

More generally, even I, as an arts lover (as well as a former social worker and teacher) am dubious whether the arts are best placed to deliver important social goods. Norman LeBrecht notes that in order to justify sustaining fulltime orchestras, the *Listen Up* project highlights "60 education projects, 60 community projects and 15 health initiatives". He correctly asks "whether such important social benefits might not be more responsibly dispensed by social and medical professionals"[18].

Arts in denial

The fate of the Bury Lowry indicates how the arts' desire to prove themselves as relevant to the social agenda can devalue art itself. If you value a painting because it can tackle unemployment or improve self-esteem, you have no idea what it's really worth, as art. Conversely, if selling a painting can raise money to pay for the social ends the arts claim to be solving, who can object?

Throwing money at the arts — in the context wherein art itself is a secondary consideration — is no guarantee of artistic excellence. The one billion pounds spent on the Dome should be a salutatory reminder that the politicisation of culture can end in a vacuous disaster. Once the demands on the arts are non-artistic — the quality of the arts is often marginalized. It is increasingly recognised that introducing considerations that are extraneous to artistic activity can sideline the creation of great art and can damage artistic integrity and aesthetic judgement. Josie Appleton's critique of a culture of mediocrity in *Who Owns Public Art* in *Culture Vultures* is instructive: "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 the quality of the work". Norman LeBrecht notes that "in recent years, defence of the orchestra has rested not so much on musical excellence as on all the other good works that orchestras do — prison and hospital visits, educational concerts, diplomatic missions". At the launch of the Youth Music initiative, a government spokesman announced its aim was to: "Establish music-making opportunities as a force of regeneration in communities, fostering social inclusion and community cohesion". In the midst of such demands, the quality of the music created is treated with contempt, a secondary consideration.

In making a business case for the arts — another popular instrumental campaign — it sometimes feels as though the arts are an embarrassing secret, which needs to be disguised or sexed up under the aegis of that weasel word 'creativity'. In attempts at pleading that culture is key to economic growth, the arts have allowed themselves to be grouped together with a range of commercial and non-artistic activities under the heading 'creative industries'. According to the DCMS, the Creative Industries are not only Fine Art and the Performing Arts etc, but also include Advertising, Design, Music Publishing, Publishing, Television and Radio. As academic James Heartfield has shown, early estimates of creative industry earnings were inflated by bundling together all sorts of things like computer software (nearly half the total) with the arts. Claims that so many work in the creative industries have relied on a rather creative interpretation of the term creative: "totals of 'creative workers' are generally exaggerated by lumping in groups of workers like swimming pool attendants and software engineers"[19].

This smoke and mirror approach to the arts tries to suggest they are wealth creators rather than in need of subsidy. Lord David Puttnam claimed "Our rock musicians contribute more to the balance of payments than the steel industry"[20]. Even the chief executive of the Royal Opera House, Tony Hall, has argued that arts funding should be a 'no brainer' *if* you put them in the "bigger... framework of the creative and cultural industries"[21]. One can't help feeling that this grouping of high earning industries like design and advertising — which do not need government support — with ballet and opera that do, is because no-one believes that the subsidised arts sector can be justified unless hidden behind the razzmatazz of 'Cool Britannia' or profit making pop-stars. Can those corporates who sponsor the endless Pop Idols, X Factors and Fame Academies on TV really pat themselves on the back the as the new Medicis? Is this really what the 'golden age' of the arts amounts to?

The arts community may get a warm glow hearing government ministers queuing up to use a term like creativity. After all it was once associated with the arts. However, as the promiscuous use of the of the C word grows exponentially, the arts are being squeezed out of the creativity discourse altogether. One pivotal document was *Culture and Creativity — the next 10 years*. In former culture minister Chris Smith's opening 1500 words, there are 28 mentions of creativity, all given a variety of meanings. There's creative industries, creative cities and of course the much vaunted Creative partnerships. When Creative Partnerships launched to great fanfare and £40 million of public money, its proclaimed mission was: "To develop long term partnerships between schools and cultural and creative organisations and artists". But to what ends? The literature is full of instrumental, non-artistic reasons. Music — we're told — can give pupils an opportunity to "work together as a group to develop team-work and increase pupils' self esteem". The Creative Partnerships website proclaimed it wanted to move beyond the art education model of the past: creative learning would produce "creative employees" who would be: "more agile and flexible" and able to "adapt pro-actively to challenge, ensuring business is ready for anything". This might have immediate instrumental appeal to the corporate sector but what has it to do with art education?

