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CULTURAL POLICY AND SCOTLAND: A RESPONSE TO THE *NATIONAL CULTURAL STRATEGY*

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> This is about more than our politics and our laws. This is about who we are, how we carry ourselves. There is a new voice in the land, the voice of a democratic Parliament. A voice to shape Scotland as surely as the echoes from our past: the shout of the welder in the din of the great Clyde shipyards; the speak of the Mearns, with its soul in the land; the discourse of the Enlightenment, when Edinburgh and Glasgow were a light held to the intellectual life of Europe; the wild cry of the great pipes; and back to the distant cries of the battles of Bruce and Wallace.
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> — from the speech of the First Minister Donald Dewar MP, MSP, at the opening of the Scottish parliament, 1 July 1999

This article considers ideas of cultural policy in Scotland against the backdrop of political and legislative devolution, responding to issues of culture raised by Scottish devolution and devolution politics. We see that culture is being used in ways that are both familiar and predictable, ways that are rooted in historical paradigms of cultural policy in Britain, and also in new, unpredictable and opportunistic ways that are specific to post-devolution Scotland. We are also keen to use this paper to encourage research that assesses the impact of devolution on the kinds of artistic projects being undertaken, the types of representations that emerge from these projects, their reception by audiences and perhaps even their evaluation by stakeholders.

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We begin with two ways of contextualising cultural policy in Scotland: firstly, in relation to the ideas around cultural policy fostered in and promoted by the modern British state; and secondly, in relation to the role and provision of culture within pre-devolution Scotland.

Attention then turns to policy in contemporary Scotland and the Scottish Parliament's early engagement with culture, the Executive's document **Creating our Future … Minding our Past: Scotland's National Cultural Strategy** (2000) and surrounding debates.[1] This section offers some ideas and some propositions about culture and cultural policy in a devolved Scotland. In this way our article aims to give both a reasoned overview of the issues of cultural policy that are 'live' in contemporary Scotland and contribute a rather more polemic intervention into the debate about the nature and provision of culture in our small nation.

It is, then, worth being a little clearer about the parameters of our article, at least in relation to the term 'culture'.

For this paper we resist contextualising our work in relation to the shifts in the sociological definitions of culture or even to the development of modern Cultural Studies – although both these comparisons and references would be productive. Instead we limit our attention to how 'culture' is used within debates of public policy: that is, how governments use and refer to culture makers, consumers and observers.

The term 'culture', even as used in the context of public policy, has a shifting definition. Generally, in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, the term was taken to refer to classical music, opera, ballet, theatre, literature, fine art and historical collections in museums. In the late twentieth century a broader definition took hold as the place of the big cultural institutions was challenged and increasing interest and support was given to areas such as community arts, black arts, and the arts and disability movements. The term 'cultural industries' was widely used first in the 1980s to describe arts activity which was commercial and made money in the market place, for example broadcasting and film, publishing, rock and pop music, architecture and design, fashion and so on.

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[1] *Scottish Executive,* ***Creating our Future… Minding our Past: Scotland's National Cultural Strategy*** *(Edinburgh: HMSO, 2000), p. 2. The* Strategy *is available on-line at <http://195.92.250.59/nationalculturalStrategy/docs/cult-00.asp>.*

The language of the **National Cultural Strategy** suggests a definition of culture which is similarly broad and inclusive: it states that 'public support for cultural activities is targeted to achieve and sustain quality, *whatever its medium or context*.'[1] [our italics] The point we make in this article is that while, at least politically, a broad definition is appropriate in the new (inclusive) Scotland, it is a definition that lacks depth (or at least context) and, as such, is problematic.

