

Artist as Executive, Executive as Artist

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Cultural policy is marked by certain contradictions, which are at the heart of our definition of culture. One of these contradictions is between, on one hand, the belief in creativity as a certain indefinable *je ne sais quoi* that is the property of unique, exemplary individuals (which cannot really be fostered by policy or even arts education) – and on the other hand, the imperative of policy to manage collective entities such as cities, regions or populations (such as, for example, how culture was historically positioned in relation to public health or a unified regional or national identity).¹

These contradictory dynamics have existed for a long time, at least since the 19th century. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Pierre Bourdieu describes what he calls the “charismatic ideology”, which directs attention to “the apparent producer, the painter, writer or composer”, allowing the “cultural businessman” to “consecrate a product which he has ‘discovered’ and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource.”² In other words, the authenticity of the unique genius must exist in order to be ‘discovered’ and promoted. Nor has this dynamic fundamentally changed through the industrialisation of culture in the twentieth century. Written in 1989, Bernard Miège’s *The Capitalisation of Cultural Production* is one of the earliest analyses of cultural production as at the heart of fundamental changes in the management of labour in Western capitalist societies. Miège cites a 1983 speech by Jean-François Mitterand (then-Prime Minister of France) made almost fifteen years before the election of Tony Blair: “creativity is becoming a development factor, and cultural activities are establishing themselves among the expanding sectors around which the future is being organised.”³ According to Miège, the capitalisation of cultural production does not really disrupt the genius myth or the figure of the artist as a representation of authenticity, as this myth provides some continuity between more traditional definitions of the arts and modern-day celebrity culture. This is why, according to Miège, the industrialisation and commercialisation of production, to the extent that it is connected to the reigning economic and social model, will not lead to its democratisation.

It is one of those obvious, even dumb, but important questions to ask why the genius myth remains so firmly intact despite over a hundred years of avant-garde experimentation, artist-led spaces and art collectives; despite proclamation of the author’s death; despite the challenges of feminism and other social movements to the figure of the genius as predominantly white, male and middle class; and despite the models and practical possibilities offered by free software and copy culture. Is the individual author one of Ulrich Beck’s “zombie categories”, which are kept alive after they have outlived their relevance out of force of habit, structural dependencies or because they serve powerful interests? Or is it that these challenges are far more marginal than we would like to think, reflecting a gap between theory and practice? To fully answer this question is outside of the scope of this text; but it is one I feel it is necessary to raise.

However, if the genius myth has not really been seriously destabilised, I am arguing that, through neoliberalism, it has merged with economic concepts such as ‘human capital’, or, as we will see, aspects of management culture. The concept of human capital actually dates back to Adam Smith; defined as “the acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of the society” which, although they cost “a certain expense, [repay] that

expense with a profit.”⁴ However, the term itself did not really come into use until the 1950s, when Chicago School economists such as Gary Becker, as well as early Economic Development Studies economists such as AW Lewis and Arthur Cecil Pigou began to make use of it.

Although ‘human capital’ is not a new concept, what is significant about its use under neoliberalism is that the development of personal skills and abilities become seen as an investment in a potential future salary, whether this means schooling or even parenting. In other words, there is an expectation to be an ‘entrepreneur of the self’⁵: each individual is meant to be responsible for his/her continued employment; keeping ‘employable’ through continually investing in oneself (such as through skills or training), continually adapting oneself to the latest job market demands, which change all the time (bringing to mind the pervasive modernisation rhetoric around ‘keep up to date’, or threats about being ‘left behind’). If individuals fail to do so, they only have themselves to blame. This is part of a wider tendency to reduce everything to its economic usefulness, as part of

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neoliberalism’s “application of an economic grid to social phenomena”.⁶ An obvious question is what happens to skills or abilities that are not seen as economically useful, and the people who have dedicated their lives to learning them?⁷ What about other forms of learning that do not immediately lead to jobs, and what happens to the arguments to justify them, or (more accurately) the willingness of others to listen to them?

If the ‘human capital’ concept serves as one of the underpinnings of neoliberal policy, then a related discourse that has more explicitly marked recent cultural policy is ‘social exclusion’. In *The Inclusive Society: Social Exclusion and New Labour*, Ruth Levitas describes how social exclusion discourse erases the power relations that produce inequality, so that terms like ‘inequality’ and ‘exploitation’ (terms that suggest a systemic critique, particularly that someone might be responsible for exploitation and might even benefit from it) start to disappear. One is not exploited but simply excluded – excluded from a seemingly homogeneous and harmonious majority; as Levitas says, “poverty and unemployment are seen to be residual rather than endemic

problems”.⁸ It is an individualising discourse; being excluded is at least partly one’s own fault – for having the wrong skill set, the wrong character traits or the wrong kind of family life.

