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The Making of a Programme Diary: A Study into the Programming of Arts Presentation at Arts Centres in Britain

Nobuko Kawashima

1999



Centre for **Cultural Policy Studies**

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List of Abbreviations

ACE	Arts Council England
ACGB	Arts Council of Great Britain
ADA	Arts Development Association
BFI	British Film Institute
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DNH	Department of National Heritage
GLA	Greater London Arts
NAAC	National Association of Arts Centres
RAA	Regional Arts Association
RAB	Regional Arts Board

Preface

This is the third Working Paper produced under a Research Partnership between the University of Warwick and the West Midlands Arts Board. Since the inception of the scheme I have conducted research into cultural policy with an emphasis on a regional perspective. The first project dealt with the issue of decentralisation in cultural policy and tried to unpack this amorphous concept and examine changes in the arts funding system. The second project investigated the impact of government policy on cultural organisations with particular reference to the new emphasis on management and efficiency.

Having examined a key principle of cultural policy and aspects of cultural management I now embark on the examination of creation in the arts. Each of the papers has thus approached cultural policy studies in Britain from a different angle. Although one research strategy might be to concentrate on an issue area or a sector, I wish to see my history of research in the three year period positively as being a process through which I have managed to gain insights into different operations, issues and debates in cultural fields in Britain and beyond.

The specific themes of the papers vary, and the papers are primarily academic in nature rather than for immediate use in practise, but my aim has been to generate research, the findings and implications of which are useful to strategic thinking for practitioners in the cultural sector. I hope that by providing concepts with which to analyse their issues I have been of some help to them and that through my papers they are better able to understand the theoretical context of their work.

I have been most fortunate in receiving support from officers of the West Midlands Arts at various stages of this study. I am extremely grateful to my interviewees for their time and the information so generously given. As this paper keeps their names and organisational identities anonymous, I can only thank them all here. Without their co-operation, it would have been impossible to write this paper.

A large number of people have kindly read the draft and made helpful comments. Many officers from the West Midlands Arts have made insightful and encouraging comments. Oliver Bennett, Chris Bilton, Christopher Gordon, Stella Hall and Andy Feist have given general comments and specific advice on certain parts of the paper for improvement. David

Fisher and Jane Woddis have read a part of the draft and directed me to relevant literature on specific points. All of them have helped me in re-writing with their specialist knowledge and expertise. Dos Elshout and Diana Crane have given their advice on sociologists and their non-British views have made a distinctive contribution. I am deeply indebted to all of these people. The views expressed in the paper and any errors are however solely my own.

Nobuko Kawashima

Autumn 1998

Executive Summary

This paper examines the framework, processes and mechanisms of arts centre programming defined as the presentation of professional arts and cultural activities. Whilst acknowledging the diverse roles played by arts centres particularly in their local communities, the paper is focused on the function of professional presentation. The findings and analysis are based on qualitative research, consisting of both personal interviews conducted at nine arts centres in Britain and a review of the literature.

The paper starts with the outline of the context in which professional presentation at arts centres works. It then proceeds to describe empirical findings and evolves into analytical and theoretical arguments. The unit of analysis is firstly arts centres in relation to arts companies and artists, and then the work of arts centre programmers. Finally the scope of discussion is widened in Part 3 to examine arts centres as a whole in the larger cultural production system.

The paper consists of three major parts. Each part is of a different nature and may serve a different primary readership as follows:

- Part 1 seeks to give a basic understanding of the ways in which the presentation of professional arts is programmed at arts centres in the UK. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between arts centres and visiting performing arts companies. This part is largely descriptive and explanatory and meant to form a foundation for the later discussion. Those who are not very familiar with the work of arts centres in Britain may find the details useful. Experienced practitioners working in arts centres may wish to skim through this part by reading summaries attached at the end of each chapter and go directly to Parts 2 and 3.
- Part 2 analyses the making of programme diaries by examining the behaviour and discourse of venue programmers. This part is explanatory and analytical. It may well be helpful for artists and administrators of arts companies in particular, as it offers an insight into programme making.
- Part 3 draws on the findings presented in Parts 1 and 2 and develops a theoretical and conceptual discussion. Its focus is on arts centres as a whole and examines the arts centre ‘sector’ in a wider context. This part may be useful for policy-makers in the arts funding system and practitioners in arts centres, as well as cultural policy academics and students.

The paper aims to contribute to the two following research fields in different but inter-connected ways:

- to the study of cultural policy by providing insights into how arts centres construct their programme diaries and by analysing their place in the large cultural production system
- to the sociology of culture by highlighting the distributive aspect of the arts and culture, a phase of cultural production relatively under-researched in the literature compared with the phases of creation and consumption.

The following lists the main arguments made in the paper. A summary is provided at the end of each chapter in the text and in the Conclusion.

Part 1: How Programmes Emerge

- Arts centres in the UK embrace an enormous range of art forms and genres. Programmers who are often in charge of managerial and administrative duties as well as artistic decision-making on presentation have insufficient time and budgets to explore what is available on the market.
- The touring market is largely buyer-led, allowing programmers to make choices from what is offered, albeit under various constraints. The costs, estimated audience potential and perceived artistic quality of particular products affect programmers' decisions.
- In recent years arts centres have started to call themselves 'presenting venues' rather than 'receiving houses', a change suggesting a more professional and proactive approach to the acquisition and development of product. Commissioning and co-producing work is a significant and growing area in this transition.

Part 2: Strategies for Programming—The Social Construction of Programme Diaries

- While arts companies send information packs and make follow-up calls to venues, arts programmers prefer to use personal contacts to acquire product. They constantly seek professional opinions on products from different networks and circles.
- In order to manage complexity and reduce the uncertainty involved in programming, arts centre programmers employ various strategies to routinise planning and optimise the predictability of outcome. Effective methods of achieving this goal include establishing regular product suppliers and reliable information sources. Diversifying programme

contents is also important so as to appeal to the whole local community and spread the financial and artistic risks of products.

Part 3: Arts Centres in the Cultural Production System

- Programming is better seen as a collective action involving a large number of actors than as a projection of programmers' personal taste. Collectivity takes place at the micro, person-to-person level where influence is exerted by various arts professionals in networks and circles of which programmers are part. Collectivity works at the macro, industrial level as well, where conventions, economics and government policy on specific industries have knock-on effects which pre-determine what is available to arts centres.
- Unlike many other subsidised arts, arts centres as a whole have only a vague and fragmented 'reputation system' to provide relevant organisations with differentiated prestige and status. One of the major reasons for the relative lack of a rigid 'reputation system' is that arts centres have two distinct markets of resources: the audience market on the one hand and that of visiting companies and artists on the other hand, each of which has different criteria for judging the 'quality' of arts centres. The aspiration of arts centres to expand their producer role through commissioning may be seen as a strategy for the development of a reputation system.
- The place of arts centres in the cultural sector as a whole is hard to locate in conceptual terms. One reason for this is that, when seen as presenting venues, arts centres are similar to the cultural industries in being 'editors' of cultural products, but constitutionally they are in the subsidised sector which is dominated by creators of the arts at least in the British system. Another reason is that, because of the eclectic nature of their programmes, arts centres are involved with a large number of 'art worlds' (called Cultural Production Systems in this paper), which in effect obscures their place in each world. This explains why arts centres in the UK have difficulty in forming a 'sector' as such.

Conclusion

- Despite the last point made in Part 3 above, it can also be argued that the collectivity of the partners in programme making at arts centres, which is the very essence of their working style, may enable a sectoral field to develop. There are advantages in forming a distinct sector, such as a stronger basis for advocacy, and disadvantages, such as the institutionalisation of culture in arts centres.

- After raising various issues for future research, the paper concludes with a suggestion that it would be interesting to study the extent to which arts centres, which present a wide range of different cultural forms and genres, contribute to the eradication, or enhancement or re-configuration, of the divisions between high and popular cultures.

