

FLAGSHIP OR FLAGGING? THE POST-DEVOLUTION ROLE OF SCOTLAND'S 'NATIONAL' COMPANIES

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National cultural institutions – national museums, galleries, orchestras and national performing companies – are a bit like national airlines: carrying national prestige abroad and providing opportunities, or fostering talent, at home. They are also equally vulnerable to social and economic fluctuations, but even when they are struggling financially the viability of the national flagship institutions may be defined in ways other than a balance sheet.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament have not, of course, seen the necessity to argue for a Scottish airline quite yet, but since devolution on 1 July 1999, politicians have demonstrated a great deal of interest in culture in Scotland and a particular interest in the place and the role of our national cultural flagships. Both in the parliament and in committee, MSPs have debated the role and policies of museums, they have argued over the funding of the national opera company, they have discussed the potential of a national theatre and, perhaps most surprisingly of all, in their concern over the future of Scottish Ballet, they have considered the very definition of dance and ballet.¹

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¹ *See the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's 'Twelfth Report, 2001' the 'Report on the Inquiry into Scottish Ballet' SP Paper 457 Session 1 (2001) (Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament, 2001). The Report is also available on line at <http://www.scottish.parliament/official_report/cttee/educ-01/edr01-12-01.htm>. Also of relevance is the 'Official Report' of evidence given to the committee during the inquiry: see the 'Official Report' of the 'Scottish Parliament: Education, Culture*

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Such discussion is partly about money – MSPs have to be able to justify the major spend on the national institutions, who certainly receive a significantly large proportion of the national cultural budget (see Appendix 1). But the devolved parliament is concerned with more than just the financial arrangements of Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, the orchestras and the museums. The Scottish Parliament has been very clear that these 'national' companies provide a service of a particular and a distinctive kind and that, in doing so, they carry meaning and significance in a highly specific way. In addition, and in the context of a period of transition, creation and recreation within Scottish society, the demands on the nation's institutions and artists have never been more pressing, and the expectations of those institutions labelled 'national' present a particular challenge.

Reviewing the role of the so-called 'companies with national roles', the Scottish Executive's **National Cultural Strategy** is clear that such institutions should 'focus on excellence in all they do', they should 'bring work of an international standard to audiences throughout Scotland', and they should 'showcase Scotland's talent at home and abroad'. These broad stroke definitions of the role of the national company leave little with which one would want to disagree. However, when isolating some 'actions to celebrate excellence in the arts and other cultural activity' the **Strategy** is less confident and still sees something of an ideas gap: it declares a need to 'identify and promote the national roles and responsibilities [...] of the funded companies which work across Scotland.' (See Appendix 2.)

This essay questions these additional responsibilities, these additional meanings, considering how our thinking about cultural policy for national cultural institutions might respond to or test or impact with the realities of post-devolution Scottish politics.

Our concern to debate the post-devolution role for Scotland's national companies should not be taken to assume that there was ever a clear pre-devolution role for these same institutions: quite the opposite is, in fact, the case, as the crises of Scottish Opera, the remit of Scottish Ballet, the major spends on the national museums and galleries concerned and preoccupied politicians and funders well before 1999. But we are convinced that the

and Sport Committee: Tuesday 25 September 2001, afternoon: meeting no. 24, 2001'. The 'Official Report' of this session is available on line at <http://www.scottish.parliament/official_report/cttee/educ-01/ed01-2402.htm>.

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critical and conceptual demands of devolution, as well as the pragmatic and economic demands of home rule, assume that a new purpose and focus is required about such complex words, ideas and concepts as 'Scotland' and 'national'.