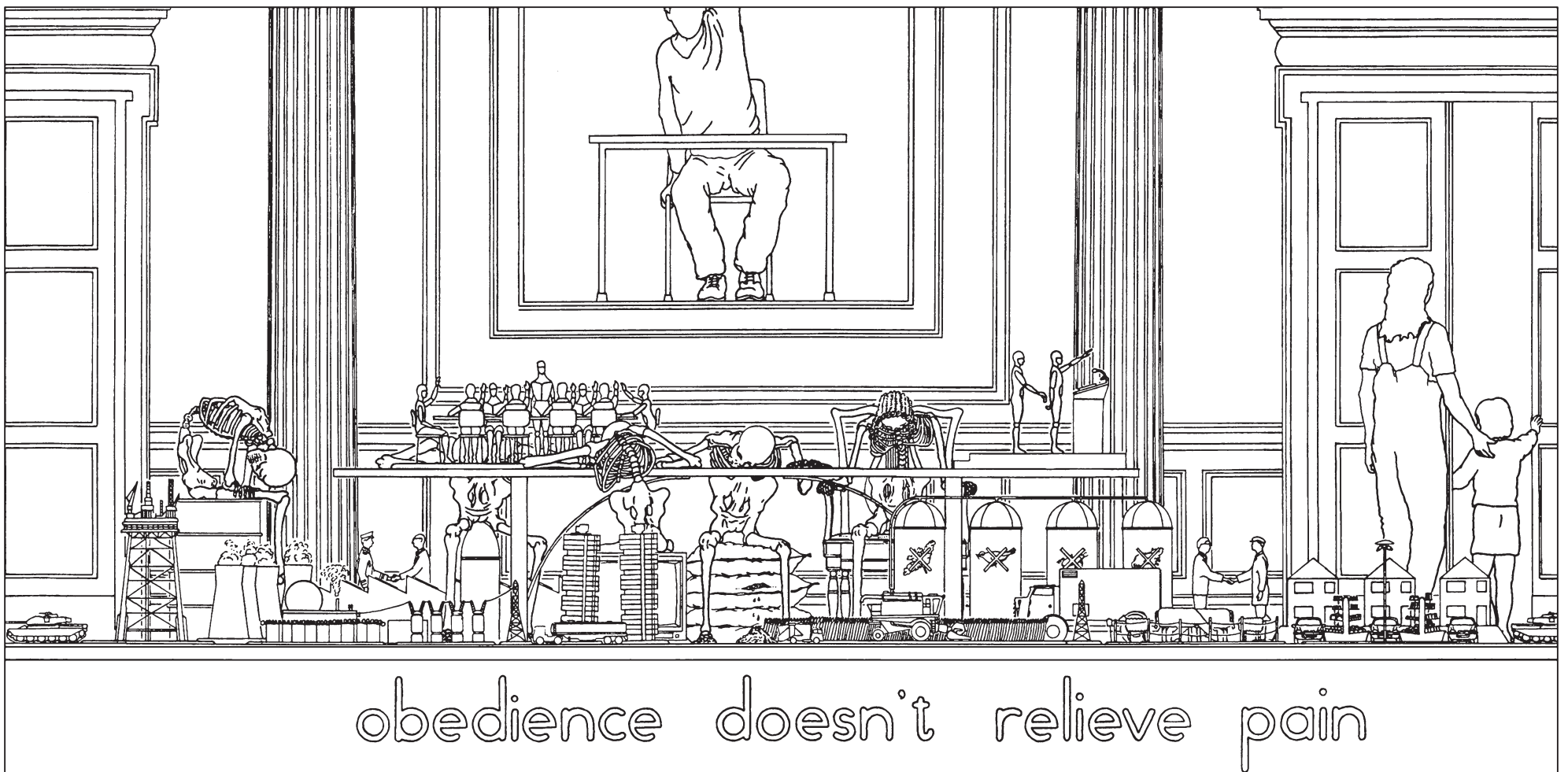
Social exclusion discourse originated in 1960s British critical social policy (which saw inequality as not only social but also cultural), 1980s US right-wing discourse which popularised the term ‘underclass’ (applied, in particular, to unemployed young men and lone mothers) and which stigmatised benefits recipients; and French welfare reform which equated paid employment with participation in society with paid work, which then became influential on EU social policy. As Ruth Lister has described, ‘social exclusion’ discourse was central to New Labour’s shift from “equality to equality of opportunity”, in other words, away from protecting benefits and income redistribution, and towards education and training, and obligations of paid work. Social Exclusion Unit was set up in 1997, as was the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion or CASE. At the launch of CASE, Harriet Harman made a speech containing the following text (which actually presents paid employment as therapeutic):