Artists for art

So — what is to be done? I agree with A&B that we need to "Promote the value of arts and culture amongst decision-makers and opinion formers". The *Private Investment Survey Report* also concedes that "poor advocacy" remains an obstacle to "increasing (the arts') share of private investment". But let me put in a plea for how and what that advocacy should centre on. The only way to gain support for the arts today is to go on the offensive and re-popularise the intrinsic value of the arts.

My solution is that we need to rediscover how to argue for the arts. That might sound banal, but actually over recent years, arts organisations seem to have forgotten how to enthuse about what they do; instrumentalism seems to have sapped the life out of how the arts community argues for funding. It is refreshing to see Arts Council England launch its arts debate — "the first ever public value enquiry". We should always welcome as open and full a debate as possible. But we don't need an enquiry to know there has been so much intellectual energy put into displaying the cultural artefacts of excluded groups or mounting exhibitions to aid local identity building that artists, curators, musicians and playwrights seem to have forgotten how to promote their core purpose for its own sake. Worryingly, Peter Hewitt, Chief Executive ACE, has a particularly bad case of artistic amnesia. He says: "I really don't understand what intrinsic value is, even less "art for art's sake". What do such terms mean?" [22].

There is an obvious solution. If we free arts' advocates from instrumentalism, we stand a chance. Whenever I hear arts professionals and artists arguing for funding by reeling off today's social and economic mantras, or spouting creativity jargon, they sound mechanical. Listening to people repeating the platitudes they feel will tick the right boxes to access the money is a deadening and dispiriting experience. But when you scratch the surface and ask those who work in the arts to talk about what their theatre/orchestra/choir/gallery actually does, their eyes light up and they become passionate enthusiasts. Unfortunately this excitement about ART and only ART often takes place behind closed doors but we should unleash it into the public debate.

Real engagement with art is infectious. I defy the most hard-nosed businessman or local authority bureaucrat not to be more inspired by genuine passion rather than a rehearsed lists of bland buzzwords. Read the latest *Arts Council England's work with Local Government* document and you could lose the will to live. Instead listen to arts lovers such as David Ward describing his love affair with classical music, an art form that "stirs both brain and heart" and can give us "intimations of eternity" [23] or the dazzling speech by comedy writer Armando Iannucci given to the Royal Philharmonic Society last year. In it he describes how 'difficult' classical music is the opposite of an elitist art form, but universally open to us all. He reminds us that "no matter where we are, whether we're learned, in prison, poor, successful, alone or average... we can go beyond ourselves, that we're human and are therefore dignified". He explains that after a concert he wants to grab people by the lapels and "tell them how lucky we are as a species that, out of all the hundreds of billions of us who ever lived, one of us managed to come up with the Goldberg Variations" [24]. These advocates' enthusiasm — let alone the art forms they are describing — is life-enhancing.

Every August, thousands of young people flock to the Edinburgh Fringe festival to perform plays they have sometimes written or lovingly reinterpreted and staged. By day they walk the streets flyering; by evening they perform in bleak church halls to often sparse audiences. Why do this so called 'whatever' generation, frequently dismissed as superficial and indifferent by their elders, bother to tread the boards, often making financial losses? It's the art stupid! Meet them in the bar afterwards or invite them to discuss their work in debates [25] and they will not shut up about Ibsen, Brecht, Pinter or Edgar. Let Iannucci and our young thespians loose on the funders and see if they remain indifferent. They are a reminder that it is yet possible to build a brave new anti-philistine society if we let art and arts lovers do the talking. Gordon Brown says he is listening. Let's make sure the arts are saying something worth hearing.

Building an anti-philistine society

Beleaguered Tessa Jowell was forced to respond to those who queued up to harangue the government about recent funding cuts by writing an article headlined: *The charge that Labour is philistine is absurd* [26]. New Labour's accusers are right to shout 'philistines', but they miss the point. Composer Sir Peter Davies has pointed out that our political leaders seldom seem to appreciate the arts on a personal level: "The only minister I ever saw at a 'cultural event' was Roy Hattersley at an Ibsen play," thundered Sir Peter. Ben Macintyre concurred: "I have never spotted a politician inside a theatre, opera house, gallery or cinema, unless on official business. A quick straw poll of friends and colleagues revealed only a single ministerial sighting: Charlie Falconer, once, at the opera" [27]. Last year the Guardian's Martin Kettle concluded that cuts in arts funding "would not have happened if Blair had cared more about the arts himself... I rarely see many politicians at arts events I attend... It cheers me to see David Milliband in the concert hall and Jack Straw at the opera... My distaste for Nick Brown's plotting against Blair is slightly mitigated by his love of Shostakovich" [28].