In addition, and again highlighted by devolution, we would argue that a rigorous understanding of the particular roles of the national flagship cultural organisations offers a distinctive way of understanding culture in contemporary Scotland. In this essay our focus is those companies and institutions that have the appellation 'national' and are funded by government to fulfil this role. As a result our work debates the contested nature of 'national' only in relation to particular institutions and particular art form. So a company like TAG Theatre Company, that identifies itself as 'Scotland's national theatre for children and young people', or the BBC in Scotland, or the National Review of Live Art or even Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery, that aspires to funding on the level of the predominantly east coast 'national' museums and galleries, are not of immediate concern. Nevertheless, it does seem important to keep these different types of agency and institution, with different models of funding, production and dissemination, in mind when debating the remit and role of the national flagship companies.

REIMAGINING THE NATIONAL

It is commonly argued that the re-emergence of political and ethnic nationalism in Europe and beyond has led historians, social scientists, artists and critics alike to reconsider issues of identity. This has led to an interrogation of the critical orthodoxies of cultural imperialism, colonialism, marginalisation, and their neat binary oppositions. The ideas of nations as 'imagined communities', and of identity in modern societies, in modern Britain, as fragmentary and 'fuzzy', have significant ubiquity when considering the evolution of identity politics, and its impact on our critical vocabulary.²

² The term 'imagined communities' is discussed in Benedict Anderson's influential text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Rise of Nationalism* (1983, London: Verso, 1990), while 'fuzzy frontiers' is described by Robin Cohen, *Frontiers of Identity: The British and Others* (London: Longman, 1994).

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It has also been argued that cultural theory, perhaps even cultural policy, in Scotland reaches an impasse because it still desires to find a Scottish 'national culture' when, in the context of new nationalisms, new federalisms, 'fuzzy frontiers' and globalization, let alone in the context of devolution, this is an 'illegitimate' project. A more useful agenda, it is suggested, is one willing to acknowledge that modern societies do not experience 'a national culture', that modern societies are essentially 'pluralistic' and paradoxical.³ A more useful agenda might then be one willing to acknowledge that society cannot achieve what David McCrone describes as 'an integrated discourse which will connect with political and social realities' but can – perhaps even should – aspire to a cultural project that is flexible, inclusive, democratic.⁴ Has this critical frame, so important in resetting ideas around national and gender identity, around representation, hybridity and interculturalism, been picked up in policy debates and decision making?⁵

In some aspects of devolved responsibility – in health, housing, student finance and transport – much has been made about seeking a 'Scottish solution to a Scottish problem'. We too are concerned to 'seek Scottish solutions' for the cultural sector and to begin this we want to interrogate the nature and the definition of the national cultural company, assessing the role of the national company in public policy terms. There are unresolved issues surrounding the role or roles of our existing national institutions just as there are imponderables around the new ones – for example, the National Theatre that is anticipated in the Executive's **National Cultural Strategy**. A core question is: how can we develop new national cultural institutions if we do not know the role, function and purpose of our existing organisations?

³ David McCrone, 'Representing Scotland: Culture and Nationalism' in David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick and Pat Straw, eds, *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), p. 172.

⁴ McCrone, 'Representing Scotland: Culture and Nationalism', *The Making of Scotland*, p. 168, 172.

⁵ For discussion of this issue in relation to contemporary drama see Adrienne Scullion, 'Self and nation: issues of identity in modern Scottish drama by women', *New Theatre Quarterly* 68 (November, 2001), pp. 373-90.

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL AUDIT OF MUSEUM AND GALLERY COLLECTIONS, PREMISES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

The Scottish Executive's **National Cultural Strategy** has as its title the felicitous phrase 'Creating our future... Minding our past'. It is a title that explicitly recognises the role that heritage – and, by extension, the role that museums and galleries – plays in sustaining, shaping and making our national culture. It is, therefore, appropriate that the same **National Cultural Strategy** initiated a significant review of cultural provision in Scotland. At the behest of the Executive, the Scottish Museums Council (SMC) has undertaken an audit of collections in museums and collections of all kinds throughout the whole of Scotland. The SMC has contacted some 222 museum organisations responsible for 454 museum sites, as well as the local authorities, the National Trust for Scotland, Historic Scotland, the universities and many others. The real economic and policy significance of the audit was made clear by the former Deputy Minister for Sport, Culture and the Arts, Allan Wilson MSP, when he launched the process by arguing that:

The audit will be used for the promotion of museums and as a planning tool for meeting their future requirements. Potential users include museum staff, governing bodies, funding organisations, Local Authorities, and us in the Scottish Executive.⁶

We are interested in highlighting some of the issues of public policy that the audit's methodology raises in particular around the idea of the nation, the national and the national cultural institution. In this audit museums were invited to assess their collections under five headings, deciding what percentage of their holdings is of international, or of UK-wide, or of national – which the audit arrangements define as Scottish – or of regional, or of local significance.⁷ An external panel then validated that self-assessment. The

⁶ Allan Wilson, quoted in 'Scotland's National Audit of museum and gallery collections, premises and public services: Interim Report, October 2001' (Edinburgh: Scottish Museums Council, 2001), p. 2. The interim report is also available on line at <http://www.scottishmuseums.org.uk/htdocs/information/services/National_Audit_interim_report.pdf>.

⁷ See appendix 2 'Definitions of significance', the notes of guidance and criteria issued along with the audit forms, 'Scotland's National Audit of museum and gallery collections, premises and public services: Full Report', p. 352. The full report is A

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process, its categories and rhetorics, is a very specific and concrete case of policy makers trying to establish an agreed set of references and criteria for assessment. The museums audit has developed and used criteria that are fundamentally concerned with the strategic role of the cultural institutions of Scotland, going much further than the **Strategy** in establishing working and useable classifications.

The SMC definitions of 'international', 'UK-wide', 'national' and so on focus on individual objects and not the location of that artefact. So the criteria for being of 'national/Scottish' significance suggest that a collection, or rather an item, is

of outstanding cultural, spiritual or social value to Scotland. [...] relates to national developments in science, technology, agriculture or industry. [... is] an outstanding example [...] of a form or style of a national artistic/aesthetic period.⁸

In contrast it says nothing about the location or the accessibility of that object; it says nothing about whether that object is housed in a state-of-the-art gallery space or in a nineteenth-century exhibition case. The audit arrangements allow, therefore, that the location or type of a museum is not necessarily an indication of the importance or significance of objects held therein. The audit arrangements allow that not all items in the collection owned by or in the stewardship of the nation are automatically of national significance. Similarly not all items in a local museum are of solely local significance. In short, there can be tat in the most prestigious of collections, and objects of unquestionable uniqueness and of rare and special value in tiny local galleries.

Whilst this audit of collections has had the positive outcome of producing a directory of museums, collections and holdings, its preferred taxonomy raises interesting questions about how we use and interpret the results: which category of museum or which classification of object do funders actually want to support, policy makers promote and audiences see? The answers are complex, and they are far removed from a high art/popular culture split, but

Collective Insight: Scotland's National Audit: Full Findings (Edinburgh: Scottish Museums Council, 2002). The report is available on line at http://www.scottishmuseums.org.uk/pdfs/National_Audit_final_report_full.pdf.

⁸ Appendix 2 'Definitions of significance', *A Collective Insight*, p. 352.

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they are, perhaps, elucidated by Scottish culture's on-going concern with the critical understanding of the nation and the national. Within the framework of the museums audit, with its categorisation of significance and influence, we might suggest the museums sector itself is confronting the **Strategy's** concern to 'identify [...] the national roles and responsibilities' of the national companies, addressing the core question of 'What makes a museum national?' and, by extension, 'What is national?' Perhaps it is the case that now, in post-devolution Scotland, the answers to those questions are informed by a range of perspectives and a flexibility of vision that can create a new orthodoxy of national cultural provision.

DEFINITIONS AND APPLICATIONS

At a seminar in June 2001, organised by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR) at the University of Glasgow, on the Scottish Executive's **National Cultural Strategy** speakers from key institutions labelled 'national' – from the Scottish Museums Council, Scottish Opera and Ballet, and BBC Scotland – considered their role as a 'national' company and grappled with the ramifications of their organisation's response to the nomenclature.⁹ The key terms of reference were reasonably consistent: speakers talked about excellence within an art form and across art forms; they talked about national and international prestige; they considered geographical spread within the nation, highlighting the ambition to work internationally while engaging locally; they mentioned a leadership role in the preservation and development of the art form.