These definitions, which have grown up in the public policy context of the very late twentieth century, have been informed by a parallel debate within the academy generally and, in particular, by the complex understandings of culture worked through in Scottish criticism, sociology and arts practice. In work by critics such as Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, David McCrone and Tom Nairn, as well as in work by some of the arts that we refer to later in our paper, it is clear that ideas, understandings and manifestations of 'culture' lie at the contested heart of our national, political, economic and social identities.[2]

CULTURE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY

> God help the minister that meddles in art.
> — the Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, 1835.[3]

Governments in Britain continue to understand that culture is useful for two main purposes: as demonstrating prestige and as a means of self-

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[1] *Scottish Executive,* ***National Cultural Strategy****, p. 2.*

[2] *The literature here is, of course, extensive, but core texts would include: Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull,* ***The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: inferiorism and the intellectuals*** *(Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989); Beveridge and Turnbull,* ***Scotland After Enlightenment: image and tradition in modern Scottish Literature*** *(Edinburgh: Polygon, 1997); David McCrone,* ***Understanding Scotland: the Sociology of a Stateless Nation*** *(London and New York: Routledge, 1992); David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick and Pat Straw, eds,* ***The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change*** *(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989); and, Tom Nairn,* ***The Break-Up of Britain*** *(Second edition. London: Verso, 1981).*

[3] *Melbourne's statement was made in a particular and specific context but has attained an aphoristic quality in subsequent debates on cultural policy and government. See Lord David Cecil,* ***Melbourne*** *(New York: Grossets, 1954), p. 245.*

improvement, in both cases defining culture as arts and heritage – that is classical music, dance and theatre, literature, fine art and historical collections. But in addition, and whilst demonstrating a regular interest in the utility of culture to advance their broader economic policies and social visions, governments in Britain have also displayed a rather more equivocal perspective on and understanding of cultural policy, which has a much more complex relationship with the workings of government than simply debates around the nature and scale of subsidy and its distribution. British governments have variously exhibited *laissez-faire* attitudes, developed interventionist strategies, passed protectionist legislation. It appears that sometimes governments have been exponents of an international free market, sometimes champions of elite cultural products and exclusive markets; sometimes they have lobbied for 'the best for the most', sometimes they focused on the demands of audiences or of artists, sometimes on the needs of the arts and entertainments industries. Culture, in short, has been viewed and used as a tool of public policy.[1]

For example, the Victorian period saw government legislation for and about culture focusing on education with initiatives – often delivered by large municipal authorities – ranging from public libraries, galleries, museums and parks to mass education and to the expansion of the universities. In this context the impact of culture on the individual can be truly transforming. The expansion of the provision for universal education increases literacy and numeracy, widening both geographical and social horizons. Libraries, galleries and museums allow the whole population access to literature, art and natural history. One of the results of this increased access to culture, its products and its languages was the increased participation of the population in cultural production. Education was also justified in rather less philanthropic ways, as it was quickly proven that an educated workforce was a more productive workforce.

The same idea of culture as potentially improving, even educative, that was current in the nineteenth century also shapes the ethos of public service that

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[1] *Classic texts in this field include John S Harris,* ***Government Patronage of the Arts in Great Britain*** *(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Janet Minihan,* ***The Nationalisation of Culture*** *(London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970); John Pick, ed.,* ***The State and the Arts*** *(Eastbourne: City Arts/John Offord, 1980); Harold Baldry,* ***The Case for the Arts*** *(London: Secker & Warburg, 1981); and, Robert Hewison,* ***Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940*** *(London: Methuen, 1995).*

dominates British cultural policy through the twentieth century and it is still defined as being about the professional artist and high arts. These same ideas – and the same infrastructure, linking national and local government – evolve further with the introduction of direct state subsidy for the arts in the context of World War II and the institutions created to manage and distribute those funds: that is, the arts councils and, from 1964, a Minister for Arts. There emerged the now familiar nexus of central government, through a Minister for the Arts, the Arts Council of Great Britain (and then the 'devolved' councils, including the Scottish Arts Council), as well as the regional arts boards, and parallel structures at local government level aimed to work at 'arms length', employing strategies of peer assessment and 'expert' advice. But, of course, even within this quasi-autonomous framework governments can manage and interpret and promote culture in significantly different ways: for example, striking a balance between the twin dynamics of cultural democracy and the democratisation of culture.