But I don't think the numbers of politicians who love the arts is the key factor. After all, Gordon Brown has apparently quoted Wordsworth and Shelley in his speeches (OK, the earlier ones, before his Arctic Monkeys phase), but it hasn't stopped him wielding the financial knife. What we need is a political elite that shows due respect for the arts; they need not parade themselves at the theatre, can be as sporty or uncultured as they want, but what they do need to note is that a modern, dynamic society would cheer at a thriving arts scene. A vibrant civil society would invariably appreciate artistic excellence.

Philistinism is an interesting motif to consider. It is too often assumed that businessmen are philistines and cannot

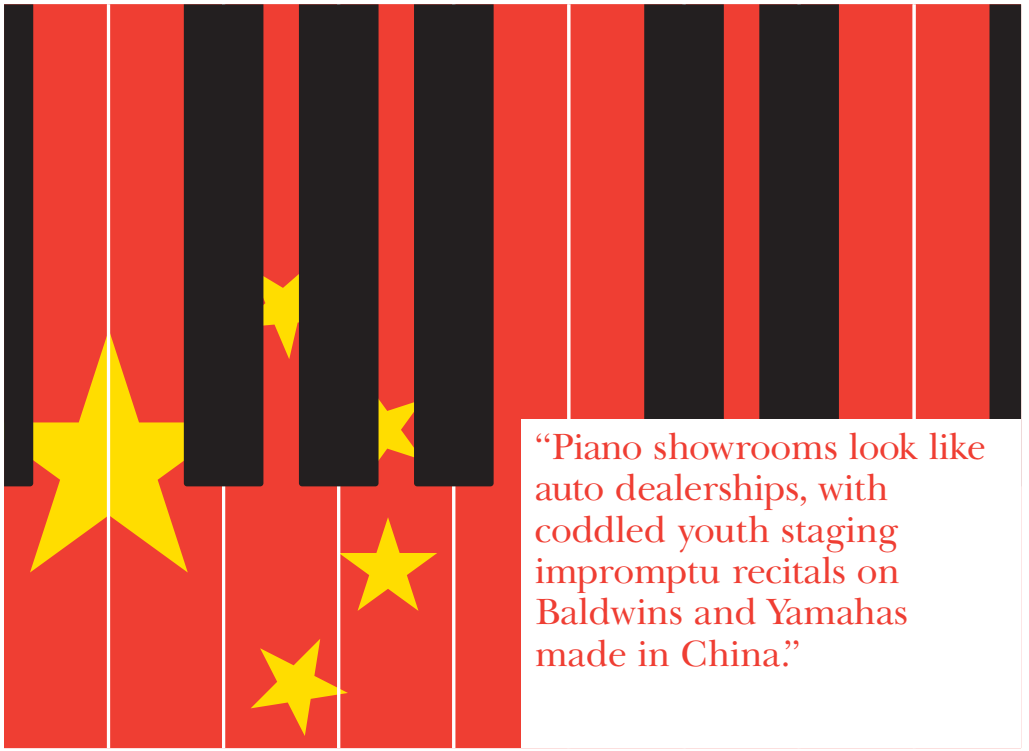
understand anything beyond shareholders and bottom lines. But of course many in the corporate sector are indeed arts lovers as individuals. Lord Browne at BP may have hit the headlines for different reasons, but we know his personal appreciation of opera may well have encouraged him to see BP as such an energetic arts champion. Helena Kennedy is a lawyer, but heads up Arts & Business because "I have a passion for the arts". The Arts & Business Square Mile Philanthropy Programme, which will identify and cherish art lovers in the City, is an exciting idea; let's hope it thrives. But again, we can't rely on corporate types being arts' fans for funding to be forthcoming.

Colin Tweedy makes an interesting observation in the A&B brochure for this year's awards: "Business people often tell me that they are philistines. They say this is order to explain why they, or their company, will not support the arts... I sometimes muse on what they think 'philistine' means... what is the opposite of philistine? The words 'arty' and 'cultured' comes to mind, but rarely the word 'civilised'. People may not care to be seen as arty, but do they want to be seen as uncivilised?... Let us hold on to that word 'civilisation' — after all, 'civil' and 'civility' come from it".