Introduction

Introduction

‘Arts Centres’ play a number of important roles in British cultural life. As primarily receiving, non-producing venues for the arts, they provide a platform for arts companies and artists to present their work. In so doing they serve one of the major goals of national cultural policy, namely, to distribute professional arts and cultural products so as to ensure geographical equity in arts consumption across the country. Moreover, they offer a variety of courses in the arts and educational activities for local communities and encourage public participation in the arts. A large number of arts centres are also committed to giving support to emerging and/or local arts groups, both professional and amateur. These functions are performed across a wide range of art forms.

It has been repeatedly emphasised by arts centres that they are very different from each other in terms of scope and type of activities as well as in financial and physical size and the characteristics of their geographic locations. However, it is possible to identify some common features among them. A major one is that almost all of them present professional arts activities, if to different degrees. A recent major survey on arts centres commissioned by the Arts Council of England (MacKeith 1996) has examined their activities, management and operational issues; it finds the presentation of professional arts indicated as a ‘high’ priority area of activities by 81% of the respondents (pp11-12). Providing sessions and workshops has also been given a high priority but only by half of the respondents in an accompanying report to MacKeith (1996) (O’Brien [1997], p11). This was the case even in the heyday of the arts centre movement. As Lane (1978) put it, “it is certainly true that the arts-centre movement...is more concerned with presentation—with performance and exhibition—than any other single element.” (p41)

Literature on arts centres is notoriously scarce, but a few papers are available on the educational aspect of arts centres at least (eg Forster 1983; Greater London Arts [GLA] 1987). When it comes to arts presentation, namely, bringing in products made elsewhere by non-building-based companies and artists or by commissioning works from them to present at their venues, however, there is very little, except for passing comments. MacKeith (1996, pp27-29) for example touches upon the area of presentation and mentions that programmers

generally feel they lack resources with which to programme in a more effective way. She also reports that whilst the economic pressures of recent years have forced arts centres to present works which can achieve high box office returns, it is difficult for arts centres to find sufficient numbers of products available that can be expected to draw in audiences.

The above observations made by MacKeith, however, leaves us with tantalising questions. If arts centre programmers do not have enough time and budgets to explore potential products in the market, or if they find insufficient products available, how do they manage to make the programme as it is? Considering that the average number of staff directly involved in arts programming is only less than three per arts centre (MacKeith 1996, p10), how can they make informed judgements on the wide range of art forms they present? Can we assume that, like for most arts organisations, the conflict between economic imperatives and artistic aspirations is a major factor to affect the process of arts programming?

This paper tries to answer these questions. I will examine the framework in which programming decisions are located by identifying the range of constraints and influencing factors on programming at arts centres with particular reference to the presentation of professional activities in the arts and culture. The paper will explore the decision-making process and mechanisms that shape programming at arts centres. The focus will be on the work of programmers in relation to the given structures rather than on tensions in arts programming between artistic autonomy and economic constraints.

One of the major reasons for this approach is that the tensions could be researched empirically, for example, by a quantitative study which classifies ‘funding-led’ products and ‘non-funding-driven’ ones and examines the correlation between the funding structure and the programme characteristics. This is the kind of approach taken by DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985a; 1985b), Alexander (1996) and others (see Literature Review in the following for more details). However, the diversity of performances and exhibitions presented at arts centres makes this type of research almost impossible.

Moreover, generally speaking, these tensions are already resolved or built-in, depending upon one’s point of view, in the operation of arts centres. As MacKeith (1996) mentions, Regional Arts Boards (RABs), major funders for arts centres, tend to emphasise artistic objectives whereas local authorities, another major funder, put more emphasis on social and community developments. However, the demand from local authorities can be and is in many cases met by educational and participatory activities and hiring out to amateur societies, which lets the

RABs take a lead in the area of professional presentation. In other words, the areas of arts activities and the degree of emphasis attached to each area at arts centres have been historically shaped by the funding patterns specific to each arts centre.

Another tension which certainly exists is that between arts centres' cultural leadership role and the demands of the market, and this will appear from time to time in the following chapters. However, it is so deeply-embedded in the business of promotion which seeks to bring cultural producers and consumers together that it is hard to separate the two sides and discuss their conflict as a topic on its own. At the same time, what I aim to tease out is not so much the programmer's agony over art vs money. In other words, whilst I will examine the conflicting objectives arts programmers need to achieve within their organisations, I will pay much more attention to the wider work environment in which programmes emerge. Such an approach will include a spotlight to be shed on the web of complex relationships of which arts programmers are a part.

I am aware that some arts centres might vigorously oppose the particular angle of this paper, arguing that although they do present professional performances and exhibitions, professional presentation does not necessarily represent the most important area of activity or their ethos. As quoted by the Arts Council of England (ACE 1997, no pagination, para. 4-3), they would argue that:

[Our arts centre] is a place where we manage a real relationship between us and our communities.

A definition of an arts centre is that it's a place where...arts are represented, and where there is a high degree of participatory activity.

English (undated) has also emphasised one fundamental distinctiveness of arts centres as being "the facility for the individual to participate in arts experiences not only as a consumer, but as a doer, a creator, a performer." (p12)

Bearing these comments in mind, however, a paper of this length and nature has to be well-focused, and knowledge can only be advanced by continuously researching into different aspects one by one. I would also like to make it clear at the beginning that I intend neither to draw an overall picture of arts centre activities nor to statistically generalise the ways arts centres do programming. My ambition in this paper which is based on case studies focusing on a specific area of arts centre activity is that its findings will lead to analytical generalisations

and raise wider issues. Therefore, although I broadly follow the definition of arts centres given by previous publications (see below), due to the exclusive focus of this study on professional presentation the discussion, particularly in Part 3, may be more applicable to arts venues in general than to the arts centres whose emphasis is on educational/participatory course provision. My hope is that the study will prove useful to non-producing arts venues in a broad sense. I also hope that the conclusions will indicate policy implications for the distribution of the arts and culture in the regions.

Definitions

The definition of an **arts centre** is itself contentious and I generally employ the one given by Hutchison and Forrester (1987, p3) as “a building which provides a regular base for substantial programmes of activities in more than one art form.” Five other characteristics to describe an arts centre have often been added in publications and they are worth introduction:

1. there is a programme and a policy for more than one art form
2. more than one space is used for arts activities
3. there is some professional input (artistic or managerial)
4. there is a substantial usage which is not part of formal education (or adult education)
5. it is not primarily subsidised as a theatre.

As the above list suggests, arts centres are hard to define and overlap with many kinds of venues. It seems that the fourth one is to exclude studios of schools and colleges and the final one to rule out Regional Repertory Theatres. This paper largely follows the convention established in the literature, employing these characteristics as indicators to suggest what an arts centre is.

Middle- and small-scale, adjectives which are frequently used both for venues and for visiting companies, are terms which have been debated both in relation to their definition and usefulness. My definition is mostly concerned with the seating capacity of an auditorium. Bearing in mind that different papers use these words in different ways, my definition is loose. In principle, however, if the seating capacity is less than 250, it is small-scale. Companies which mainly perform in these spaces may be called small-scale companies accordingly.

In practice, these 'small-scale' companies are very often small in annual budgets, in the number of permanent staff and contractual performers. 'Large-scale' denotes a seating capacity of more than 900 and 'middle-scale' between these. It has been argued by Lancaster (1977, p9) that middle-scale should be distinguished between 250 to 400 and 400 to 900 and that the 250 to 400 band is very much of a grey zone. Since the majority of arts centres do not have any auditoria of the 400 to 900 capacity band, a middle-scale venue in this paper would mostly imply a space with the seating capacity of 250 to 400.

Programmers in this paper refer to those individuals who are responsible for booking visiting companies and artists in performing arts, for organising exhibitions in the visual arts and choosing titles of films and negotiating the hire of prints in cinema. The exact job title varies, including Director, Artistic Director, Head of Live Arts, Curator, Film Programmer and so on. As will be mentioned, booking itself may well be only part of the job for these staff.

Organisation of the Paper and Guide for Reading

For the purposes outlined in the Introduction, the study proceeds in the following way.

After giving details of research methodology the paper will provide a literature review. The literature review will extend this Introduction by laying out the theoretical framework and approaches taken in this study.