“We hear a lot about the non-wage costs of work. But very little about the non-wage motivation for work. Work helps fulfil our aspirations – it is the key to independence, self-respect and opportunities and advancement... Work brings a sense of order that is missing from the lives of many unemployed young men.”¹⁰

Social exclusion policy places artists in a contradictory position in several different ways. The first issue is that, in its narrow focus on the virtues of paid employment, social exclusion does not perceive unpaid labour as real work and “undermines the legitimacy of non-participation in work”.¹¹ As cultural production can involve, in many cases, activities outside of the ‘day job’ and even identifying with them more than with one’s paid employment, this starts to pose a problem. The irony of course is that the dedication and willingness to work for free on the part of artists, but also others in the cultural and voluntary sectors, are practically celebrated *at the same time as the support structures that facilitate this kind of work are withdrawn* – as in the current Welfare Reform bill which serves to stigmatise benefits even further.

Another issue is that artists are positioned as the agents of social cohesion, usually through community arts commissions where artists are expected to involve marginalised groups in large scale projects. There have been many critiques of this: Munira Mirza has called these policies fundamentally “therapeutic”.¹² The Cultural Policy Collective (CPC) critiqued the top-down nature of their implementation, whereby they “recruit willing representatives from targeted zones without considering the non-participation of far wider sections of their population”¹³; promoting a “a parochial sphere of action that is almost wholly dependent on professionalised community organisations”.¹⁴ This kind of client relationship provides very little scope for communities to determine their own needs and act in their own interests. This is similar in certain ways to the depoliticising tendencies of development NGOs, which positions those in the global South as continually needing the help of trained experts, and in some cases, multinational corporations.¹⁵

This can also be seen as part of a wider tendency to associate culture with an aspirational imperative, often connected to urban regeneration schemes: that the presence of certain types of cultural activities (art galleries for example) will



give people a taste of a middle class lifestyle, and in doing so, raise their expectations and lead them to participate in mainstream society. Consistent with social exclusion discourse, the only way to improve one's lot is through (individual) participation, achievement and success in mainstream society, (through training and paid employment). Within this context, alternative, and more importantly, *collective* models for dealing with one's personal situation (workplace or community organising, grassroots campaigns, etc.) become inconceivable. In a larger sense, what is politically dangerous about social exclusion discourse is that it creates a kind of inarguable hegemonic logic – to disagree with these schemes is to be 'against aspiration', to be recalcitrantly against change, to want to keep people (or one's self) in the ghetto.

We can see both these concepts of 'human capital' and 'social exclusion' in recent cultural policy, particularly that of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in their emphasis on the 'creative industries' over the past ten years. It could be argued that 'human capital' is present in their very definition of the creative industries, through the emphasis on "individual creativity, skills and talent"; returning to the discussion at the beginning, they define creativity in terms of exemplary individuals – but perhaps closer to the 'leadership' and 'vision' fetishised by new management literature: "those industries that are based on *individual creativity, skill and talent*. They are also those that have the *potential to create wealth and jobs* through developing intellectual property".¹⁶ Imperatives to address the entire population are also present, but increasingly focusing on economic development: "creating wealth and jobs".

Strategy Documents & Cultural Leadership

'*Culture and Creativity: the Next Ten Years*' (2001) was authored by former MP Chris Smith. It begins with the assertion that "everyone is creative" and that "people in all walks of life... need to develop their creative potential and learn from each other".¹⁷ Reading between the lines, we could see this as an attempt to combine cultural democracy (that "everyone is creative", not only a few), with human capital ("develop their creative potential"). The problem with the UK, according to Smith, are that people from marginalised communities feel that the "arts are not for them" and that there is a general lack of support and encouragement to experience the arts, such as being "taught musical instruments" or making "regular visits to museums or theatres".¹⁸ The proposals outlined

in the document include increased funding for Arts Council England (ACE) and free access to museums (a genuine imperative towards cultural democracy). There is also a strong emphasis on education, including various partnerships between schools and cultural institutions. What is significant is that '*Culture and Creativity: the Next Ten Years*' links the arts, or, more disturbingly, cultural democracy to discourses of 'innovation' associated with science, technology and business; creativity is seen as "at the centre of successful economic life in an advanced knowledge-based economy".¹⁹ All these elements become more explicit in the 2008 strategy document, '*Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy*'.²⁰

