Philips, Deborah, and Garry Whannel. "A Culture of Consensus? The Arts from 1945." *The Trojan Horse: The Growth of Commercial Sponsorship*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 35–48. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472545145.ch-002>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 00:47 UTC.

Copyright © 2013 Deborah Philips and Garry Whannel 2013. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

A Culture of Consensus? The Arts from 1945

The dramatic and decisive victory for the Labour Party in 1945 allowed for and encouraged new conceptualizations of the public sphere and made the role of culture central to the post-war state. The Labour Party manifesto had promised state support for a new infrastructure for the arts: ‘by the provision of concert halls, modern libraries, theatres and suitable civic centres, we desire to assure to our people full access to the great heritage of culture in this nation’ (Labour Party 1945). The Beveridge Report, commissioned in 1941, put forward a set of proposals for the post-war reconstruction that was committed to the abolition of the ‘Five Giant Evils’: ‘Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness’; and culture and the arts were understood as weapons in the battle against, particularly, idleness and ignorance.

Arts policy, CEMA and the arts council

The role of the arts in sustaining national pride and morale had been significant to war-time policy, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts (CEMA) was an organization committed to providing performances of concerts, ballet and opera for the troops and civilians to boost public spirits throughout the war; the concerts ranging from the music hall comedy of Arthur Askey to the piano recitals of Dame Myra Hess. CEMA had itself grown out of the Pilgrim Trust – set up in 1930 with a substantial grant from an Anglophile American millionaire.¹ John Maynard Keynes, the economist who had been an eloquent advocate of public funding for the arts before and throughout the war, became the chair in 1942. Keynes had a deep-seated enthusiasm for the arts; he was closely allied with the Bloomsbury group, married to the ballerina Lydia Lopokova and had funded the initial building of the Arts Theatre, Cambridge.

CEMA had been seriously underfunded and relied heavily on wartime goodwill, but at the end of the war, with support from all the political parties (and with considerable influence from Keynes), it became the precursor of the Arts Council, the first council to have and to administer major government funding for the arts in Britain (Hewison 1995, pp. 29–44). As Judt points out, Keynes' plan to extend his own taste for the 'high' arts through the Arts Council cannot simply be dismissed as a patrician position:

These were innovative public provisions of uncompromisingly 'high' art - much like Lord Reith's BBC with its self-assigned obligation to raise popular standards rather than condescend to them.

For Reith or Keynes . . . there was nothing patronizing about this new approach . . . This was 'meritocracy': the opening up of elite institutions to mass applicants at public expense – or at least underwritten by public assistance. (Judt 2010, p. 53)

Keynes had put forward the economic argument that culture should be a central element in the economy and was clear that it was not an added extra. He and the Labour government understood the 'Arts' to be integral to the new welfare state, an arsenal in the war against Ignorance and Idleness. As Sinfield explained it in 1995:

The underlying ideology that informed the post-war reforms was that the good things in life customarily enjoyed by the leisure classes were now to be available to everyone . . . And 'good' culture . . . was also to be available for everyone. . . . A key post-war assumption, significantly challenged recently only by Thatcherism, was instituted at this point in the 1940s, that the condition of culture is in substantial part a responsibility of the State. (Sinfield 1995, pp. 183–4)

The Arts Council was the embodiment of this state responsibility. As a popular history book put it in 1967: 'It was . . . an age in Britain of Government patronage of the arts through the Arts Council, incorporated in 1946 as part of the Welfare State' (Halliday 1972). State support for the arts was not, however, quite 'patronage', as 'part of the Welfare State' the Arts were seen as socially and economically advantageous as well as educational, boosting national morale as they had done throughout the war. The Arts Council was formally established in 1943 with a constitution drafted by Maynard Keynes. In 1947, J. B. Priestley testified to the scope, national range and impact of the Arts Council's activities:

Take a look sometime at the monthly bulletin of the Arts Council, with pages and pages devoted to what is happening in each group of counties, concerts by

the hundred, repertory and touring companies all up and down the country, exhibitions of pictures and drawings going off in all directions; and then remember that all this represents new activity; . . . and I think you will arrive with me at the conclusion that although our people today may not know and appreciate as much art as they ought to do, there are certainly far more of them knowing and appreciating it than ever before in our history. (Priestley 1947, pp. 17–18)

The symbolic launch of the Arts Council was a 1946 performance of *The Sleeping Beauty*, performed by the Sadlers' Wells ballet company led by Ninette de Valois, which had toured the regions and performed in London throughout the war. The performance took place in the restored Covent Garden theatre, now established as a national opera house; with British dancers, orchestra and designs, this was a statement that London could hold its own as a capital of culture.