Helena Kennedy might be right that "Company shareholders are much more demanding than they once were about corporate spend; those working in these enterprises also want more from the relationships with arts organisations than a night at the opera" [29]. But what can be offered is the reflected glory that comes from an association with one of greatest of humanity's creations, a reflection of man's ability to imagine and create in defiance of the logic and limits of the market or politics. To quote the President of A&B, the Prince of Wales "I believe our spirit and our very humanity are articulated and illuminated by the arts. When I was young they gave me a vital introduction to the world of the imagination, wherein lies a treasure trove of memories, romance and inspiration — an inspiration that has lasted a lifetime... They remain the hallmark of a civilised society [30]".

There is no doubt that most of us — including the business community — would rather live in a civilized than a philistine world. That is why we need to be bolder and less instrumental and philistine when we appeal for funding for the arts. According to the latest Rich List, over the last year the number of billionaires increased by 14 to 68 and under New Labour the worth of the top 1000 richest people in the country has soared by 263%. There are a lot of private patrons and philanthropists to appeal to as supporters of the fruits of human civilization.

If the arts were valued and paraded as a good in their own right, any serious philanthropist or corporation would no doubt queue up to gain the glow of approval by association. Perhaps we can take inspiration from the nineteenth century industrialists who magnificently set up the great arts institutions we still cherish today. The economic dynamism of that period was accompanied by a confident display of the artistic jewels of that era and human achievement to date. When A&B say: "It is good business to invest in the arts, it brings business



"Piano showrooms look like auto dealerships, with coddled youth staging impromptu recitals on Baldwins and Yamahas made in China."

rewards and helps the UK maintain its creative edge", they may think it is clever to appeal to self interest but maybe they are underestimating even hard-nosed business people's capacity to see beyond the short-term. A commitment to the arts would indicate a broader long-term vision for a dynamic society.

The future of arts funding — look East!

Let's look at the relationship between economic growth and the arts in another country, often cited as a threat to the west's economic hegemony. I take some heart from contemporary China, where after years of neglect, classical music is making a comeback, and not because it's useful to the economy, but because it's being passionately embraced by a society which is aspirational [31].

According to the New York Times "European classical music has a charge of pop-culture frisson in China. Young people flock to concerts, or at least those they can afford. A woman at a Beijing bookstore was seen carrying Mozart's portrait in her wallet. Piano showrooms look like auto dealerships, with coddled youth staging impromptu recitals on Baldwins and Yamahas made in China, as anxious parents haggle over prices".

Today's China has around four million professional musicians and new concert halls and opera houses are being built across the country. According to the Chinese Musicians Association there are an estimated 30 million piano students and 10 million violin students while conservatories are bulging. Hundreds of factories make Western musical instruments, producing 370,000 pianos,

one million violins and six million guitars. China dominates world production of all three. The legendary Italian tenor Carlo Bergonzi, one of opera's greatest stars now in his 80s, is working at Beijing's Central Conservatoire. "My work... is to uncover new talent, and many of the voices here today are first class... Without a doubt they are among the most beautiful voices in the world at the moment," he said.

Quoting statistics doesn't do justice to what is really happening in China. They are mercifully free from our own homegrown audit culture, which measures quantity and downgrades quality. Instead their politicians seem to view the arts as a mark of civilization. Li Lanqing, a former minister of education and member of the ruling Politburo Standing Committee wrote a lengthy, loving tribute to 50 Western composers in which he argued that you cannot be a true intellectual if you don't understand Western classical music.

Hao Jiang Tian, one of the New York Metropolitan Opera's superstars, has said that "the future of classical music will be in China". Meanwhile Chen Hung-Kuan, the chairman of the piano department at the Shanghai Conservatory, has noted that classical music "is hot in China... It may be fading in Western countries," but in China the talent is "unlimited". How ironic that in the west, fewer young listeners find their way to classical music, because of our own lack of faith in the arts, the paucity of music education, and an inability to believe the young can cope with the challenges of the difficult[32].

Here in the UK, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) has launched China 2008, which will feature exhibitions of Chinese textiles, art and objects[33]. But maybe instead of British arts institutions "engaging everyone in a celebration of Chinese culture", we should take our lead from China and try and rediscover our hunger for universally great art.

Yu Long, one of China's most well known conductors has explained that the barren years of the Cultural Revolution gave rise to a hunger for music; when it ended, people were "so thirsty to suck everything in". Maybe we can write off the last ten barren years of UK instrumentalism as our own version of the Cultural Revolution. This might unleash a society eager to "suck everything in". I believe the thirst for the arts exists at all levels of society here as well as in China — if only we go out and let people know of the wonders on offer without apology. Let's use the Cultural Olympiad to show that the disaster of the Dome is part of the philistine past. 2012 is an opportunity to build a dynamic, civilized society for the future. Now who on earth wouldn't want to fund that?

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