Working from and reviewing the parameters and definitions framed by the museums audit, Jane Ryder, from the Scottish Museums Council, summarised the debate by arguing that:

- A national museum or gallery might be, perhaps ought to be, a centre of excellence; it might be the repository of *best practice* in every area.

⁹ *The seminar was held on 25 June 2001 at the Gilmorehill Centre, University of Glasgow. An account of the proceedings, with transcripts, summaries and notes of individual contributions, is available on line at the CCPR web site <<http://www.culturalpolicy.arts.gla.ac.uk/conference/programme.htm>>.*

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- A national museum or gallery might have an explicit responsibility to current, past and future generations through the *preservation and presentation* of heritage and art collections.
- A national museum or gallery might have a responsibility for *education* in its widest sense, perhaps even using ICT as a means to expand access.
- A national museum or gallery might have a responsibility to the wider museum or gallery community to offer specialist assistance, advice and *research capabilities*.¹⁰

Taken together and even separately these are convincing responses to the remit of being a 'national' cultural institution – encompassing an expectation of international awareness and rigorous contextualisation. These core values of best practice, preservation and presentation, education, and research represent for us a useful benchmarking of the potential features of a national museum, or national orchestra, or national theatre. They are useful because, at present, national cultural institutions are struggling to respond to the politicians' demands that they negotiate a clear and consistent role for themselves in the dangerous and ever-changing waters of post-devolution politics.

For example, the National Museums of Scotland is focused, through objects, on the history and achievements of Scotland and its external and international links. The same is true, at least by implication, for the National Galleries of Scotland – their collections encompass far more than the works of Scottish born, based or connected artists; they show work from other 'national' traditions, demonstrating the internationalism of arts practice and framing the work of Scottish artists within these movements, while the remit of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art includes the acquisition of the best of contemporary art and commissioning in its remit. The international breadth of a major collection is one of the marks, one of the criteria, of a 'national' collection and can be understood as a marker of cultural maturity: and at the very least a broad collecting strategy acknowledges that the national traditions of Western art have developed in a complex and sometimes

¹⁰ *Our emphases.*

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contradictory dialogue with each other. With this in mind national collections should reflect the internationalism and indeed interculturalism of art.

However, in the context of decreasing acquisition budgets, the National Galleries of Scotland have faced – perhaps even courted – public controversy in their response to their flagship role, in particular, in relation to their acquisitions policies and their high-profile collecting and displaying of, for example, art of the Italian Renaissance. This came to a head in mid-2001 when they attempted to acquire a Michelangelo sketch. Now a Michelangelo drawing may well represent the pinnacle of draughtsmanship; it may be something that a community, a society, a nation would want preserved and displayed; it may well be an essential text for study and advanced research. In these ways the Michelangelo sketch certainly fits neatly into one set of criteria appropriate to a national art institution: that is, a case can be made for its place within collections of the agreed best of man's endeavours, a case can be made for its purchase and preservation within the principal gallery of any modern nation.

The same Michelangelo sketch is also a rather expensive example of a highly specialist kind of art – the rough drawing, the work in progress, the preparatory outline of work to come – whose particular significance may well only be appreciated by art historians. This raises the question: what is this sketch's specific role and particular purpose within the collections, in the galleries, of a small nation at the edge of Europe that had little or, more likely, no connection with the artefact or its creator until the work came up for sale?