Ballet might now seem to be among the most élitist of art forms, and Covent Garden a theatre for the rich, but this performance of *The Sleeping Beauty* was emblematic of the aspiration to democratize 'high culture', and testament to a new public appetite for the arts. The war had seen a huge rise in audiences for theatre and particularly for ballet, as Fernau Hall wrote in 1947:

All branches of the theatre did well during the war, but the rapid growth of interest in ballet was something unparalleled in British theatrical history . . . By 1946 the ballet audience had increased at least tenfold . . . the value of ballet as a mass entertainment is recognised by the State: four of the leading companies have been formed to visit factories and the troops, and in the plans for the Arts Centres of the future, provision is made for the specialised requirements of ballet. (Hall 1947, p. 2)

'A tonic for the nation'

In 1947, J. B. Priestley gave a lecture to the Fabian Society in which he avowed the centrality of the arts to a progressive new government:

. . . what I am affirming is that the creation and the appreciation of the arts - or let us call all this simply art - is one of the ends towards which the Socialist State is the means. . . . The commonest mistake made about art is to assume that it is like the icing on a cake. Nearly all politicians take to this error as a duck takes to water . . . art is not really like the icing on the cake, it is far more like the yeast in the dough. It is not something added, for decoration and

fancy-work when the solid job has been done; it is much nearer the leaven, permeating and then aerating and lifting the doughy stuff of life. (Priestley 1947, pp. 6–7)

The Edinburgh International Festival, established in 1947, was one expression of this understanding of the arts as the ‘yeast in the dough’. The festival was intended both to bring tourism and social and cultural benefits to Scotland and, in the words of its founders,² to ‘provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit’ (www.eif.com).

The arts were seen to be contributing to the nation’s economic and moral well-being, able to boost national morale as they had during the war. More spectacular, if less long-lasting, than the Edinburgh Festival, was the Festival of Britain held in London in 1951.³ This was a national festival intended as ‘a tonic to the nation’, in the words of the Festival Director Gerald Barry, a reward to the people for the hard years of the war and a post-war period of rationing. The Festival was also designed to promote British achievements in science, technology, design, architecture and the arts. According to Robert Hewison, the Festival of Britain was the moment that cemented the Arts and Design Councils in British culture and gave them both new confidence:

For the Arts Council and the Council of Industrial Design, the Festival marks a coming of age . . . the Arts Council was confirmed in its role of leading public taste in the arts to the light, and acting as a judge of artistic quality. After the Festival, a more confident and polemical note is sounded in the Arts Council’s annual reports. (Hewison 1995, p. 65)

The Festival was proudly modernist in its design and exhibitions: it provided commissions for architects, designers (including Robin Day, who would become the designer of the bestselling chair in the world), and for painters, sculptors and musicians. It was a confident display of national state investment in the arts and in design. The Festival drew attention to the importance of design in contemporary Britain; the Council of Industrial Design had been another pre-war initiative, founded in 1944 by Hugh Dalton, then President of the Board of Trade. Sir Gordon Russell, who took over from him, had a key role in the Festival’s design and displays and the prominence of the Council at the Festival enabled him to open the office as a public showcase in the Haymarket, central London in 1956,⁴ with a mission to educate the public and to display British design skills. The Arts Council was emboldened to directly support British

artists, and after the Festival commissioned and exhibited selected painters and sculptors, among them including Jacob Epstein, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore. In 1952, it spent £12,540 on commissions.