Whilst theoreticians argued that cultural policy was about achieving a more or less equal balance between these ideas, in practice they have seemed to represent two distinct approaches to culture: one that was about creating the conditions which allow those who are excluded for whatever reason to engage in cultural activity – to become active 'consumers' usually in what is termed 'mainstream' or 'high arts'; the other concerning the development of programmes which are owned and shaped by those who are excluded, creating a context and a frame wherein their own cultural expression is valued above everything else. These approaches have often been described as audience *versus* participation, or passive *versus* active. This twin theory challenges understandings, definitions and uses of culture, broadening the terms of reference to encompass traditional arts, folk culture, amateur and popular forms.

In the 1980s Thatcherism shifted the way in which the cultural sector perceived itself and conducted its business, preferring an economic model that was about the explicit commodification of culture. Thatcherism recreated the paradigm of the modern state – suddenly there was no such thing as society (let alone community), merely markets, marketplaces and individualised consumers. Within such an isolationist view, culture was primarily seen as an economic instrument. Under previous governments, the argument was developed that some cultural activities such as film, television, recording, publishing, design, and architecture (the cultural industries) had a significant role to play in the economic well being of the country, broadening

yet further the understanding of what the word culture might mean, at least in terms of public policy. But within the economic framework of Thatcherism *all* cultural activity was seen as having an economic return in terms of tourism and jobs and had to deliver 'value for (public) money'.

The ideas of cultural democracy and the democratisation of culture have been recovered and are now far from being the mutually exclusive opposites they appeared in the 1980s – when, within the context of local government legislation and, in particular, the abolition of the Greater London Council (GLC), they seemed to present two violently opposing ideas and resulted in deep divisions within the arts industries. At that time the lines were all too easily drawn between elite art forms that argued for subsidy to promote the best, and process-driven interventions that were about giving voice to communities and individuals through cultural projects. The *reductio ad absurdum* that what we deliver to those who are excluded is the workshop, while those who are 'included' get the performance or the exhibition is rightly understood as a dangerous and outmoded dichotomy.

There is now some evidence of a growing number of cultural practitioners who do not make these distinctions in practice: in Scotland good examples would include arts and disability organisations Sounds of Progress and Projectability and, at least in recent practice, 7:84 Theatre Company. In its music-based theatre, Sounds of Progress integrates the work of members with disabilities with that of professional actors building on the talents of all participants be they disabled or able bodied, as the company's recent **A Wee Bit of How Do You Do** (2001) demonstrated with some style. Projectability, whose work centres on those with learning disabilities, sell their members' high-quality artworks at the annual Glasgow Artfair where they are displayed alongside the wares of Scottish and London art dealers. 7:84's **Under Construction** (1999) allowed young people in Castlemilk the opportunity to reflect on their living spaces and the built environment of Glasgow and, with professional theatre makers, shape their responses and present their work to audiences, their ideas and opinions just as valid as any others featured in Glasgow's City of Architecture and Design programme. Just as the differences between the subsidised and the non-subsidised sector have become blurred, so the lines between the artist and the participant have become fuzzy, encouraging a reappraisal of cultural policy that values inclusion *and* excellence.

This re-imagining and re-setting of cultural provision and policy parallels, influences and is influenced by Tony Blair's government. In modern Britain culture is being utilised as a key marker of and player in the re-creation of society and community; this despite the 'Blairing of Culture' and the commodification and branding of 'Cool Britannia' seem to run contrary to the government's rhetoric on the inclusive use of culture. In contemporary Britain, the rhetoric goes, culture has emerged as a core part of a new symbiosis of the strategic economic investment, social responsibility, legislative and policy devolution, aesthetic and artistic innovation that re-imagines the potential of society not just to be inclusive but also to be 'good'.

The Blair government, and indeed the Scottish Executive, sees that culture can promote active citizenship, communitarianism, mutuality, education, health and welfare. The rhetoric shows an understanding of this, and the policies act upon the value of artistic endeavour, process and product in achieving the goals of social inclusion: it then prefers a policy that is itself a kind of middle way between the seeming elitist exclusivity of the cultural democracy and the process-driven free for all of the democratisation of culture. The ramifications of this commitment to culture as a tool to support policies of social inclusion demand critical attention and further research.