Contributing to the debate in his regular column for **The Herald**, Michael Russell, MSP and SNP spokesperson for arts, broadcasting and culture, acknowledged that the acquisition of such an item fulfils an important criteria of a national collection: that of 'bringing to the attention of the citizens of a nation some of the best works of art from the rest of the world.'¹¹ This is a purpose the significance of which, he says, should not be underestimated. But Russell makes another observation:

my dictionary defines the word national as meaning 'common to, peculiar to or characteristic of a nation'. Those definitions would lead most people

¹¹ Michael Russell, 'Not one Michelangelo more or less', **The Herald** 30 July 2001, p. 11.

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to assume that the National Galleries of Scotland exist to hold and exhibit a collection of artworks that are *characteristic of Scotland and, in some sense, peculiar to it*.¹² [our emphasis]

Russell's intervention does not necessarily frame or introduce a call for a narrow, introspective or xenophobic collecting policy, but his questioning does raise important questions that challenge our curators and practitioners to form a viable collecting policy for the national collections of Scotland. His implied and explicit questioning of the role of a national arts institution and arts practice is important: introducing an intriguing conundrum for our investigation into the role of national institutions.

Russell's dictionary definition is as problematic as it is logical. It is a definition that certainly puts at the core of the 'national' institution the idea of preserving and conserving. But it also asks that we at least contemplate a collecting strategy that establishes priorities. Russell argues that:

the very idea of simply going on adding to the [national] collection with items that are not peculiar to, or characteristic of, Scotland needs to be seriously questioned. It may well be that there are gaps in the attempt to present the major trends in Western art since the Renaissance [...]. There are probably bigger gaps in the collection of Scottish art and that which speaks of Scotland's involvement on the wider stage. [...] a national gallery should regard the acquisition of items that have some connection with Scotland, if only as part of their provenance, as a first priority.¹³

National flagships in the performing arts traditionally demonstrate their 'national' remit in terms of scale of operation and repertoire (with perhaps a parallel here with collections and acquisitions policy): negotiating a path between productions of 'classics' and the canon, on the one hand, and new indigenous writing, composition, or choreography on the other. In the context of music it remains the case that the core repertoire of a national opera company, chamber or symphony orchestra is based on an internationally understood 'benchmark'. An opera company will test its maturity, its skills base and its audience with large-scale projects such as the 'Ring Cycle'. And a serious symphonic orchestra would almost certainly include the canonical

¹² Russell, 'Not one Michelangelo more or less', *The Herald* 30 July 2001, p. 11.

¹³ Russell, 'Not one Michelangelo more or less', *The Herald* 30 July 2001, p. 11.

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repertoire of Beethoven and Bruckner, Mozart and Mahler during its annual season of concerts.

That said, for opera and classical music – the very areas that might be seen to struggle with definitions of the national that are predicated on the indigenous – Scotland's national companies (Scottish Opera and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, in particular) have reset definitions of best practice with creative and challenging commission policies. As well as demonstrating excellence in the canonical, international repertoire, Scottish Opera and the orchestras have supported a raft of outstanding new and established Scottish composers, pushing ever further audiences and musicians of all kinds with bold 'fusions' of the classical and traditional Scottish repertoire: examples here might include Judith Weir's **The Vanishing Bridegroom** (1990), James Macmillan's **Inez de Castro** (1996) and Sally Beamish's **Monster** (2002) for Scottish Opera, and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' **Strathclyde Concertos** (1986-1996) for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

In contrast the dance sector in Scotland has been much less successful in negotiating a 'national' role in anything other than a classical model predicated on rather narrow definitions of provision – in particular, geographical spread – and form. In fact the board of Scottish Ballet has been interrogated to the level of a Parliamentary Committee inquiry after they presented proposals to 'redefine [the company's] position as a contemporary dance company.'¹⁴ The outcry against Scottish Ballet's proposals suggests that the idea of a national dance/ballet company is generally still assumed to be a company presenting nineteenth-century Russian classics with as many cygnets and dying swans that the stage can hold. According to Scottish Ballet's outgoing artistic director Robert North: 'If there is a national [dance] company it must be based around classical ballet'.¹⁵