The Festival of Britain was attacked by the *Daily Express* and other papers owned by the Conservative Lord Beaverbrook as a waste of national resources (as many newspapers would later, perhaps with more justification, attack the Millennium Dome); the *Evening Standard* headline trumpeted 'Mr Morrison's⁵ multi-million pound baby'. In fact, the Festival Office provided money towards the cost of the Festival Hall and the Pleasure Gardens in Battersea Park (both resources which would continue long after the end of the Festival), and none at all for the events that took place across Britain; the concerts, performances and exhibitions were entirely staffed and organized by volunteers. The Arts Council commissioned a group of 60 artists to paint a canvas for the Festival – with no financial incentive other than that the Council provided the canvas (Hewison 1995, p. 82). In Hewison's estimation: 'it is as an act of patronage on a wide scale that the Festival of Britain must be appreciated' (Hewison 1995, p. 59). In fact, it was not patronage as such – the Festival was, as the Great Exhibition had been a century before, a trade fair, displaying the products and abilities of British craft; the Festival had originally been conceived as a 'Universal International Exhibition to demonstrate to the world the recovery of the United Kingdom from the effects of the war in the moral, cultural, spiritual and material fields' (Frayn 1963, p. 321) and was planned for the same site as the original Crystal Palace. The material fields of design, architecture and the arts were, as Hugh Dalton of the Board of Trade knew well, exportable products.

It is the case that the Festival could – in its London manifestation at least – be seen as an act of patrician display of 'good' taste and 'good' art that was defined by an élite for the public. The right-wing press were not alone in their accusations that state support for the arts was unaffordable in an Age of Austerity and that the Festival of Britain, the Arts and Design Councils were patronizing; suspicion also came from the Left. Michael Frayn's 1963 essay on the Festival pointed out that those in charge of the Festival were liberals who offered the public what they perceived as being 'good' for them:

With the exception of Herbert Morrison . . . there was almost no one of working-class background concerned in planning the Festival, and nothing about the result to suggest that the working classes were anything more than the loveable human but essentially inert objects of benevolent administration. In fact Festival

Britain was the Britain of the radical middle classes - the do-gooders, the readers of the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, the signers of petitions, the backbone of the BBC. In short, the Herbivores, or gentle ruminants. And in making the Festival they earned the contempt of the Carnivores (Frayn 1963, pp. 319–20)

There is already here a hint of the mistrust of middle class ‘do gooders’ and of their association with the support for cultural and public art that was to be such a mark of the later ‘Carnivores’ of the Thatcher government. That mistrust was also to be found in New Labour’s scorn for élite forms of art, in their insistence that ‘footfall’ and ‘participation’ should be conditions of funding. Neither of these positions left any room for the experimentation and new energy that characterized the art and design of the state-supported Festival of Britain. When the Conservative Party won the 1951 election, they swept away all traces of its site on the South Bank, leaving only the Festival Hall and the Battersea Park fun fair as reminders. In Frayn’s phrase: ‘By 1951 . . . the Carnivores were ready to take over. The Festival was the last, and virtually posthumous work of . . . Herbivore Britain’ (Frayn 1963, p. 320).

If the year of the Festival of Britain also saw the Conservative Party reclaim government, this was a government that was not going to dismantle the structures of the welfare state. It had been the collapse in the Conservative vote that had allowed for the Labour landslide of 1945; once the Conservative party ushered in the era of Butskellism by making it clear that they would not depart from the welfare state ethos, their vote recovered. Katherine Whitehorn, writing in 2007, remembers: ‘(the Conservative party) was a very different brand from its pre-war counterpart: in practice, all parties endorsed the welfare state and those Tories were far pinker than even the Labour party is now’ (Whitehorn 2007, p. 13).

The right to fail

The Labour Party Election manifesto for 1950 made their commitment to arts and culture central to their election manifesto: ‘We shall continue to do all that can legitimately be done to support the Arts, without interference in any way with the free expression of the artist’ (Dale 2000, p. 71). The Conservative Party did not refer to the arts at all, instead they promised lower taxes, and included a section on ‘Waste and Extravagance’ (www.conservativemanifesto.com).