Part 1 consists of four chapters which describe the range of activities at arts centres and explain how the programming of professional presentation is conducted. It will start by describing the practical context of arts centres, arts venues and arts touring in general in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 will overview the range of activities undertaken at arts centres. It will then narrow the focus down to professional presentation and outline fundamental constraints and parameters existing in this particular area of activity. Chapter 3 will illustrate the typical relationship between arts centres and visiting companies in performing arts. Chapter 4 will return to the wider context of arts centre operation as outlined in Chapter 1 and examine recent trends in the area of professional presentation at arts centres. Particular attention will be paid to an increase in commissioning and co-production. The chapter will examine the reasons for this development despite the financial difficulties which arts centres have been experiencing. The chapter will then revisit the relationship between visiting companies and arts centres.

Part 2 will analyse the emerging process of programme making by focusing on the ways in which programmers work: to acquire materials, to select them and put them together. Chapter 5 will examine the work of programmers at arts centres and identify the variety of ways in which 'products' come to their attention. The focus on programmers is back in the first part of Chapter 6, where the process of creating the programme 'diary' will be described. The analysis will draw on findings in Chapters 3 and 4 and locate them in the context of annual planning. An investigation will be conducted into the ways in which individual programmers organise their work and the kinds of considerations they would take into account in making programme diaries.

Part 3 will be a conceptualisation of arts centres in a wider context of what I call the Cultural Production System. Chapter 7 will discuss programming as 'collective action' rather than personal choice of cultural connoisseurs, working at all levels: industrial, inter-organisational as well as inter-personal.

Chapters 8 and 9 will be still more conceptual than the previous chapters. It will be based on a premise that the subsidised arts generally work for symbolic rewards, or reputation and recognition, in the particular value system where each art world is located. Chapter 8 will argue that arts centres do not fit in well with this proposition and explain why this may be the case. The second part of this chapter will, however, show some strategies being developed for a reputation system. Chapter 9 will examine the role of arts centres as venues in the larger cultural production system, which will lead to a discussion that arts centres as a whole do not seem to form a sector as such.

In the Conclusion, I will summarise the findings and arguments made in Chapters 1 to 9. I will conclude by discussing some of the issues emerging for future research.

For those practitioners in the cultural sector who are already familiar with the work of arts centres, it may be advisable to skip Part 1, particularly Chapters 1 to 3 which aim to give a flavour of programming work at arts centres, and go directly to Part 2. Part 2 is theoretical and may be useful for those who like to reflect on what they do in systematic accounts. Part 3 is conceptual and meant particularly for senior managers and policy-makers who like to have some strategic thinking for arts centres.

For students of cultural policy and the sociology of culture, the Literature Review and Parts 2 and 3 will be of interest. For those of the readers who are less familiar with arts centres in the UK, however, descriptive information found in Part 1 will be necessary as a foundation.

Research Methodology

The discussion in this paper is based on qualitative research, combining personal interviews and a review of archival material. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and tape-recorded by the author between January and June 1998. Interviewees and their organisations whose names are kept anonymous in this paper include the following:

1. Twenty-one programmers from nine arts centres, including those who have left the posts before or during the course of my study.
2. Five individuals who are non-programming staff of the above arts centres (eg marketing officer) or some kind of 'stakeholder' such as board members.
3. Thirteen individuals who are in the position of providing strategic support to the arts centres, such as officers from funding organisations and trade bodies.
4. Ten individuals from arts organisations which have offered their productions to the nine arts centres, in the areas of dance, theatre and music. Three of the individuals in this category are artists and the rest are administrative staff.

Most interviews ran for one to one and a half hours and six individuals were interviewed twice. This resulted in fifty-five recorded interviews which totalled some seventy hours in all. All interviews were conducted in person, except for one which was done on the phone. Some individuals, particularly in the first category, were contacted again for factual clarification after the initial interviews.

In addition, as much archival material was collected as possible, although not all the arts centres could provide documents such as annual reports due to lack of time. Annual reports, business plans, grant applications and programme diaries were the key documents. Research reports written for particular arts centres in marketing and management in general were obtained wherever possible. Fliers for art productions which were on display at the arts centres were also collected whenever a visit was made. They often indicated the range of venues the companies were touring, including the arts centres under examination.

The nine arts centres from which programmers were drawn represent different types of the institution in many respects: budget size, physical size, geographical characteristics, range of activities, legal status and the number of professional presentations (see Tables 1 to 3).

The majority have small auditoria (smaller than a 250-seater theatre) only, but the sample includes middle-scale and large-scale auditoria as well. In terms of constitution, all are private and have charitable status, except one which is part of a university. All receive funding from their RABs and local authorities, and occasionally from the Arts Council for specific projects. The kind of activities undertaken in addition to professional presentation varies. They include programmes of classes and workshops, artist-in-residence, community projects and support for young artists

The mix of these income sources varies and there is no pattern of correlation between the income structure with the features shown in the tables below. The proportion of funding from RABs is the only one that is similar across the sample, in the region of 10-20%, with an exception that has a larger proportion of funding from one of the Arts Councils. Funding from local authorities ranges from close to none to 55% of the total income, but generally around 30%. Two arts centres rely substantially on charitable donations. The proportion of self-earned income (box office sales, catering, sponsorship etc) can be anything between 30% and 70% of the total revenue.

Table 1. Arts Centres by Budget Size

Annual Income	Number of Arts Centres
over £1,000,000	3
£400,000 to £999,999	3
£200,000 to £399,999	2
£100,000 to £199,999	1

N=9

Table 2. Arts Centres by Location

Location	Number of Arts Centres
Urban/Metropolitan	3
Suburban/Town	2
Rural	2
Inner London	1
Outer London	1

N=9

Table 3. Arts Centres by Foundation

Foundation Year	Number of Arts Centres
1990s	2
1980s	3
1970s	2
1960s	2

N=9

Literature Review

The following literature review is organised as two parts: in the first part, practical and policy documents which have relevance to the subject of the present paper will be reviewed. It will expand on my brief comment in the Introduction that very little literature in general, not to mention on their presentation of professional arts in particular, is available on arts centres. The second part will introduce books and articles of academic research on cultural sectors different from arts centres. They are nonetheless relevant to the subject and useful for two purposes. One purpose is to present the theoretical and analytical framework formulated for this research. The other is to review findings in various other cultural sectors, ranging from repertory theatres, to publishing and television, which have implications for the present study. The introduction to each work is kept to the minimum, and some of the reviewed literature will where appropriate be referred to in more detail in the following chapters.

1. Policy-Oriented Research

Literature that is specifically related to arts centres is very scarce. Mention has been made of their artistic and social values up until the mid-1970s, for example, in the Labour Government's White Paper of 1965 (Cmnd 2601, pp12-13) and by Lord Redcliffe-Maud (1976, p160), but systematic study on arts centres has been limited. Exceptions are Hutchison and Forrester (1987) and MacKeith (1996).¹ These two reports provide overviews of the sector, by outlining the origin, finance, staffing and other operational issues of arts centres in Britain. An earlier study by Hutchison (1977) provides a detailed, sometimes evaluative description of three particular arts centres in these aspects. The founding spirit of the arts centre movement can be understood by consulting Lane (1978) and English (undated). Kushner (undated), Greater London Arts (1987), and Forster (1983) more systematically, survey educational activities at arts centres. The above is an almost exhaustive rather than selective list of works which have arts centres as their focus. Little documentation on arts centres, with the exception of conference proceedings from the National Association of Arts Centres (NAAC 1986) and arts funding bodies, is currently available from trade bodies (since the NAAC and its successor, the Arts Development Association, ceased to exist in 1989 and 1992 respectively). In all these papers professional presentation is only given a cursory glance.

¹ O'Brien (1997) and the Arts Council of England (1997) accompany MacKeith (1996).