But Scottish audiences know from experience of seeing the best of international choreography that the repertoire of dance, and even ballet, can extend into modern, contemporary, jazz, traditional and folkloric or a fusion of some or all of these. Audiences in Scotland have, for example, seen the

¹⁴ *Scottish Ballet, press release 15 August 2001; quoted by the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's 'Twelfth Report, 2001' the 'Report on the Inquiry into Scottish Ballet', paragraph 65.*

¹⁵ *From Robert North's submission to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's 'Inquiry into Scottish Ballet': 'Official Report', col. 2593.*

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bold variety of work achieved by the national dance company of one near neighbour – the Netherlands Dance Theatre. And yet despite such examples of best practice the idea of a 'national' dance/ballet company within and for Scotland has been severely limited. James Boyle, the chair of the Scottish Arts Council, has been disconcertingly absolutist, going so far as to claim that 'we [sic] are not going in the direction of contemporary dance. We do not commit suicide.'¹⁶

Whilst the Parliamentary Committee's inquiry has exposed a lack of communication within the company and some problems with planning procedures, it has also highlighted tensions around the remit of Scottish Ballet as a national company. The board seemed to envisage a new approach to ballet and dance within the framework of a revitalised national company, but they failed to explain the vision publicly. And in the course of the inquiry the board tied itself in knots over the definitions of 'contemporary' and 'modern' dance, finally claiming the proposed changes are not that big, not that significant, not that new. The chairman then posited a definition of the national remit that completely removed the specifics of the art form from the debate and attempted something not too far removed from the language of the **National Cultural Strategy**. He defined a successful Scottish ballet company as one which

audiences of all ages throughout Scotland wanted to see in increasing numbers. The company must be a true international ambassador [...]. A successful company would tour England and Europe and provide people an opportunity to perform and work in it.¹⁷

Familiar and difficult to disagree with; however, and perhaps fatally, not about the art form merely about the institution. And so, finally, the debate around ballet in Scotland has nothing to do with logic or strategy or form or even excellence.¹⁸ It is a debate about national airlines, and the reductive and

¹⁶ From James Boyle's submission to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's 'Inquiry into Scottish Ballet': 'Official Report', col. 2628.

¹⁷ From Duncan McGhie's submission to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's 'Inquiry into Scottish Ballet': 'Official Report', col. 2612.

¹⁸ One of the main lacks in the contemporary debate about dance in Scotland is that it so readily dodges the idea of excellence: and that is surely a sine qua non of the national flagship company.

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limiting and insular argument that if there is a national opera company, national orchestras, national museums, there must also be a national dance company, and that is generally conceived of in the most limiting and traditional of ways.

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The question of definition, the question of remit, is not only relevant to the debates surrounding our existing national institutions such as Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet and the National Gallery of Scotland, but is extremely important when considering the setting up of a new one. The **National Cultural Strategy** commits the Executive establishing a new National Theatre of Scotland.

The initiative has come from the theatre sector itself and the most advanced proposal was initially developed by the Federation of Scottish Theatres (FST), a grouping that unites both building-based and touring companies, revenue, fixed-term and project-funded companies to represent and promote the interests of Scottish theatre makers. Its proposal rejects the concept of a new national theatre building and a new permanent company. Its response to the national theatre debate began as understandably pragmatic: companies want more money to make theatre and to commission plays; the only way to access more money from public funds, from the Scottish Executive, see-s to be under the auspices of a Scottish national theatre; so the FST is in favour of some kind of national theatre.

However, in practice the FST's interpretation of the idea of the national theatre model has been distinctive. It proposes the creation of 'an independent organisation which [...] would commission work from Scotland's leading theatre companies and individual theatre artists, to create seasons of work at all scales'.¹⁹ This 'producing model' is likened to that of a publisher or even the organisation of Channel 4 and its role as a broadcaster that commissions almost all of its output from independent television producers. The National Theatre would not, therefore, be building-based but would maintain an infrastructure that would facilitate the funding of a range of companies to make a range of productions, each of which would be flagged as productions

¹⁹ *Federation of Scottish Theatre, Proposal for a National Theatre for Scotland* (Edinburgh: FST, 2000), p. 3.