A populist anti-élitism (which was later to prove so enormously damaging to the arguments for state support for the arts) continued to persist. In 1952, a *New*

Statesman theatre reviewer complained of an Arts Council culture that was, he maintained:

... a now clearly recognisable theatrical mode which we may christen Arts Council kitsch. The principal ingredients are bags of good taste, a chorus of cavorting lasses and lads, and a great deal of self-conscious humour which ceaselessly proclaims: Isn't culture fun? (T. C. Worsley, quoted in Hewison 1995, p. 82)

This was more than a little unfair; Arts Council support went beyond 'kitsch' and fun. 1952 was also the year that saw George Devine become artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre; it was Devine who coined the phrase 'the right to fail', a right that would not be supported by private patronage or commercial sponsorship. The Royal Court became home in 1956 to the English Stage Company, a 'writer's theatre', dedicated to new writing (Roberts 1986, p. 10); in 1956, it produced a play that embodied the figure most associated with this post-war period in Jimmy Porter, the Angry Young Man. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was written by an actor who had learnt his craft in the subsidized regional theatres, and it was produced by a subsidized theatre.

Dominic Sandbrook has noted that in this period, there was 'a general flowering of the Arts in the British regions outside London' particularly in theatre, although he does not make the connection with Arts Council funding, (Sandbrook, p. 188). This cultural flowering was not an embrace of the patrician 'high culture' anticipated by Maynard Keynes and Harold Macmillan; state funding for the arts was limited, but it was in place, and it did not necessarily result in the kind of art approved by the gatekeepers of politics or culture. In 1956, funding for drama was increased, and there was a relaxation of the Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship over plays;⁶ throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the 'right to fail' enabled a flourishing of British writers, actors and directors who would go on to shape European drama into the next century.

In 1956, in the year of *Look Back in Anger*, Anthony Crosland published *The Future of Socialism*, which called for a socialism that went beyond the consumerism of the Macmillan years. Crosland called for 'Liberty and Gaiety in Private Life', with a clear eye to a European model of well-being and the expectation of a cultural capital that went beyond the economic:

We need not only higher exports and old-age pensions, but more open-air cafés, brighter and gayer streets at night, later closing-hours for public houses, more

local repertory theatres, better and more hospitable restaurateurs, brighter and cleaner eating-houses, more riverside cafès, more pleasure gardens on the Battersea model, more murals and pictures in public places, better designs for furniture and pottery and women's clothes, statues in the centre of new housing estates, better designed street lamps and telephone kiosks . . . (Crosland 1956, pp. 521–2)⁷

Both parties accepted that politics went beyond exports and pensions and made a commitment to culture, leisure and the arts in their election manifestoes. In 1959, the Labour Party published a 52-page document, 'Leisure for Living', which approvingly quoted J. B. Priestley's argument that the arts were not incidental but 'the yeast in the dough'. The Labour manifesto promised an annual £4 million increase in the Arts Council grant and the establishment of the National Theatre (Dale 2000, pp. 94–5).⁸ The Conservative manifesto included the arts under the heading 'The use of Leisure' and introduced a more functionalist tone. While the Conservatives welcomed, and took credit for, 'the increasing enjoyment of leisure', which they saw as 'the fruits of our policies', there is a suggestion that the arts should demonstrate their use value:

But at the same time all this represents a challenge to make the growth of leisure more purposeful and creative, especially for young people. . . . Measures will be taken to encourage Youth Leadership and the provision of attractive youth clubs, more playing fields and better facilities for sport. We shall do more to support the arts including the living theatre. Improvements will be made in museums and galleries and in the public library service. Particular attention will be given to the needs of provincial centres. (www.conservativemanifesto.com)

The Conservative Party produced their own document and reply to Labour on cultural policy, 'The Challenge of Leisure', but, while this promised to maintain support for the Arts Council and even pledged a marked increase in its funding, it also promoted an élite culture. It also suggested that arts organizations should not rely entirely upon state funding: 'artistic enterprises would be well advised to use a "pound for pound" approach in seeking extra subsidies from industry, including TV companies and local authorities. It helps to counteract the tendency for too much central control'. (Conservative Central Office 1959, www.bodley.ox.ac.uk) Meanwhile, the Bow Group produced a document in the same year, 'Patronage and the Arts', demanding that the arts should increase their reliance on private patrons.