In order to examine programming at arts centres which receive products from producing companies and artists, 'touring' serves as a key word to search for relevant materials. The Arts Council has been concerned with this area, if in an uneasy way, as it represents access, one of the principles of public funding for the arts. The policy of improving geographical access to the arts has seen many twists and turns in implementation since the Council's early days (Elsom 1971, pp93-96; Kawashima 1996, pp23-25). There was a time when the Council was mainly concerned with bringing people to where arts were presented (eg by providing transport for people to theatres),² but soon after it chose to concentrate its resources on funding 'exemplary' institutions in London and some major regional cities (Arts Council of Great Britain undated, p21). 'Housing the Arts' to provide buildings for the arts and culture around the country, thus, had been a major project in this policy. Touring, the other means of increasing cultural provision in the regions, turned out to be more complicated for the Council to plan centrally and has largely been left to the market; today some of the revenue-funded clients receive additional funding for touring and some specialist touring is organised by the Council (eg Contemporary Music Network), and many of its project-funded clients are required to tour to different regions for performance as a condition of funding. However, beyond these measures there is not a great deal of intervention.

The existence of reviews on touring provision, commissioned by the Arts Council from time to time, signifies the lack of policy in this area rather than a continuous interest. Review reports have been written on different areas such as small- and middle-scale drama by Lancaster (1977) and Devlin (1985), large- and middle-scale contemporary dance by Skene (1987), large-scale lyric work by the Arts Council (1998) and more comprehensively by Marchant (1992). They have pointed out the mismatch between the provision of touring products and the needs of venues, and made specific recommendations to the funding body to create a coherent strategy for touring. Reflecting the concerns of the Arts Council, these reports primarily address the relationship between the funding body and the touring companies it subsidises. They mention as an issue the quality and diversity of the products available in the regions, but make relatively less reference to venues. Exceptions are Barker (1991) and Mackenzie and Scott (1991), discussion documents prepared for the National Arts

² Several Regional Arts Associations (RAAs) likewise operated transport subsidy schemes for arts attenders until the mid-1970s.

and Media Strategy on the touring of visual and performing arts respectively.³ They offer critical views and raise a number of issues. A stronger message given by Mackenzie is that venues should serve to help products of top quality only in terms either of audience development or artistic improvement or both (Mackenzie and Scott 1991, p15).

Some of the policy documents written or commissioned by the Arts Council on specific art forms also mention touring as one of the issues. For dance, where virtually all the companies are non-building-based, see Devlin (1989) and Foley (1994). On drama, the Arts Council's policy document (Arts Council of England 1996) discusses the specific roles the funding body should play to support the touring of independent theatre groups and to develop large-scale touring in partnership with the commercial sector. Overall, these documents are on the side of the producing companies the Arts Council supports and they suggest that venues do not know enough about art forms nor do they have the time to explore potential products because of their tight budgets.

On film, distribution (the equivalent concept to touring for visual and performing arts) has lately started to receive attention from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS 1998), reflecting the Government's policy to strengthen the British film industry (eg DCMS 1998; Department of National Heritage [DNH] 1995). This has been spearheaded by the introduction of Lottery funding which has supported film production, since film is technically classified as 'capital' assets. Film distribution however has largely been left to trade practice and convention and little has been written, except for a detailed description given by Durie (ed)(1993) in a practical guidebook to marketing for independent filmmakers in Europe. Another is a research report commissioned by the Arts Council and other quasi-public bodies on the 'specialised cinema' sector of which arts centres constitute the major part (London Economics 1997). However, much less research has been done to describe and analyse distribution and exhibition than the production and consumption aspects of the film industry.⁴

As far as papers with a focus on venues are concerned, very few are written from a national policy point of view. This derives from the fact that the national arts funding system as a whole has largely been concerned with producers of the arts, as Scott (Mackenzie and Scott 1991) puts it:

³ This was co-ordinated by the Arts Council and led to a book entitled 'A Creative Future' (Arts Council of Great Britain 1993).

...the [receiving] theatres are not Arts Council clients and the Arts Council has always had great difficulty representing or even talking with the art forms and activities that it does not actually subsidise. (P20)

The theatre management consultant Raymond has developed a series of papers on the management of touring theatres (ie middle- to large-scale venues primarily for theatrical work) commissioned by the Touring Department of the Arts Council (Raymond 1990; 1991; 1993). There is some (though limited) overlap between these theatres and arts centres with middle-scale auditoria and the papers are helpful in throwing light on the relationship between venues and visiting companies. Raymond (1991, p13) describes the relationship as an “antiquated Courtship Ritual”. Maitland (undated a; undated b) has written two manuals on marketing for touring to be used both by venues and by touring companies of different scales. The manuals provide us with clues to the various stages of the process by which touring companies obtain tour bookings. Being management manuals, however, they offer only limited insight into programming at non-producing arts venues.

Finally, mention has to be made of Lewis (1990, pp34-49) who makes a lengthy reference to arts centres in his analysis of the values which underline public funding of the arts in Britain. He concludes that despite their ethos arts centres have largely failed to attract a wide range of people but remain predominantly a preserve of the middle-class.

In short arts centres and venues generally are poorly-documented and very little is available to describe or examine their arts programming and presentation activities.

2. Sociological Literature—the Production of Culture

The analytical approach employed in this study relies heavily on the literature collectively called the ‘production of culture’ in sociology. This is a branch in the sociology of culture with an empirical emphasis, developed in the last two to three decades mostly by American sociologists. For the most part, ‘production of culture’ research has applied sociologies of organisation, industry, work and occupation to the field of the arts and culture, including the area of mass communication. Unlike the traditional approach to the sociology of culture which is primarily theoretical or aesthetic (Wolff 1993, pp26-31), this body of literature has been based on empirical (ie statistical, historical or organisational) research and stresses the

⁴ For example, Hill (1996) in his comprehensive account of British film policy makes only a brief mention of distribution and exhibition sectors (pp108-109).

importance of examining economic and organisational contexts in which recorded culture is created, distributed, evaluated and consumed. This sociological approach was taken early on, for example, by Peterson (1976) and DiMaggio and Hirsch (1976) in their mapping out of a research strategy for the sociology of culture. As DiMaggio and Hirsch (1976) succinctly put it, the perspective should be:

to examine and compare the diverse range of situations in which works of art [meaning culture in a broader sense] are conceived, sketched, actualized, and enjoyed....We adopt this perspective because...it is naive to ask “How does society affect art?” or “What is the role of art in society?” or “What happens to art under socialism?” until we better understand the concrete range of activities and channels through which art is produced. (p736)

Therefore, to recapitulate what needs to be studied, it would include:

to understand the social context of production—who produces art, what biases of selection make art which is produced and distributed systematically different from that which is not, and what political and economic factors to which they are directed. (p747)

The following two decades have seen a proliferation of research undertaken from this perspective, leading to Peterson’s (1994) excellent review of the literature. He identifies six distinct lines of research. They include research on:

- comparative market structures
- market structure over time
- reward structure
- gatekeeping and decision chains
- careers of creative workers
- structural conditions facilitating creativity.

Each of these has different units of analysis, and it is impractical to identify exclusive relationships between a level of analysis and an area of research. One of the analytical levels is micro (ie personal interaction) which is largely related to the fourth and fifth areas of research. Other levels of analysis include institutional (ie inter-organisational relationships) for many of the research areas in the above list and finally societal (ie relating to socio-political values of entire societies), which again cuts across the study areas. There are too many papers in this body of literature to be discussed here, and the numerous review articles which are available (eg Peterson 1994; Wolff 1993, chapter 2; Griswold 1993 on the field of literature; for a critique of this perspective, see for example Heywood 1997) make another attempt unnecessary.

Taken together, the researchers in the 'production of culture' have analysed the ways in which organisational and economic factors have affected artistic content and changes and have thereby attempted to de-consecrate and de-mystify Romantic ideas of artists as autonomous geniuses. In Britain, there have been some empirical studies into the production of culture in the field of the media (eg Elliott 1972; Silverstone 1985). However, most studies in the sociology of culture have largely been much more abstract and interdisciplinary, developed with literary critics and social historians of art. They have approached the production of culture by constructing theories on the issue of art vs society or art vs commerce (Wolff 1993, pp29-32; Seed and Wolff 1988, pp10-11).