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of the Scottish National Theatre. The vision of this model is to commission work from existing producers; to have productions of the National Theatre spread throughout Scotland; to promote education and training in theatre; to develop new Scottish writing; and to think and work internationally. It is argued that this model would be funded to produce work of the highest of standards and would attract to Scotland artists – actors, directors, designers – of standing. The principle is that this is a flexible model that does not prefer building-based companies over touring companies, established companies over newer ones, and has the potential to be pluralist not monolithic.

So, does this model, arrived at after extensive consultation within the sector, fit the various models discussed above? Well, yes. The proposal is an explicit attempt by theatre practitioners to take on some of the issues already raised in relation to the existing national institutions and to the particular aesthetic and infrastructural demands of theatre making in Scotland and beyond. As a result the model is ambitious of a distinctive, and perhaps reflective, devolved model of production if not administration; its infrastructure seems to be a creative response to the topography and demographics of Scotland; it aspires to excellence; it will commission and present new work, while also presenting classics and works from the Scottish repertoire; it acknowledges and encompasses responsibilities to the wider theatre community with ambitions to deliver specialist assistance, advice, research and training; it is all about prestige; it is all about theatre.

However, the FST proposals and document go beyond this tick-box response to a national remit. Built on extensive self-reflection from within the sector it conceives of a definition of national and a definition of national theatre which is aspirational, which is flexible, which is inclusive and democratic: 'the Scottish Parliament and a National Theatre for Scotland', says the proposal, 'reflect each other in the enterprise of a truly democratic civic society.'²⁰ While this concept of 'the arts at the heart of the nation'²¹ is hardly new, it is compelling. We believe that cultural policy in and for Scotland should offer a model for how that vision could be achieved.

²⁰ *Federation of Scottish Theatre, Proposal for a National Theatre for Scotland* (Edinburgh: FST, 2000), p. 4.

²¹ *The phrase is a slogan used by the Scottish Arts Council: see its web site <<http://www.sac.org.uk/>>.*

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So, the next question for policy makers and practitioners is 'how?' How does the proposal for the Scottish National Theatre get from blueprint to actuality? The FST's proposals prompted the Executive to ask the Scottish Arts Council to set up a working party to develop a more detailed plan. The result, published in 2001, moved things along by costing the proposal in some detail. It is a working document which offers the Executive a phased approach to the development of a National Theatre with all the right ingredients of excellence, conservation, education, development and research flagged and contextualised, and although the 'vision thing' does get a bit squeezed it is there, in a single, if admirable, clause declaring that:

The Working Group has sensed a confidence about the artistic potential of a Scottish National Theatre which can reflect an inclusive and outward looking sense of identity – creating the future and minding the past.²²

The Working Group has done its job: it has analysed; it has costed; it has presented a timetable and framework. It has offered a model rhetorically and practically linked to the **National Cultural Strategy**.

But still there is a gap: it is not an ideas gap, nor is it a gap of strategy, but one that concerns the realpolitik, the procedures as much as the policies of legislating for culture. So the answer to our question of 'how does the proposal for the Scottish National Theatre get from blueprint to actuality?' is that the move from strategy document to reality requires political will. And that's one thing that is hugely and completely unpredictable in the new Scotland. The realities of post-devolution politics mean that politicians are much more present, much more involved, than was ever the case in Scottish cultural life before. This has significant advantages: access to government is much easier when government is in Edinburgh compared to the accessing of government in London. But if the sector is closer to government then government is closer to the sector, and that means more scrutiny from both government and from parliament.

In this final point about political will and political reality the case of Scottish Ballet is salutary. The attempts by the board of Scottish Ballet to reposition its operation towards a smaller, more contemporary model might be seen to be a positive, creative response to ongoing problems of insufficient subsidy,

²² *Scottish Arts Council, Scottish National Theatre: Report of the Independent Working Group* (Edinburgh: SAC, 2001), p. 5.