Nonetheless, looking back over almost 25 years of the Arts Council, Lord Arnold Goodman, its chair from 1965 to 1972, reflected on its impact over the cultural life of the nation with some satisfaction:

I believe that in the last thirty years in this country has demonstrated a profound social change. Within our society there is now a widespread feeling that the provision of drama and music and painting and culture in all its broadest aspects is no longer to be regarded as a privilege for a few but is the democratic right of the entire community. (Goodman 1969, p. 6)

The nation had not quite embraced this democratization and elected a Conservative government in both 1951 and 1959; the Conservative pledges of new built housing and economic prosperity trumped ‘culture in all its broadest aspects’ as election promises. The compromise candidate for leadership of the Conservative Party after Anthony Eden was Harold Macmillan. Macmillan was Eton and Cambridge educated, apparently a patrician old Tory – but nonetheless, he was a (relative) Conservative rebel, who in his 1938 book *The Middle Way* (a title that would later come to have resonance for Tony Blair’s New Labour policy) had argued for centralized planning. His 1959 campaign slogan ‘You’ve never had it so good’ encapsulated a consumerist shift in post-war politics, but, despite the Bow Group, a consensus remained in both Labour and Conservative parties that education and health remained the provenance of government and that culture was also integral to the national well-being.

By 1962, however, Anthony Sampson was pointing to the stinginess of the Conservative arts budget. In *The Anatomy of Britain*, he bemoaned ‘the old puritanism, shown . . . in the State’s attitude to the arts. . . . The *total* annual government grant to the arts in 1961 was £8 million – one 200th of the defence budget, and of this the main state patron, the Arts Council get a meagre £1.7 million’ (Sampson 1962, p. 577). Sampson refers to a ‘cultural revolution’, noting the rise in book buying and borrowing from libraries, the audiences for music and the ‘booming’ of the visual arts; which he attributes to an increase in ‘money and education’. While acknowledging that Arts Council funding is inadequate, he regards ‘Private patronage’ with considerable misgivings; ‘commercial sponsorship’ is not yet a term for Sampson, as it was not for the Bow Group:

Private patronage, with its huge potential influence, is largely in the hands of commercial middlemen who sponsor the safest mediocrity – the cinema distributors, property developers, building societies, television tycoons. They

blame mass tastes, but some of the nicest tastes, like olives, have to be acquired by familiarity. (Sampson 1962, p. 578)

There is a whiff of patrician snobbery here, but Sampson does recognize the potential impact of sponsorship and also identifies the major drawback in the use of private finance to plug the gaps in arts funding. He is well aware that commercial 'middlemen' were not likely to fund forms of art that are in any way risky or offensive and that private patronage could not provide the right to fail, or the space to experiment, that had enabled the flourishing of artistic practices in Britain.

Nonetheless, the idea of sponsorship was beginning to gain some purchase. A 1970 collection, In *The Social Context of Art* (edited by Jean Creedy), contains a chapter entitled 'Patronage', in which Ralph Berry notes the creeping acceptance of sponsorship by journalists and arts organizations. Again, Berry does not yet use the term 'commercial sponsorship', but refers to 'industrial patronage':

Of recent years the notion of industrial patronage has gained ground. The concept received some publicity during the exhibition "Art in the Executive Suite" held at the Grosvenor Gallery in December-January 1964-5. The catalogue to this exhibition contains some interesting assertions. 'Modern patronage, however, largely depends on enlightened individuals . . . The business world with all its power and enterprise, its concern for staff welfare and ambience, is potentially the most important source of all.' It quoted a recent *Times* editorial: 'It lies within the capacity of the business community to become the greatest patron of the arts in present-day Britain.' Clearly a campaign of sorts was being launched.' (Berry 1970, p. 100)

Both Conservative and Labour parties manifestos for the 1964 election nonetheless continued to affirm their support for the arts. The Conservatives championed their investment in the arts and promised:

We shall continue to expand this support and to increase the resources of the Arts Council. We shall also seek to promote higher standards of architecture and civic planning, and commission works by contemporary artists for public buildings. (www.conservativemanifesto.com, 1964)