CULTURE IN SCOTLAND

> What do you do when democracy fails you?
> — The Proclaimers, 'What do you do?', **Sunshine on Leith**, 1988.

In Scotland culture has been celebrated as one of the key factors that made devolution possible. Through the 1980s and 1990s politicians, community leaders, churchmen and trade unionists supported the devolution cause. In addition – it is all too easily assumed – devolution was promoted and celebrated and nurtured by Scotland's cultural community. It was the poet who articulated our national identities as both nostalgic and radical; it was the film maker who presented Scotland in all its beauty and quirky nature to the wider world; it was the singer who told of Scotland's industrial devastation at the hands of an uncaring Westminster government; it was the fine artist who made us look at ourselves and our cities in a new 'cool' way. In these ways Scotland's artists defined us for ourselves and, inevitably, also re-defined our place in the world as a nation capable of at least being able to run our own domestic affairs. The economic success and the popular appeal of our artists bolstered a positive and outward looking version of our culture. Not for us the

narrow nationalism of emerging states. We were, according to the reflection, a complex people who could forge identities – independent or devolved – which would take place alongside the world's modern democracies.

This assertion – this assumption that culture not only made a difference but also was the motive force behind political devolution – has reached almost mythical status. But is it true? Just what was Scottish culture doing in the 1980s and 1990s?

The range and scale of cultural activity in Scotland through these decades was arguably greater and more apparent to a wider audience than at any other point in recent history. The cultural life of late twentieth-century Scotland has been staggeringly eclectic. The 1960s and 1970s saw the impact of the folk revival, the 'rediscovery' of Scottish history, the opening up of the Highland touring circuit of theatre and music makers (a process pioneered by 7:84), and the flourishing of an extraordinarily diverse range of urban theatres. After the failure of the devolution movement of the 1970s and the election of the Conservative government in 1979 the culture of Scotland seemed at its most confident when it was oppositional. This encouraged an energy that was productive but also resulted in a social context in which artists felt under-valued and at times disenfranchised. Frustrated and alienated by the political and cultural and social and financial ideologies of London, the period saw Scottish artists working in two contrasting but oddly complementary ways. On the one hand Scottish artists refocused their attentions on work for and in Scotland, looking to the past with new application, creating texts of linguistic and visual specificity (for example, John Byrne's **The Slab Boys** (Traverse, 1978) and Tony Roper's **The Steamie** (Wildcat, 1987)), reassessing the cultural influences that make Scotland. On the other there was an increased internationalism of outlook in terms of influence, process and market in the careers of new artists, most famously those 'New Glasgow Boys' Stephen Campbell, Ken Currie, Steven Conroy and Peter Howson. Both dynamics were about bypassing London, or at least finding ways of working beyond the 'them and us' identities that the Thatcher government engendered in Scotland.

The culture of the 1990s, and of contemporary Scotland, is as multifarious but also has the potential to be more sustainable because of the energy released by the devolution process. Making work in and for Scotland has been redefined as anything but parochial; the potential for internationalism is still significant, still inspiring, still evolving. London has been recovered as a potential market place and a potential partner, although for many Scottish

artists success is still found abroad, in a more international context, than it is in London.

Thus the ecology of the system – its infrastructure, its representations, its texts, its practitioners, its audiences – is tremendously varied; and we are interested in understanding this diversity, questioning the relationship of opposition to renaissance, and charting how criticism contributes to cultural diversification and the creation of a canon of work. Significant questions still remain unanswered and under-researched: how much of Scottish art of the 1980s was merely created *in opposition* to what was happening in Westminster, and how much was located in a rigorous analysis of Scotland? How much was about re-action, and how much about moving on to define a new Scotland unfettered by the old cultural cringe? How much was truly sustainable, created with critical self-awareness and cultural autonomy? How many of those writing and producing, painting and playing with local relevance and international success in the 1980s are still working in and for Scotland today?