In the present paper, I will follow the empirical, American orientation and apply their findings to British cultural policy wherever appropriate. It also needs to be mentioned that my paper will freely cut across the categories of research identified by Peterson (1994). To some extent, the aspect of comparative market structure will be introduced as arts centres represent multiple art forms with different industrial structures. In Chapters 5 and 6 in particular, gatekeeping and decision chains will form the main part of the argument. In Chapter 6 reward system and structural conditions facilitating creativity of arts centres will be most relevant. As to the unit of analysis, the study will be largely conducted at an institutional and organisational level, and only marginally at the personal level. Thus, I will examine programmers as part of organisations but pay little attention to their psychology, for example, personal career motivations of programmers or their personal conflicts with artists or other individuals. Unlike humanist scholars, I will not be concerned, either, with the ways in which societal values are reflected into the meanings and narratives produced by arts centres.

Having described the theoretical framework in which this study is placed, I will now proceed to review relevant works from this body of literature. As has been the case with policy-oriented research, there has been very little on artistic decision-making at non-producing venues, let alone at anything equivalent to arts centres in Britain. There are however at least two areas in the literature which shed light on the topic under investigation in this paper. All the papers introduced here inform the present paper and many of them will reappear in Part 2.

First, there have been some research papers which examine producing performing arts organisations, such as repertory theatres, opera companies and symphony orchestras, whose production derives largely from existing canons of work. They are, like arts centres, under constant pressure to reconcile economic and artistic considerations in the choice of titles for production. In general, these papers try to establish the degree of correlation between what they hypothesise as variables (eg the degree of dependency on earned income) and artistic

orientation expressed in the output (eg the reliance on what are empirically known to attract large audiences). With a risk of over-simplification but for the good reasons and rationales provided, the qualitative dimension of the output is mostly measured by the titles from repertoires without taking into account styles of stage design and performance. Therefore, despite being on producing (as opposed to distributing) organisations of the arts, these papers are relevant to my research insofar as they analyse the programme decisions made in the choice of play (or opera) titles from a repertoire (and the choice between the repertoire and new work).

Not surprisingly, almost all the papers in this category conclude that market forces tend to suppress programme diversity in terms of title. DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985a; 1985b) have examined American repertory theatres in two papers with different units of analysis to identify what leads some theatres to present something different from the others. They find that the smaller a theatre's seating capacity is and the less dependent on earned income the theatre is, the more divergent its repertoire tends to be from those of the other non-profit theatres surveyed. Those 'innovative' theatres would be more likely to put on new works or bring forgotten, unpopular works back to the stage than larger houses with high rates of earned income (DiMaggio and Stenberg 1985a). Accordingly, therefore, in the other paper (DiMaggio and Stenberg 1985b) which examines programmes of repertory theatres as an aggregate over time, they conclude that as the resident theatre sector matured and became institutionalised and many of them grew larger towards the end of the 1970s, the conformity of repertoires at sectoral level increased. The cultural economist Austin-Smith (1980) in his empirical study on British repertory theatres similarly concludes that public subsidies encourage the presentation of relatively higher levels of minority interest plays. Martorella (1977) on American opera houses finds the tendency for standardised repertoires to be strongly correlated with dependence on box office income.

Secondly, since arts centres as venues can be seen as close to what one might call 'editing' organisations, in other words, organisations which select creative materials, attach meanings to them and turn them into consumer products, a useful analogy and insights can be obtained from research on cultural industries which have the same function. There are a number of industries in the category of 'editing' organisations and studies on them which will throw much needed light on our analysis of arts centres, as the following shows.

Publishing houses are an obvious example of editing organisations; they filter book proposals and manuscripts received from authors and produce books. Coser et al (1982) have conducted a comprehensive study of the US publishing industry by using two levels of analysis mentioned before, namely, micro and institutional. They examine human relations in the industry, for

example, between editors and authors, marketing departments of the houses and other key outsiders in the book trade and argue all of these shape the production and distribution of books. The descriptions and analysis of these aspects illuminate the whole process in the making of the books as they finally appear on the shelves of book shops.

Television is another major industry in this respect as the product is at least partly purchased from programmes made elsewhere. Powell and Friedkin (1986) offer an interesting study of programme-making in public broadcasting television in the US, in which one of the stations studied relies heavily on two central bodies which distribute programmes to local stations. The authors reveal how the bidding mechanism at one of the central bodies where programme producers and buying stations meet affects the characteristics of programmes which come to be shown. A paper by Bielby and Bielby (1994) examines a similar process in the American commercial television world. Prime-time programming at national television networks in the US has been highly dependent on outside production companies. Bounded by the commercial imperatives of the organisation and faced with the uncertainty of quality involved in the choice of projects, buyers develop strategies and discourses that provide legitimate accounts of their actions targeted to different constituencies (eg advertisers), which eventually affect the characteristics of programmes aired in prime-time slots.

Art dealers and commercial galleries form the third major industry of editing organisations which have attracted research interests. They are largely brokers with little involvement in the creation process; they find talents, assign meanings to them and sell them. White and White (1993 [1965]) is one of the founding works for the 'production of culture' theory, in arguing that the development of commercial dealers and their middle-class clients made a major contribution to the emergence of Impressionist painting in the French art market at the turn of the last century. Bystryn's (1989 [1978]) study examines the relationship between art dealers and the artists promoted by them in New York of the 1940s and 1950s. Crane (1987) is a major work, more systematically and comprehensively researched, on the avant-garde art development in New York between 1940 and 1985. Moulin (1987 [1967]) and Peterson, K (1997) on the French art market of recent decades and Plattner (1996) on an American local art scene have enriched the scope of the study on art dealers. Martorella (1990) is an interesting study on art collections of American corporations to explain why they buy art and what they do with it. She explores the impact of relatively new but increasingly important art patrons in the US on art style and aesthetic judgements in the art market.

There are some papers which focus specifically on art critics, as they perform the functions of selection and validation, if not the selling itself. These papers have examined the effects of critics in providing authority for new movements in fine art (eg Mulkey and Chaplin 1982 on a small but influential group of curators and critics who championed Jackson Pollock) as well as in literature (van Rees 1987) and drama (Levo 1993).

Finally news organisations such as the press and broadcasting houses can be seen as editing organisations. Although they do create their own works in reporting news, news is a constructed social reality: the essence of news report is to select potentially ‘newsworthy’ events from what is available and produce news by presenting them as such (Tuchman 1978a, 1978b, 1973). Not unexpectedly, research has suggested that journalists work under economic and political constraints and what is presented to us by them as neutral and objective reality is much dictated by the organisation of their work. Mortensen and Svendsen (1980) on Danish newspaper journalists and Powell and Friedkin (1986) mentioned earlier are works of this kind.

Golding and Elliott (1979) is a comprehensive study on news making from a comparative perspective, examining news broadcasting in Nigeria, Sweden and Ireland. The authors argue that broadcast news is a cultural product manufactured through a highly routinised and standardised procedure. Kannis (1991) argues local news-making in the US is an amalgamation of the economic motives held by media owners, the professional aspirations of journalists and tactics used by elected and appointed officials of local government to influence news. In a similar vein, Elliott (1972) is a case study on the making of a documentary series at what was then called Associated Television (ATV) in Britain. He reveals the whole process and organisation of programme making, from the emergence of an idea through the organisation of the production team, item selection to the final filming at the studio.

The kinds of cultural organisations mentioned so far may have seemed remote from arts centres in Britain. Many of those mentioned above are multi-billion, global industries for profit-making whereas arts centres in Britain are tiny, local and not-for-profit in comparison. Bearing these differences in mind, however, I will show later that the theoretical implications of the reviewed papers are suggestive and applicable to the phenomena under investigation in this study; arts centres as receiving venues can be compared to repertory companies which are producing houses insofar as both are in the business of making choices from what is available: arts centres choose what to present and repertory theatres which title to interpret for production.

Arts centres as venues will more appropriately be considered as part of editing organisations many of which are so-called cultural industries. The range of industries mentioned here for reference and analogy to arts centres as venues in fact suggest the ambiguity and versatility of arts centres in the cultural sector, which will be the central point for exploration in Chapter 9.

Part 1: How Programmes Emerge

The objectives of Part 1 are to show the context in which the presentation of professional activities in the arts and culture takes place at arts centres in the UK and to provide an empirical account of the framework and mechanisms in which programmers' choices are located.