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limited earned income, poor audiences, artistic osmosis, critical maulings, and managerial change. And one might have expected that such change could be effected with only passing comment from the arts pages of the Scottish broadsheets. Instead the board's ambition for a new approach resulted in the worst kind of publicity and a parliamentary committee inquiry that exposed a factionalised organisation and some shaky management decisions, as well as precipitating dissent and crisis within the main public funder.

Why? Does Scotland really care so much about dance? Well, maybe and maybe not. What seems more likely is that Scotland or, more precisely, the Executive and the Parliament is interested in and invested in national institutions, and that, despite everything, despite a new role in a new Europe, national flagship institutions have something of the security blanket about them, that instead of testing and expanding our sense of nation, instead of testing and expanding the meanings of 'Scotland' and 'national' within our post-devolution frame, our flagship institutions are still required to maintain a familiar and rather predictable role as the cultural pillars of a still uncertain society.

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APPENDICES

(1) The National Companies

In 2001/2002, Scottish Opera is to receive £7.47m, Royal Scottish National Orchestra £2.59m and Scottish Chamber Orchestra £1.41m from the Scottish Arts Council, these awards representing 88% of the music budget; Scottish Ballet is to receive £2.48m, 93% of the total budget for dance. Those four companies receive 28% of the total SAC programme budget.

This weighting is true for museums and galleries as well as the performing arts. The national museums are: the Royal Museum, Edinburgh; the Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh; the National War Museum, Edinburgh; the Museum of Flight, East Lothian; the costume museum at Shambellie, Dumfries; the Museum of Scottish Country Life at West Kintochside, East Kilbride; the Granton Centre, a conservation centre, Edinburgh. The National Galleries are the National Gallery of Scotland, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, The Dean Gallery: Paolozzi Gift (all in Edinburgh), and Duff House in Banff, Aberdeenshire.

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While the 'national' gallery and museums buildings and collections – managed and mainly housed in Edinburgh – are funded directly by the state, there are regional and local museums – most notably in Glasgow, and most significantly Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum – which are the sole responsibility of local government. Yet, it is argued, they have as much claim on the nomenclature 'national' and, crucially, just as much right to be funded as such. In 2001/2002 £1.54m will be spent on behalf of Scotland's 340 'non-national' museums and galleries – that is 6.7% of the Scottish Executive direct spend to the sector – while the remaining 93.3% is divided between the seven national museums (£15.27m) and five national galleries (£7.67m). In contrast, in the past five years funding for museums by local authorities has fallen by 30%.

(2) The National Cultural Strategy

According to the **Strategy's** definition, the 'roles and responsibilities in relation to companies with national roles' are that, 'within the resources available to them, each Company's Board should'

- 'strive to achieve work of world-class quality, performed throughout Scotland;
- 'plan, agree and deliver a broad and varied artistic programme;
- 'continuously seek ways of widening their audience;
- 'seek to establish service level agreements with its partners, including SAC, commercial sponsors and the Scottish Local Authorities;
- 'promote increasing levels of educational outreach work in schools and communities throughout Scotland;
- 'maximise income from sponsorship and donations.

(From Scottish Executive, **Creating our Future... Minding our Past: Scotland's National Cultural Strategy** (Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2000), pp. 17, 18, 19. The Strategy is also available on line at <<http://195.92.250.59/nationalculturalstrategy/docs/cult-00.asp>>.)

These ideas are a significant development of the tripartite role of the national companies described by the Education, Culture and Sport Committee's 'First Report, 2000' the 'Report on the Inquiry into the national arts companies' SP Paper 65 Session 1 (2000) (Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament, 2000). See, in particular, 'Section 3: Roles and structures of the national companies'. In that document, which certainly declares itself as preliminary to the **National Cultural Strategy**, the national remit is outlined as: connoting artistic excellence; having a key role in education and community development; and, as an essential source of employment. The **Report** is also available on line at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/educ99-00/edr00-01-c.htm>.