We would like to see a fuller understanding of this period of 'cultural opposition' and 'cultural renaissance', asking anew what artists were saying about, in and of Scotland. We believe that the answers are subtle and complex. As we move into this new era of devolution and autonomy, wherein the challenge for artists is to find new inspirations, a rigorous interrogation of the recent past might offer some unexpected insights that can inform both cultural practice and policy.

Indeed there is a clear challenge in this review for public policy makers. Contemporary politics has made a number of assumptions about the significance and the place of culture. It appears that today the debate on Scottish culture in the new Scotland centres on its instrumental role in delivering social change, economic diversification and prosperity. We are certainly interested in this strategic use of culture by government, the notion of valuing culture as a tool for social as much as economic change, and the parallel rejecting of the 'aesthetic' project of culture in favour of other outcomes.

This 'use' of culture is a feature of the policy programme of both the Westminster government and the Holyrood executive. But if culture is being used in Britain as a tool for economic and social renewal this is also a feature of public policy in other states and other nations. Whilst it is the place of culture within Scotland that is our immediate concern, we recognise that

international awareness, comparison, and questioning is essential within any modern society. We are interested to see how other governments, particularly those influenced by 'third-way' politics and those experiencing the impact of new nationalisms and the culture of globalisation, use culture. The examples and models are there, but we are keen that these should be re-framed within the context of devolution: we see the need to re-imagine and even look beyond the familiar parallels of Ireland, Quebec and Catalunya to test ourselves against other new democracies.

The debate on culture in the new Scotland has been constrained by a series of omissions including the lack of an historical or contextualised frame of reference. Perhaps most surprisingly, given the energy and passion around devolution, the debate has lacked vision, as well as clarity and rigour. We have been frustrated to see the debate about culture in contemporary Scotland return with depressing regularity to petulant arguments about the relative merits of karaoke and ballet, of high and popular art, of 'sport' and 'culture'. We certainly agree that within contemporary Scotland there is a debate to be had about quality – but it is not an argument to be framed in terms of high art and popular culture. This is an old and sterile division that rejects issues that are both political and aesthetic in nature.

The ideological battle taking place in Scotland, in which appear claims and counter claims about the role and importance of culture, is being fought with little regard to any evidence. We would like to see a more rigorous understanding of the role and meaning of culture and cultural policy, and a commitment to policies that demonstrate awareness of and reflect on process, and immediate and long term impact. We want to understand the function and the use of culture, finding ways of charting and monitoring its effects on individuals and communities. And we wish to start by asking where the new Scotland stands on the relationship between government and cultural policy.

CULTURAL POLICY AND THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

> Devolution does not mean a parochial Scotland. It does not mean a return to the kailyard. Inwardness is not the Scottish experience of the past. It is not the Scotland I know. It will not be the future.
> — from the speech of Donald Dewar at the 'Ireland and Scotland: Nation, Region, Identity' conference in Dublin, 29 September 2000

Welcomed as 'a start', the Executive's **National Cultural Strategy** was published in August 2000, a year after a consultation document had been issued and a breathtaking thirteen months after the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. Whether this alacrity was strength or weakness has yet to be judged, and although the fact of its very existence should not be underestimated, one must ask what exactly is the **Strategy** saying.

Even described as a 'framework' the document has presented some immediate problems, primarily centring on the question 'a framework for what?'. And how does it stand on the twin views of culture traditionally taken by British governments – the key issues of national prestige and self-improvement?

Rhetoric

There is, perhaps, a structural problem in the thinking and the presentation of the **Strategy**: it is, to borrow a phrase, a document of two halves. On the one hand it tries to be all-encompassing about Scotland's culture. In its prose, and most especially in its illustrations, the document aims to present a version of Scottish culture that is inclusive, that is diverse and that is rooted in history, but also one engaged with new art forms, new practitioners and even new audiences.

But it's not altogether convincing, primarily because the document quite simply lacks 'the vision thing'. The document is really rather boring: for example, in the summary the authors note with remarkable measure and care that 'public support for cultural activities is targeted to achieve and sustain quality, whatever the medium or its context'.[1] Fine sentiments but not exactly an exciting or ringing pledge to claim the significance and value of cultural provision and activity.