The Labour government's clear commitment to the arts was manifested in 1964, when Jennie Lee was appointed as the first Minister for the Arts in Harold Wilson's government. Lee renewed the Arts Council's charter; this revised Arts charter of 1967 committed to the development of arts practice and to increase

accessibility to arts events. Jenny Lee oversaw an expansion of the Arts Council's work. In 1965, Labour had issued a White Paper, 'A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps', which reiterated that state funding should be understood as a central contribution to the common good, comparable with spending on health and education. It declared, as Maynard Keynes, Priestley and Crosland (among others) had insisted, that 'in any civilized community the arts and associated amenities, serious or comic, light or demanding, must occupy a central place' (HMSO 1965, p. 100). In calling for Britain to become 'a gayer and more cultivated country', it echoed Crosland's 1956 hope for 'Liberty and Gaiety in Private Life'. The 1965 White Paper was a clear call for a growth in support of the arts in real terms, and it represented a milestone in the history of British state support for the arts; for the first time, the Government recognized the need for a considered and systematic plan to replace the largely unplanned growth of the years since the war. The Arts Council was authorized to set up a building fund and set up a network of regional bodies. In London, this allowed for the establishment of the South Bank Centre, with the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Purcell Room opening in 1967 and the Hayward Gallery in 1968, under the management of the Arts Council.

The 1966 Labour manifesto made much of these achievements and also announced the establishment of the Open University (then referred to as the University of the Air). It continued to promise further investment in the arts, aligning the arts with educational policy:

Access for all to the best of Britain's cultural heritage is a wider part of our educational and social purpose, and is one hallmark of a civilised country. That is why we appointed the first Minister for Arts and Leisure.

The 1965 White Paper, "Policy for the Arts", has inspired a coherent, generous and imaginative approach to the arts and amenities. Already the situation is being transformed, by substantially increased financial support for the Arts Council, purchasing grants for museums, and five times the support for younger artists. A quite new local authority building fund has been initiated. Next year expenditure on the arts will rise by £2.5 million. (www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1966)

Within months of the election of the Labour government (by a very slim majority in 1966), however, Wilson had to announce a £500 million package of cuts; these cuts, as Childs put it: '... amounted to the harshest deflationary measures since 1949' (Childs 2002, p. 172). Even Britain's victory in the 1966 World Cup could not deflect a demoralized electorate, faced with wage freezes

and the devaluation of the pound. If the Labour Party will to develop a cultural and arts policy was there, the financial wherewithal was not.

The Conservative manifesto of 1970 trumpeted: 'Labour Has Nothing to Offer', and relegated Labour Party policy and the one-time consensus on the welfare state to the past, instead employing the now familiar rhetoric of tax cuts, private enterprise and private patronage for the arts. The Selsdon group, a free-market think-tank, had produced a report in the same year advocating free market and monetarist policies, and echoes of their position are evident in the language of the manifesto:

Labour's policies for the future are their policies of the past. More taxes. More blanket subsidies. More state ownership. More civil servants. More government interference.

We will encourage the flow of private funds to charities including voluntary social service, sport and the arts. (www.conservativemanifesto.com, 1970)

In 1973, OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) quadrupled the price of oil, triggering an economic crisis, but Heath retreated back to a Keynesian economic policy; his February 1974 election manifesto sounded a much softer note and continued to affirm the Conservative's commitment to state support for the arts:

We shall continue to give the fullest support and encouragement to the arts, on which we are already spending £50 million a year, more in fact than any previous government. At a time when economic stringency is necessarily limiting our material objectives it is more important than ever to improve the quality of life. (www.conservativemanifesto.com, February, 1970)

By October of 1974, battered by confrontations with the trade unions, the 3-day week and another miner's strike, Heath was no longer in a position to improve the quality of life. The October manifesto of 1974 drew back from promising the 'fullest support' to the arts and could only promise to 'give as much help as we can', a qualification that Margaret Thatcher would later echo in her 1979 manifesto. The post-war consensus that the arts contributed enormously to the economic and public good had largely been sustained by both Labour and Conservative governments throughout the 1960s and 1970s, despite grumblings from a number of sources that state subsidy only encouraged a patrician form of culture. The Selsdon group took this further with their policy argument that state funding was expensive, bureaucratic and undemocratic. The once unquestioned assumption that the British state

should provide financial support for cultural activity would not survive for much longer.