Written seven years later, '*Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy*' begins with the argument that the creative industries are a growth sector, expanding at twice the rate of the economy as a whole, but the UK faces competition from other countries (the report does not specify which countries). National competition for comparative advantage within the global economy, in fact, shapes much of the document. The other dominant argument is that many lack the necessary skills to succeed in the creative industries, particularly those from what are seen to be marginalised communities. Exclusion, then, is not about not going to museums – it's about *not having enough employable skills*, particularly in technology; by not having enough skills, one is not employable or adaptable enough within a post-industrial economy. '*Creative Britain*' focuses primarily on skills training and on business development; the arts, when not connected to these two, tend to vanish. Proposals include: 1) the creation of 5,000 formal apprenticeships²¹ a year, with a variety of arts organisations; 2) research to promote a "more diverse workforce" (although 'diversity' here means skills ability, not diversity in terms of race, gender or class); 3) closer links between academia and industry, specifically centres in computer games, design, animation and "haute couture"; 4) legislation against filesharing; 5) the development of mixed media centres and live music venues²²; 6) the development of various funds, programmes and networks for business development.

These sorts of developments: where creativity becomes defined in terms of human capital, particularly those skills (such as IT) seen as marketable within a (pre-crash) post-industrial economy, should also be seen within the context of the raft of new management literature on 'creativity', from Tom Peters (known for phrases such as "thinking outside the box") to Daniel Pink (author of '*The MFA is the New MBA*'); to John Howkins to urban theorist-cum-regeneration consultants such as Richard Florida, who famously

suggested that the old class structure was being replaced by a new meritocracy of knowledge and talent.²³ What is significant about this sort of literature is how certain qualities associated with the Romantic genius are brought into management culture and in some cases projected onto the figure of the manager. In '*The Organisation of Culture Between Bureaucracy and Technocracy*', Paola Merli mentions that post-bureaucratic theories of management discuss the need for charismatic leaders displaying qualities such as 'vision', giving their organisation a 'mission', and being sources of 'inspiration' for their subordinates – though, crucially, not presenting an alternative worldview.²⁴

According to Jim McGuigan, management literature began to become popular with the Labour Party in the 1980s and 1990s, in connection with a turn to economic pragmatism, following the 1983 defeat. This meant, among other strategies, the adoption of business lingo, which provoked Simon Frith to ask why the Labour Party was using terms such as "market niche" and "corporate image".²⁵ The result of these influences on UK policy was that, in addition to privatisation, many publicly-funded organisations were increasingly required to re-organise and run themselves *as though they were the private sector*. This was also a common pattern in many European countries – organisations were not directly privatised, but were required to operate like businesses. McGuigan uses the term "managerialism" to characterise this shift in organisational structure and purpose.

A synthesis of the tendencies I have mentioned so far (the genius myth, individualism, an association of culture with aspiration and employment skills, regimes of professionalisation and managerialism, and the charismatic leader of management theory) can be found in recent policy initiatives towards fostering 'cultural leadership'. These initiatives formalise connections between management discourses and the arts, through a variety of professional development programmes set up to train arts management, and in some cases artists, in leadership skills. It is notable that all these initiatives *propose professionalisation and skills training as a response to a perceived organisational crisis*. In 2002, the Clore Programme was set up in order to offer fellowships to "exceptional individuals who have the potential to take on significant leadership roles".²⁶ The programme was started in response to what was perceived as a skills gap in arts management and a "crisis in cultural leadership" in the UK, based on a 2002 study commissioned by the Clore Duffield Foundation.²⁷ The organisation does state that "cultural leadership is distinct

Chad McCall
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from management competencies, and that it is generically different from business leadership²⁸; however, so much of the language on the website seems indistinguishable. The programme now runs twenty to twenty-five fellowships a year.