On the other hand, the **Strategy** does have 'strategic objectives' and the kind of systematic (perhaps bureaucratic) approach necessary as a way of explaining, or pinning down, where government money is actually going to be used. But when presenting the priorities the language (again) loses its way and its precision. A 'key priority' is: 'to celebrate excellence in the arts and other cultural activity we shall investigate the feasibility of identifying national centres of excellence in traditional arts.'[2] Just what 'investigating the

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[1] *Scottish Executive, **National Cultural Strategy**, p. 2.*

[2] *Scottish Executive, **National Cultural Strategy**, p. 65.*

feasibility of identifying' something might entail is about as far from visionary or even strategic as one is likely to get. One might suggest that the **Strategy** should have been the document for the Executive to make unqualified commitments to initiatives like these.

Prestige

The **Strategy** emphasises that culture has a broad definition; that it needs to be cherished and valued; that it is represented through our heritage as well as in new ideas; and that it is created by anyone and is for everyone. It sees Scottish culture as being important for national prestige and as a driver for the economy. Indeed it goes as far as to propose more feasibility studies into two major symbols of national prestige – a film studio and a national theatre.

This raises an intriguing series of points around the idea of the nation.

A key indication of the new politics of Scotland is that a Labour/Liberal coalition government is prepared to be so sure about culture as a way of representing our *national* identity – when that national identity assumed is Scottish as opposed to British. This is exciting because such confidence is a reflection of the diversity of representation that we have already identified within Scottish culture. However, this positive aspect of confidence and investment in ideas and issues of national identity and representation also distracts attention from a critical flaw in the thinking and analysis that frames the document.

The **Strategy** is much less confident when examining infrastructure, much less confident when examining the internal power structures for culture in Scotland. There are, for example, unresolved issues surrounding the role(s) of our existing national institutions – music, dance, opera, museums and galleries – let alone the new ones.

Interestingly the **Strategy** ignores the biggest cultural institution, the biggest cultural provider in Scotland: there is no mention of the BBC or the other broadcasters. Now whilst it is certainly the case that broadcasting is one of the powers reserved for Westminster the legislative restriction really focuses on telecommunications, access to the airways and licensing. One might suggest that some reflection on the role of the BBC would not only have been informative but would have been a positive example of some 'joined up thinking' on an understanding and servicing of the 'nation', in relation to musical provision (in particular in relation to the 'national orchestras' and

'centres of excellence'), as well as in terms of training, employment within the cultural industries, audience development, the new technologies and their impact on contemporary social life as well as representation and identity.

Similarly the proposal on a Scottish National Theatre lacks the appropriate context. It focuses on doing more research into the pragmatics of what this organisation will look like, what it will cost, and what it might earn, rather than tackling the more difficult question of what, within the context of devolution, the role of a 'national' organisation might be. It is uneven when considering the contribution the individual has made to national prestige, a lack which stung the novelist Iain Rankin into publicly criticising the document for seemingly ignoring literature. Rankin frames the gap, not just in terms of the representation and storytelling, but also in the very terms that thread through the **Strategy**, that is in terms of the 'cultural industries' and the economic importance of literature. He argues:

> Scotland has taken off on a world scale in recent years. It is a huge industry – one of our biggest export markets. People like Iain Banks, J K Rowling and Irvine Welsh sell all over the world. … There are people all over the world who are inspired not by Scottish Opera, but by books. But without recognition, young people will think that writers are way down the list of what's important. It's an invisible industry.[1]

In contrast there is recognition of the importance of design and designers in Scotland's international profile and economic well being. This comparison begs the questions: why include the designers and their industry while ignoring the writers and theirs?

Improvement

On the face of it the **Strategy** appears more confident when it talks about culture delivering the Executive's key objectives of education, health and jobs. In its rhetoric and in its ideas it affirms that social outputs, impacts and evaluation have replaced the economic measurements preferred by the British governments of the 1980s. But here too the **Strategy** fails to grasp the thorniest of issues.