The rapid growth in sports sponsorship since the mid-1960s had seen the development of new agencies dedicated to the brokering of sponsorship deals, many of whom were keen to extend the opportunities for sponsorship. System Three, a communications and advertising agency, was among these, and their 1973 report noted a discrepancy between the amounts raised through sponsorship for sports and the arts:

The Arts Council is the companion organisation to the Sports Council and operates on the same principle of government-funded independence. . . . As far as is known the Arts Council has paid less heed to the question of sponsorship than has its sporting counterpart. Until recently, perhaps there has been little need to do so, since most industrial money has been given as patronage but, particularly over the last few years, sponsorship proper has been growing rapidly. (System Three 1973, p. 384)

The report estimated that the total income in arts sponsorship was in the region £250,000 in 1973, half the amount for the sponsorship of golf. System Three went on to point out that while arts events tended to attract a smaller audience than for sports, and did not achieve the same level of publicity, the arts did attract distinct audiences, and that association with arts organizations could be beneficial to a corporate identity: 'their image is distinctly an up-market one . . . and they have . . . an almost unparalleled appeal to industrial aspirations towards social involvement and betterment' (System Three, p. 131). Arts sponsorship is at this stage in its infancy, but already System Three have identified the elements of what would become a strategy for commercial arts sponsorship (a strategy that later was promoted by ABSA, the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts, which was established 3 years later), System Three understand that the arts offered great venues for the entertainment of clients, that they embellished the image of a company, and that corporate promotion in an artistic environment was more 'subtle' than advertising:

Entertainment of business associates, clients, wholesalers, chief buyers, retailers, trade and national press is, of course, an integral part of many successful sponsorships. The opportunities offered by sporting and artistic events for the subtle influencing of important figures would seem to be both novel and a good deal less strained than many other methods; the intention to influence is not as naked as in, say, the more conventional demonstrations, press conferences or receptions . . . (System Three 1973, p. 46)

The companies which System Three cites as already sponsoring arts events are: the Midland Bank, Littlewoods Mail Order, Courtaulds, Unilever, Olivetti and Players cigarettes. It is significant that these companies should include major global corporations such as Unilever and Olivetti, who would have had prior experience of sponsorship in America and also two 'downmarket' British brands of the time – Littlewoods and Players. All are companies whose image would benefit considerably from association with the 'upmarket' connotations of artistic events. The template for commercial sponsorship established in the sporting arena was poised to extend into all areas of cultural and public life.

Notes

- 1 The Pilgrim Trust was founded in 1930 by the American, Edward Stephen Harkness, who had inherited a fortune from his father's work with Rockefeller. 'Edward and his wife had no children to whom to leave their vast wealth and so they adopted a course of what was termed "systematic philanthropy"' (www.thepilgrimtrust.org).
- 2 The Edinburgh International Festival was founded by Rudolph Bing, then manager of Glyndebourne Opera House and the head of the British Council in Scotland.
- 3 There were also touring and local exhibitions that ran the extent of the country; see Philips 2004.
- 4 The Council of Industrial Design was renamed the Design Council in 1970, and the Haymarket centre closed in 1998.
- 5 Herbert Morrison was then leader of the Greater London Council and a central figure in the planning of the Festival of Britain.
- 6 The censorship of drama was finally abolished in 1968, after a long campaign in protest at the prosecution of the English Stage Company for the production of Edward Bond's 1965 play *Saved*.
- 7 In 2012, Tower Hamlets Council, beset by funding cuts, announced its plans to sell 'Old Flo', a large bronze statue by Henry Moore. Moore had sold the statue at a discount to the London County Council on condition that it be displayed publicly and gifted to the people of the East End.
- 8 Although a National Theatre Act had been passed in 1949, and the London County Council had provided a site on the South Bank in 1948, the National Theatre did not open until 1963, and did not move onto the present South Bank site until 1976.