Chapter 1 will explain the historical development of arts centres and regional touring of the arts in Britain. Chapter 2 will draw an overall picture of arts centre activities and outline basic constraints on programming. Chapter 3 will depict the typical relationship between arts centre programmers and visiting companies in performing arts in the negotiation over booking a date and marketing. Chapter 4 will explain recent phenomena which affect the relationship between the two, including an increase in commissioning by arts centres.

Chapter 1. Context

The objective of this chapter is to provide background and contextual information which places the subject of this study, namely, the presentation of professional arts at arts centres, in a larger picture. The following will review the development of arts centres in relation to the scene of arts presentation in the regions.

According to a chronological review given by Lane (1978), the first wave of arts centres was established in Britain in the 1950s and came to fruition from the mid-1960s to the explosion of the 1970s. This coincides with the movement in which the ideals of cultural democracy and the democratisation of culture were put into practice through the establishment of Regional Arts Associations (RAAs) and the development of community arts projects. The descriptive account of arts centre development up to the 1970s offered by Lane (1978) also gives a flavour of the spirit in support of artistic experimentation.

While this chronology probably explains the overall pattern of development over the decades well, it is interesting to note that quite a few arts centres were opened even after the ideology of community arts faded, owing above all to funding made available by local authorities (Hutchison and Forrester 1987, pp7-12). Although the level of involvement in culture and the arts has varied from one authority to another, it can be said that the period from the 1980s to the early 1990s has seen a notable expansion of cultural policy at selected authorities. As an indication of the level of growth in recent years, the study of MacKeith (1996) which included 129 arts centres in the survey had 57 'new' centres that had appeared since the previous study by Hutchison and Forrester (1987).⁵

Not only the expansion but also some degree of professionalisation and clarification of policy and strategies characterise the change in cultural policy at the local level in recent decades. This reflects a general trend in public service provision at local government level, which now has to aim at greater efficiency, effectiveness and not least economy. Harsh criticism made by the Audit Commission (1991a) was primarily levelled at local authority support for the arts and entertainment at receiving theatres and concert halls. This does not specifically include arts centres, but, taken together with the same message delivered in another report on

⁵ It can safely be assumed that most of these new entries are arts centres opened between 1987 and 1996, since there is consistency and comprehensiveness in the research methodologies between the studies. MacKeith is even more selective than Hutchison and Forrester in choosing only those arts centres which are funded by the Arts Council of England or Regional Arts Boards or are considered to be of significant importance in their area. In other words, the new entries are not 'new' because MacKeith has broadened the definition.

the provision of museum services (Audit Commission 1991b), it has been more broadly received. Therefore, the original ideal and enthusiasm alone would no longer be enough; arts centres of the 1990s need to be professional and strategic in artistic as well as managerial terms.

Other drives in the direction of professionalism include the change of corporate culture in the national arts funding system in which the Regional Arts Boards (RABs, formerly the RAAs) have gained more prominence than before, working in enhanced harmony with the Arts Council (Kawashima 1996, pp32-33). The increasing need for plural funding since the 1980s has forced arts centres to review their self-earned income in areas such as catering, sponsorship and marketing (National Association of Arts Centres 1986). Due to the dwindling level of local authority funding and standstill funding from the RABs, financial difficulty at arts centres has increased particularly since the 1990s. At the same time, however, funding for capital projects from the National Lottery has enabled major refurbishment and building work.

In the meantime, Regional Repertory Theatres, which are primarily producing theatres, have been putting on work made elsewhere. This change is mentioned here for two reasons. One is that the works presented in their studio spaces (if not in the main theatres) often overlap with those seen at arts centres. Secondly, the Venue Development Fund of the Arts Council which was initially created to promote Regional Repertory Theatres in this direction benefited arts centres, too.

Many Regional Repertory Theatres present productions by other companies for both financial and artistic purposes. Like arts centres, the Repertory Movement has since its inception early this century and throughout the decades hailed the theatre as a meeting place for the local community where art exhibitions, lectures and discussions would be held in the café and the foyer (Jackson 1984, p92). At the beginning of the 1980s, however, Repertory Theatres found it difficult to move forward. Jackson (1984) described the Repertory Movement in retrenchment:

...the expansiveness and accompanying sense of adventure and purpose, and the ideal of the theatre as the cultural powerhouse of the community, had all taken a severe knock. The idea of the permanent company resident in the community, striven for if attained only at a handful of theatres, has become increasingly in the regions a thing of the past. (p97)

The gradual decline of audiences for these works at Regional Repertory Theatres and the financial stringency of recent years have driven them to review their traditional way of operating. It has been felt necessary for Repertory Theatres to make a better use of their space,

during the summer in particular, by inviting other companies to perform or offer workshops (see for some cases the journal for theatres *Prompt* 1997a, pp16-17). This has been in the hope that non-drama works in particular would bring an audience to the theatres who would then come back or start to come to the main productions. It has also become important for Repertory Theatres to co-produce and co-promote productions with external partners which may be non-building-based companies so as to economise on production costs (see for some unusual cases *Prompt* 1996, pp8-9; *Prompt* 1997b, pp10-11).

Taken as a whole, therefore, Repertory Theatres are increasing their role as a presenter, co-producer and co-promoter, whereas arts centres are taking advantage of the Venue and Promoter Development Fund to commission new works albeit on a small scale.

Conclusion

The invention in the early 1990s of the term ‘presenting venue’ instead of ‘receiving house’, which marked a turning point for venues, is located in the context outlined in this chapter. Arts centres have been evolving to become more professional, entrepreneurial and market-sensitive. Also the distinction between presenting and producing venues has become blurred as both arts centres and Regional Repertory Theatres struggle to broaden their traditional boundaries in order to survive in an increasingly challenging climate for the arts. Key words preferred by arts funding bodies and local authorities include strategy, planning, partnership and vision. Thus, while financial constraints for arts centres are increasingly tough, it has become very important for them to invest boldly in new artistic territories and improve facilities (particularly with Lottery awards), which it is hoped will bring in further income.

Chapter 2. A Year at an Arts Centre

Arts centres present a wide range of professional arts and cultural productions, but presentation is only one aspect among many activities undertaken in one year. The following aims to provide an illustration of what annual programmes in a variety of activities at arts centres look like. It will then focus on the area of professional presentation and outline the constraints on programming in this area such as the economics of costs and income. Finally the patterns of work undertaken by programmers are described.

2.1 The Business and 'Busi-ness' of Arts Centres

As MacKeith (1996) identifies, there are at least three major areas in which arts centres are generally involved: presentation (both professional and amateur, both visual and performing arts), community participation (eg course provision) and artistic development (eg artist-in-residence programme). There is some overlap between the three. A community theatre project directed by professionals is an example which crosses over the three major objectives of arts centres. In quantitative terms, sessions for participatory courses can number several hundreds annually up to some five thousands per arts centre. An arts centre may let studios to more than ten arts companies or visual artists for very low rents, or host artists in residence.

In professional presentation alone, the sheer volume of presented work is staggering. An arts centre with a large turnover may present 300-400 performing arts productions, 800-1,000 film screenings and 10-40 exhibitions per year. Even a medium-sized arts centre in budgetary terms in my sample presents 90 professional productions alongside as many amateur presentations and 20 exhibitions.⁶ The 'busi-ness' of these places as they draw people in to their cafés, bars and restaurants is equally impressive.

What characterises arts centre programming is its enormous variety even within one organisation. At any arts centre, art forms range from music, theatre, dance, visual arts, comedy to literature. In music alone, for example, there are events of folk music, world music, jazz, rock, chamber music and many more. Many of them would include what one might call

⁶ The median number of professional presentations in the survey by MacKeith (1996) is however only 38. This comparison suggests that my cases may be skewed towards those arts centres with a keen interest in presentation.

accessible, popular, entertaining events and more challenging, esoteric work. Some works are contemporary while others are interpretations of the classics.

Although the summer period tends to be quiet as far as performing arts are concerned, the staff cannot solely engage in booking visiting companies and artists before autumn starts. The programming is a much more dynamic, continuous and organic process. Also the lead time varies greatly from one art form to another. Performing arts typically have three to six months for preparation and art exhibition eighteen months, whereas film has only a couple of months. Therefore there is always something being planned, discussed or mounted throughout the year.