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[1] *Iain Rankin quoted by Karen McVeigh, 'Rankin attacks arts Strategy for ignoring writers',* ***Scotland on Sunday: This Week*** *20 August 2000, p. 11.*

It is widely understood that cultural activity has a positive impact on an individual's confidence and self esteem, that it creates a sense of community and has an impact on the environment. Research into cultural policy – and in particular François Matarasso's influential report **Use of Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts** (1997)[1] – has identified some of the conditions for success, including clarity of purpose, partnership with the community, and commitment to quality. But, as the **Strategy** acknowledges, there is no agreed language of or approach to evaluation, and no agreed 'success' factors.

Whilst this clearly points to the need for a greater understanding of the impact of cultural policy decisions and a shared rhetoric or language of criticism and evaluation it also begs the question 'why culture at all?'. Why is a cultural project a more effective instrument of intervention than any other form of community development?

The **Strategy**, in its broad-based definition of culture, its championing of every kind of cultural activity, its generally positive tone throughout, offers little room for manoeuvre when it comes to answering these questions or determining funding priorities. The clear implication is that the impact cultural activity has on the agreed agenda of social inclusion will determine the level of support which projects and practitioners might receive. Although some signals are given about developing an evaluation and research framework, there is, as yet, no clear indication about how that will be measured.

Quality

Perhaps most challenging of all, the **Strategy** avoids any discourse on the issue of evaluation of the cultural activity itself – there is no commentary on the idea of the quality of the work. Measuring or, more accurately, assessing quality has become progressively a no-go area and it is not reclaimed for Scotland in this strategy. A failure to address some of these issues, and the absence of any real debate, has led to some old and tired arguments emerging: the sport *versus* art debate is the most recent example of headline grabbing. Cultural policy must be willing to see that cultural practice does have an

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[1] *François Matarasso,* ***Use of Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*** *(Stroud: Comedia, 1997).*

aesthetic and be willing and able to assess the quality of that aesthetic free from prejudice and in an open manner.

Debate

The lack of critical weight in the **Strategy** encourages old and clichéd debates. For the modern and progressive and challenging democracy that we would like to see Scotland become we need new debates and new ways of questioning policy statements of all kinds, including those concerned with cultural policy. We want to reassess what we value in our culture today, and that starts by engaging in an informed debate with the ideas of the **Strategy**.

Except from some key political opponents, out-and-out criticism of the **Strategy** itself has been fairly muted. It is not that we want to see knee-jerk negative reactions to the Executive's statements but we would certainly like to see a more critical engagement with its ideas. We detect that in contemporary Scotland there is a sense that having got as far as gaining this level of political commitment to culture – and the **Strategy** is certainly that – no one in the cultural community wants to discourage this declaration of support by being critical.

But there is also a deeper issue at work here: having spent years making the case for cultural activity in the teeth of what was perceived as a hostile Westminster government, suddenly the debate – along with the power base – has shifted; the field of play and the ground rules have changed; and a new language of engagement has yet to be developed. With no clear framework within which debate might be had there is a reluctance to be critical, there is a consensual view that what we have now is better that what we had before. In addition the financial settlement is the best it has been in years.

So that's all right then. Except, of course, it's not. We are concerned by the lack of 'intellectual space' within Scotland for that language to evolve, for those connections to be made and for that debate to take place.

Equally frustrating to those working in the cultural sector is the distinction between the commercial and the subsidised. For the 'consumer' there is no distinction. For the artist, it does not matter who pays as long as someone does; it does not matter who the collaborator is as long as they are appropriate. Yet policy makers continue to struggle with a distinction which leads to frustration and confusion over who supports what. There is also a parallel at the other end of the funding spectrum with the amateur or

voluntary arts where their contribution to the overall cultural life of the country remains unacknowledged.[1]

Too much of what is said in the **Strategy** itself and the debate that has followed has failed to move beyond the assumptions of the last century and to address anew what a *Scottish* cultural strategy might look like. But this is perhaps inevitable given how fast everything has moved since 1 July 1999. The politicians have set out the framework. It may be flawed, but unless the cultural community – and a wider group of those interested in the future of Scottish culture – engage with these issues, participate in an informed debate, challenge assumptions and test themselves then cultural policy in Scotland will be doomed to the margins.