In 2005, a review was commissioned by then-chancellor Gordon Brown and led by Sir Arthur Cox, entitled the *'Cox Review of Creativity in Business: building on the UK's Strengths'*. Brown announced that "we must recognise the role of our cultural leaders in delivering [economic] success and ensure the emergence of a talented and diverse group of future leaders".²⁹ In response to the *'Cox Review'*, the 'Nature of Creativity' scheme was launched, with a goal which "seeks to enhance understanding about the nature of creativity and its relationships with innovation". It was funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) in collaboration with: Arts Council England, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Dept. for Trade and Industry, and Research Networks and Workshops. In connection with this scheme, Dr Anne Douglas of Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, conducted *'The Artist as Leader'* research project³⁰. According to the AHRC's annual report, "Douglas has started to research the role of creativity in culture using the concept of leadership, posing questions such as: When is an artist the leader?, How does the artists critical thinking influence practices of leading?"³¹ In 2006, Robert Hewison, writing for the think tank DEMOS, also published a report about cultural leadership, arguing that there is a crisis of faith in institutions.³² On the one hand, the report is marked by an imperative to show that culture is not equivalent to business; on the other, it still insists that culture has much to learn from business and vice versa.³³ According to Merli, this contradiction has marked other aspects of his writing.³⁴

The Cultural Leadership Programme also began in 2006 – a "two-year, £12 million initiative to promote excellence in management and leadership within the cultural sector".³⁵ The initiative was funded by ACE; the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; as well as Cultural and Creative Skills (CCS), the "sector skills council for the advertising, craft, cultural heritage, design, literature, music, performing and visual arts". CCS was set up in 2005 to "reduce skills gaps and shortages, improve productivity, business and public service performance, and to reform learning supply, making courses and qualifications relevant to industry".³⁶ It was launched at EMI Headquarters in West London; at the launch, then-Secretary of State for Culture Tessa Jowell made a speech claiming that the "initiative aims to provide a strategic approach to embed a strong leadership culture that will make Britain's creative sectors *more successful – and more accessible – than ever*".³⁷ The Cultural Leadership Programme mentions the Clore Leadership Programme, but notes that Clore "cannot be for everyone".³⁸ The initiative mainly consists of professional development and training programs, with the goal of training artists and arts managers, particularly women, Black and Ethnic Minorities and people with disabilities. More recently, City University, London, launched an MA in Cultural Leadership, in partnership with the Cass Business School.³⁹ The programme was originally stated to focus on female arts managers, in response to a 'glass ceiling' whereby women were under-represented in senior management positions in culture. It is now open to both genders.

It is worth asking about the way in which these professional development programmes propose to address structural hierarchies of race and gender in arts organisations. There is at least an acknowledgement that "organisational culture can serve as a barrier to professional development" and that "the diversity of sector leaders has not yet been fully addressed".⁴⁰ However, leadership is seen as the cure to all problems, and leadership is to be fostered by skills development and networking – but not really any change to organisational structure. It is assumed that if women and minorities have the necessary skills and resources, they should be able to succeed within existing structures and contexts. Actively fighting discrimination, or developing

alternative organisational structures (such as through the long, rich and largely ignored history of feminist art in the UK, which involved setting up numerous organisations and publications), are not really seen as an option, and a concept such as discrimination does not really make sense within this framework. What these sorts of initiatives can be seen as, instead, is as part of a wider regime of professionalisation where artists are continually expected to retrain themselves and where deeper structural conditions are problems to be solved, in a technocratic fashion, through modernising imperatives and management techniques. 'Leadership' becomes a way of merging art and business, combining aspects of the genius myth with the figure of the executive. Jowell's statement, that the creative sector can be "more successful and more accessible", reflects this sort of desire to have one's cake and eat it too – that one can seamlessly combine equality and productivity or efficiency objectives.

Larger questions need to be asked about democratic participation in these organisations, and especially the role for those without management training – what about those lower down in the management hierarchy, not to mention the ever-growing number of unpaid interns who must work for free, in some cases for years, before getting their first paid job?⁴¹ What about the artists who do not work in ways that can be programmatically defined as 'leadership'? What about the audiences, or even the communities targeted by public art programmes? Does this entrench their position as clients continually in need of help to participate in mainstream society, but never able to act on their own situations? Another question is about what happens to alternative models for running organisations, including those modes that would easily be dismissed as inefficient and amateurish, but which are nonetheless important in other ways? Can an organisation be sustained without a conventionally defined 'management ethos', and do these imperatives and discourses risk erasing both the history and the possibility of alternatives? Could the crisis suggested by these policy imperatives, of organisations that do not function (both inside and outside the cultural sector), be read, in some ways, as a crisis of democracy – of frustration at the consolidation of executive control and the inflation of executive salaries⁴², at the endless consultation exercises, or the adoption of the latest new management lingo, and so on? In the current political climate (marked by populist anger at bankers and MPs) now is perhaps a good time to ask ourselves some hard questions about the directions taken by cultural policy over the past ten years. But in a more general sense, it's also important to question the tendency to reward and celebrate exemplary individuals, both within and outside the arts.