2.2 Constraints on Programming

There are a number of constraints on programming. Some are structural factors such as seasonal events, physical structure of spaces and the characteristics of the location which are largely unchangeable. Others are variable parameters such as programme budgets and the artistic policy of the arts centre. The following elaborates on these.

Scheduling starts by following the widely-seen seasonal pattern of arts and cultural events in Britain, with autumn to winter tending to be the highlight of the year and spring to summer being less intense. On top of this general seasonal pattern come more specific dates for the programmer to take into account. The first thing the programmer would do is to note major events of significance to the centre's activities, such as annual arts festivals that take place in the locality with which the arts centre may collaborate or compete for attenders. These are given factors and define the boundary for the arts centre.

Another centre-specific factor that influences programming is the general characteristics and the level of arts provision in the local area in which an arts centre is located. Rural arts centres tend to fill gaps in cultural provision and find it necessary to be all-embracing, whereas urban arts centres may be able to specialise in a specific genre or be focused on a specific segment of the local community (eg an ethnic group).

The third constraint that is hard to change is the physical structure of the arts centre. The size of the auditoria and the extent to which they can be flexibly used determine which kinds of events can be accommodated. There are also other physical characteristics than sheer size which may encourage or discourage certain kinds of productions in a venue, such as the

width and depth of the stage, the quality of the stage floor (particularly for dance) and the availability of equipment. Similar to the above point is the availability of human resources. Performances and exhibitions cannot be mounted simply by artists but need the skills of technical staff too. Whether competent technicians with the skills required for specific productions are available to arts centres or not is an important consideration.

Finally the availability of productions to book is also a given factor over which programmers have little control, a factor that distinguishes arts centres from producing venues. Products must be available for programmers to show at the right time; they are not imperishable commodities to which buyers can return for purchase.

With these given factors and contexts in place, programmers are now in a position to choose what to book. The following variables in booking particular events now come into play: costs and budgets, audience potential and marketing costs and the artistic aspirations of the organisations and programmers.

One of the variables to consider is the economics of costs and income, namely, the relationship between fees to pay product suppliers and other related costs incurred for presentation on the one hand and attendance level and pricing on the other. Programmers have to try to meet whatever target rates they have in recovering expenditure with box office sales. Financial reports are circulated to inform programmers and other senior staff of the financial status within (at least well-managed) arts centres on a constant basis. For many arts centres the income from catering and the bar is so significant that when booking events the potential for these ancillary services sometimes play a role. For example, a performance with no interval may not be favoured in this respect.

It must be noted that when it comes to film and exhibition, the economics are quite different from live arts. Whilst exhibitions are almost without exception admission free and generate only minor income, if any (ie sales of catalogues), film tends to be the money-spinner in most arts centres due to the financial structure in which film distributors and exhibitors work. Firstly the fixed costs specific to film screening are relatively small, including the rental, insurance and transport. Secondly the box office intake is split between the two parties largely on a 50:50 basis. Thirdly, there is screen advertising revenue. Therefore the cinema is relatively less risky and costly than other art forms presented at arts centres. It may effectively subsidise other arts, although they may keep separate accounts to ensure that each is achieving the sales target in its own terms.

Finally the general policies of arts centres and the personal interests of the programming staff, which may largely overlap, are the final determinant. That this factor is mentioned last should not be interpreted as suggesting it is a low priority. However, I list this variable after the others because arts centres tend to be generalist and it is difficult to regard their artistic policies as useful criteria for programming. Mission statements and strategic objectives given by the arts centres studied show their comprehensiveness, for example:

- To present a broad programme of artistic activity which entertains and challenges large and diverse audiences living in [this region] and beyond
- To promote...a mixed programme of the best work in the arts of film, theatre, dance, a wide variety of music, storytelling, comedy, and other related forms, primarily, but not exclusively, of a contemporary nature
- To be the Centre that develops, supports and encourages the arts and related activities for [this town] and [this county] and the surrounding region for the benefit of all [which is followed by a list of some 20 art forms and genres as 'core' areas of activities].

None of the arts centres I investigated has a specific quota or allocation policy by art form and/or the experimental to traditional spectrum. Rather their policies are all-inclusive and ever-expansive.

2.3 Work Patterns of Programmers

One obvious result of the 'busi-ness' of arts centres described in 2.1 is that without exception, programmers have a mixed work load. The number of productions and the range of art forms each programmer deals with vary, but generally they are large and very wide. Developing the programme, supposedly the major area of programmers' work, is however often only part of their responsibilities. A programmer who books 40 productions may well be in a small organisation and responsible for a wide range of work involved in venue management such as fund-raising, marketing, PR and managing staff, paid and/or unpaid. Carrying out educational and community-related activities can be another addition to his/her brief.

Due to the huge volume of work to be done—perhaps all too familiar across the arts—programmers tend to work long hours: 50 to 60 and up to 80 hours a week. In addition, their 'private' time is very often spent on attending shows at venues other than their own. In an average week, they would have two shows at their own venues to attend and one to two performances to watch elsewhere from September to May. At home, they would scan video

tapes sent by companies, and while driving they would listen to demo tapes sent by music agents and promoters. Even so some programmers expressed their dedication to their work (or vocation for that matter) and the sense of satisfaction, or what economists may call high 'psychic income' (Towse 1996, p14):

I've got friends from college...who aren't in the arts business and think that I've got a fantastic, glamorous job. And even though they know that I don't get paid much,...they know that I get a lot more reward than they do.

A lot of my friends are also working in the theatre. Anything social I can do is from 10pm at the earliest.

My children grew up around here [the venue], exposed to most queer things from their infancy.

However, a major implication of such a mixed and heavy work load is that despite programmers' emphasis on proactive ways of finding interesting productions, there is often less time and budgets available to make that way of working possible. As programmers commented:

It is extremely difficult to remain outward-looking. I am spending more and more time on looking inward.

Ideally I would like to go out and see more, but then the building would have to be shut on that day [because there is nobody else to keep the centre open and running].

One of the film programmers interviewed thinks that 'programming' as such (choice of films for screening) takes the smallest proportion of her time (about three days in a two month period) among other works she has to do such as writing grant applications, chasing up the arrival of film prints and so on.

Furthermore, booking itself involves a range of tasks, for example, discussing details of the deal such as 'contras' with companies or their promoters, confirming the deal in writing, contract preparation and liaising with technical and marketing staff of the venue. On the day of the performance, programmers should make efforts to attend the performance, which is important in order to observe its quality and audience reception. Then after the performance, programmers receive invoices from the companies and other technical services which they have to check for approval.

As has been mentioned, many programmers, despite the pressure and demands of their work, enjoy it. However, there are some programmers who feel they might switch to different jobs in the near future, partly (or largely) because of the heavy pressure they are under. Not surprisingly, 'burning out' is said to be a serious issue among them.

Summary

Arts Centres are busy places with a large number of professional productions in various art forms to present. There is almost no discrimination against any particular genre. Popular as well as esoteric, accessible as well as difficult and contemporary in addition to classic work is represented. These productions are chosen from the existing suppliers by arts centre programmers who have a number of considerations to take into account. Programme choice is firstly constrained by seasonal patterns of consumer behaviour and the arts centre's geographic location in relation to general arts provision in the area and its audience characteristics. A particular production needs to be of the right size and available at the right time in order to be booked by the arts centre programmer. The programmer then considers the suitability of the product in the light of its costs, audience potential and artistic quality. One major characteristics common to arts centre programmers is the heavy and varied work load they have, not only related to programming as such but also in other managerial/operational areas. As a result, they tend to spend less than the desirable amount of time in researching products in a proactive way.

Chapter 3. Antiquated Courtship or Antagonistic Co-operation? The Relationship between Venues and Visiting Companies

Chapter 2 has outlined various constraints, parameters and variables which programmers face in considering what to present at their venues. This chapter illustrates what actually goes on between venue programmers and arts companies as the programme emerges.