By common consensus, the **Strategy** is a 'good start'. However, it could also be seen as a missed opportunity. There needs to be a real understanding about what the **Strategy** is all about – and in turn what it is not about – if we are to understand the position of culture in the new Scotland. Nature abhors a vacuum and with no proper critical debate, prejudice masquerading as policy grabs the headlines and unproductive debates are replayed. We are seeking to establish a context in which an informed and rigorous and creative debate can occur, a context in which cultural policy is re-imagined in and for Scotland.

A SCOTTISH SOLUTION

> It is from Scotland that we receive rules of taste in all the arts.
> — Voltaire, 1762

This article argues that cultural policy initiatives are a significant part of modern government. We see that culture is a powerful force in Scottish social and economic life but that cultural policy makers have not yet responded to the radical revisioning of Scotland that devolution allows. The **National Cultural Strategy** is a significant statement by the Scottish Executive to the extent that it declares that culture matters, and that culture is significant in the social, psychological and economic well-being of the modern nation. We

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[1] *Greg Giesekam's report **Luvvies and rude mechanicals? Amateur and Community Theatre in Scotland** (Edinburgh: SAC, 2000) is an essential and highly topical contribution to this debate. The document is available on-line at <http://www.sac.org.uk/>.*

agree. However, the **Strategy**, and the debate around it both in the Parliament and elsewhere, has been disappointing in both vision and critical rigour.

This paper calls for a Scottish solution, an understanding and application of cultural policy that encompasses a creative re-imagining of Scotland. To this end we would like to see research and debate that investigates and reviews ideas of the local, the regional, the national and the international, interrogates quality, provides a framework for evaluation and assesses the impact of cultural policy on practice and the development of practice.

The Federation of Scottish Theatre's (FST) document **Proposal for a National Theatre for Scotland** (2000)[1] is an intriguing exemplar of post-devolution thinking: it flags the idea of cultural solutions that are 'specific to Scotland'. This is, of course, the point of devolution. In its discussion the FST envisages an arts environment in which 'the Scottish Parliament and a National Theatre for Scotland … reflect each other in the enterprise of a truly democratic civic society.'[2] Without commenting on the National Theatre debate we are keen to highlight this 'Scottish solution' of key cultural institutions working in critical and reflective partnership. This is indeed what we believe culture and artists should achieve. 'The arts at the heart of the nation' is, of course, not a new concept, but it is a compelling one.[3] We think that a cultural policy should offer a model for how that vision can be achieved, and describe a framework in which these lines of communication can remain open and 'live'.

Neither the **Strategy** nor its critics have been as bold in their resetting of the rhetoric of Scotland as was Donald Dewar in his speech at the opening of the parliament on 1 July 1999. This speech – a section of which is quoted at the beginning of our article – was a surprising and daring (and indeed a moving) piece of oratory that was about placing cultural debates at the centre of policy debates. In it Dewar boldly paralleled contemporary parliamentary structures with the images and the iconography of mythic and historical Scotland, seeing imaginary Scotland as just as significant, just as potent and just as authentic

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[1] *Federation of Scottish Theatre, **Proposal for a National Theatre for Scotland** (Edinburgh: FST, 2000).*

[2] *FST, **Proposal for a National Theatre for Scotland**, p. 4.*

[3] *The phrase is a slogan used by the Scottish Arts Council: see its web site <http://www.sac.org.uk/>.*

as legislative and civic Scotland. In the potential of the new parliament and in the ambition of some of our leading artists we might see that a central motif of contemporary Scottish culture is critical awareness and questioning, openness and outward-looking, fantastical imagining and critical rigour. One might suggest that cultural policy has yet to benefit from an engagement with these critical and reflective discourses, has yet to engage with the radical potential of devolution, and has yet to respond to the ambition of Dewar's heightened and poetical vision of contemporary Scotland.

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