Notes

- 1 See, Miller, Toby and Yúdice, George. *Cultural Policy*, SAGE, 2002.
- 2 Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Columbia University Press, 1993: 76.
- 3 Miège, Bernard. *The Capitalisation of Cultural Production*. IG, 1989: 38.
- 4 Smith, Adam. *Book 2: Of the Nature, Accumulation, and Employment of Stock. In An Inquiry into the Nature And Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. 1776. Online at: <http://www.adamsmith.org/smith/won-b2-c1.htm>
- 5 Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Palgrave-MacMillan, 2008:239.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 See Richard Sennett. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. W.W. Norton and Co., 1999.
- 8 Levitas: 1998:7.
- 9 Lister, Ruth. 'From Equality to Social Inclusion: New Labour and the Welfare State.' *Critical Social Policy*, 1998, 215-225.
- 10 Levitas, Ruth. *The Inclusive Society: Social Exclusion and New Labour*. Palgrave-MacMillan, 2005: 151.
- 11 Levitas: 1998:27.
- 12 Mirza, Munira. 'The Therapeutic State'. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Volume 11, Number 3, Number 3/November 2005, pp. 261-273(13).
- 13 *Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards Cultural Democracy*. Cultural Policy Collective, 2004: 11.
- 14 *Ibid.*: 33.
- 15 Chakravarty, Paula. 'Governance Without Politics:

Civil Society, Development and the Postcolonial State'. *International Journal of Communication*: 1 (2007), 297-317.

- 16 Department for Culture, Media and Sport website, my italics, <http://www.culture.gov.uk/>
- 17 Smith, Chris. *Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years*. DCMS, 2001: 5 [http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4634.aspx/](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4634.aspx)
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy*. DCMS, 2008. http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/3572.aspx/
- 21 As to how viable this is, see: 'Gordon Brown's apprentice scheme "out of money"', *The Observer*, Sunday 24 May 2009.
- 22 In spite of such a business-centric model having already erred, e.g. see: National Centre for Popular Music, Sheffield; The Arthouse, Dublin; The Media Centre, Huddersfield.
- 23 Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class, and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life*. Basic Books, 2002.
- 24 Merli, Paola. 'The Organisation of Culture Between Bureaucracy and Technocracy'. *International Journal of the Humanities*, Vol.3, No.10, 2005-6,143.
- 25 Frith: 1991:36, cited in McGuigan, Jim. *Rethinking Cultural Policy*. Open University Press, 2004: 43.
- 26 Clore Leadership Programme website <http://www.cloreleadership.org/>
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Annual Reports and Accounts, 2006-7: 14.
- 30 <http://www2.rgu.ac.uk/subj/ats/ontheedge2/artistasleader/pdf/2006-07.pdf>
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Hewison, Robert. *What is the point of investing in cultural leadership, if cultural institutions remain unchanged?* DEMOS, 2006.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 Merli, Paola. 'The Organisation of Culture Between Bureaucracy and Technocracy'. *International Journal of the Humanities*, Vol.3, No.10, 2005-6,143.
- 35 Cultural Leadership Programme website <http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk>
- 36 Cultural and Creative Skills website <http://www.ccskills.org.uk/>
- 37 Clore Leadership Programme website, my italics <http://www.cloreleadership.org/>
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Cultural Leadership MA, City University. http://www.city.ac.uk/cpm/cultural_leadership_programme/index.html
- 40 *Cultural Leadership Programme: A Call for Ideas*: p7. http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/publications/clpideas_php940QwU.pdf
- 41 See: 'No pay, no gain: The reliance on unpaid interns in Britain's industries puts poorer graduates at a disadvantage and makes a mockery of our so-called meritocratic society', *The Guardian*, 19/1/08.
- 42 49% of UK staff have taken a pay cut or pay freeze due to the recession (Ceridian), in addition to more than half working £26.9 billion unpaid overtime in 2008 (TUC), with the UK's income gap the widest since '60s (Dept. for Work and Pensions).