3.1 Booking a Tour—How to Approach Venues

First of all this is largely a market with more companies wishing to get their performance booked than the number of slots available at venues. As a result, programming staff of arts centres are inundated with endless telephone calls. At the peak time of the year a programmer may receive on average forty calls a day. In order to protect their time, some programmers refuse to talk to those they see as inexperienced administrators. Not to return calls is another practice common to programmers.

Programmers also receive printed information on productions on a continuous basis, about four to five packs a day, or twenty a week. Some of the packs are well-made with succinct information but others are of low quality and the language tends to be self-centred in the views of programmers. Programmers firstly need basic information on particular products such as

- cost of the production per performance
- available dates
- technical requirements
- marketing support available
- education work available

(Maitland undated b, p13)

In addition, they need objective descriptions of the plot, style of acting or movement, notes on author, composer, designer etc where relevant, selling points and a realistic assessment of the potential audience. In practice, it is said that information sent to them is often poor, along the lines of “in Supershow Co.’s inimitable, innovative, exuberant style, a tragi-comic tale, with music, dance and visual effects, based on the famous novel by Nils Schneldt, suitable for those aged 0-100” (a fictious example given by Barnett 1987, p5).

Packs without an easily comprehensible description of the products go straight into the bin. There are of course some programmers who go through every pack and place some interesting ones in their in-trays and return to them after accumulating more packs. This kind of sorting process may lead to a booking but not very often. If, however, booking is only occasionally made through the information pack sent to programmers, how do companies get booking dates? In what other ways do programmers identify products worth booking? Why do some packs but not others catch programmers' attention? For the time being, these questions remain unanswered but will be taken up for analysis in the next chapter. We now come back to the discussion of the approaches made by companies to arts centres.

Inexperienced company administrators may, whether after sending a pack or not, simply phone up any venue that looks suitable in the directory. They are likely to get refused in many cases. A more experienced administrator of a small-scale company interviewed described how she would commission the design of a visually attractive pack. She would send the packs off to venues well in advance of the tour period. She would then sit down in front of the telephone, trying to secure bookings with venues.

She would firstly go through her 'Box A' containing cards of some 50 venue names to which the company is known and are hence more likely to give a date than others might do. As was mentioned, this is a buyers' market where programmers are in a stronger position and therefore she needs to have determination and perseverance in order to achieve her target. If it turns out to be difficult for her to get sufficient tour dates with venues in Box A, she moves on to Box B and trawls the next target venues. In the worst case, she would need to consult the directory of the British Performing Arts Yearbook.

These weeks are, according to her, very demoralising. However, it is essential work, particularly because having twenty public performances in four RAB regions is a condition for funding by the Arts Council of England. To get a good tour schedule, however, is a task which is difficult to achieve because of two considerations which must be taken into account. One is that the booked venues should be as geographically close to each other as possible or well-connected from one to the next so that the company can move efficiently around in the country. This need however often gets compromised. The other consideration is that the tour dates should be as packed in as few weeks as possible because the company pays performers weekly wages only if there is one work (eg a performance or a workshop) in a week, regardless of the schedule for the rest of the week. (The company does not pay performers for the weeks with no work at all.) In other words, booked dates scattered over a number of weeks would be very expensive for the company.

To be booked into the 'right' places is equally difficult for two reasons. One is that the administrator might not have all the information on the venues regarding the factors that affect performance in advance. Physical conditions and specifications of the stage are most important. Whilst hard facts on these are obtainable, they do not give a good sense of the whole ambience and suitability for the particular product of the company, including whether the stage is warm enough and the venue is clean and well-maintained or not. She would accompany the tour or visit the venue beforehand whenever possible but this may be too late. The other factor which makes her booking difficult is that when she books she does not know exactly what the product is going to be like. Work is in progress and a number of modifications may be made towards the start of the tour.

Given all these conditions, it is most sensible for her to go back to the venues which are known to the company already. There is another reason for the company to tend to return to the same places. Through regular contact it becomes easier for the company to have multi-faceted relationships with specific venues, for example, in the form of providing educational workshops as well as performances. This helps to strengthen grant applications to funding bodies for other projects in the future, as it demonstrates that the company (and the venues) have strategies for artistic and audience development.

For a more established, middle-scale company with more resources, the administrator can be more strategic. S/he would send, similarly to the previous case, about 150 packs but would not ring as many venues. S/he has a regularly updated list of some 30 to 40 venue managers with whom s/he and the company have had good relationships over the years. An interviewed administrator of this kind states that for the company the relationship is with venue managers rather than with venues:

As far as I know, venue managers have shifted in the sector between venues of this scale....So it tends to be that you follow the promoters around. At one point, X [a venue manager] moved from (one theatre to another) but programmed for both venues for some time. So we could book with him for two places. It was so easy and we were lucky.

Or even if Y, another programmer and a supportive promoter of the company, moves to a venue which is not in the position to book the company for various reasons, she would keep talking to him, because:

it may not be that he can really programme us for another couple of years, but he's on my list of people to keep talking to....I feel it's important. When the time is right for the company and the Theatre, he's the right person to support us.

She would write to these key individuals twice or three times a year to keep them informed of what the company is up to. Therefore by the time the final pack is received by the venue managers there has been some input on the product development at the company.

For the companies of this scale in the sector, there are also a number of opportunities to formally discuss issues between companies and programmers, arranged by the Touring Department of the Arts Council and by the umbrella organisation. Programmers of venues and festivals would meet and talk with company administrators to exchange information and highlight common issues.

A company of this status may be approached by venues but the administrator could afford to be selective and might mildly refuse to come if she could not see "the context is right for the company". In other words, if the venue did not seem to have a clear policy and a strand of programming with proven record that would fit the company, it is likely that the company is going to be used to fill in a gap and the audience may not be there. This particular company performs on a fee basis so that the audience turn-up rate would not matter in financial terms alone but would have a demoralising effect on performers, and hence this kind of venue would be avoided.

For companies with a national and international reputation and long-standing fame, it is a different story. The administrator of a company in this category which I interviewed would start to book eighteen months ahead of a tour, even before the rehearsals begin. Artistic director(s) would have informed her of what kind of stage and what type of audience the work in progress would be suitable for. She, an experienced administrator and a respected figure in the sector, knows of some 200 venue managers. She would then "shortlist the venues, consult the artistic director(s) and just ring the venue managers (ie programmers) up". She may send packs later but that is supplementary and not as an essential tool for securing tour dates.

3.2 Marketing for Touring

Alongside booking a date, the fee and the payment arrangements need to be negotiated. For small-scale venues and companies, a flat fee seems to be common practice. As the size of both

companies and venues increases, more complicated arrangements start to emerge, including the box office split with variations on the ratio. For example, the first £1,000 of the sales may go to the company and then comes a 50:50 box office split. The complexity of the arrangement derives largely from a concern with marketing and the desire of each party to encourage the other to make efforts in it.

In fact, marketing is a major area of relationship between arts centres and visiting companies where both are mutually dependent and need to be highly collaborative. Companies do not normally have a direct relationship with nor good knowledge of local audiences, which venues are supposed to possess. Venues in turn have to depend on companies for the information and visual images of the shows in order to sell them. However, anecdotal legends abound about companies and venues blaming each other for the inappropriateness of the marketing. On arrival at the venue for a performance a company may find that the fliers and posters it sent weeks ago are stacked below the desk of the marketing manager. Or a venue manager feels betrayed to find the performance s/he booked and which the company said would be about a wedding turned out to have a gloomy plot about a funeral. Or the marketing manager of a venue is angry not to receive prints s/he is supposed to receive from the company or even the exact title of the performance in time to go to press in the season's diary.

Summary

The relationship between arts centres and touring companies is asymmetrical in the sense that there tend to be more companies than performance slots available. The practical relationship between arts companies and arts centre programmers is various. On the one hand there are examples where both have visions and strategies which result in mutually beneficial relationships. On the other hand anecdotes of poor relationships are multiple. One area that is crucial to the relationship is marketing. In order to maximise the box office income which benefits both visiting companies and arts centres, both parties need to work in close collaboration. In practice, however, the extent of co-operation varies.

Chapter 4. A Changing Relationship between Arts Centres and Visiting Companies

So far I have largely discussed the programming of professional arts and cultural events by referring to the term 'booking'. This and the overriding tone of the discussion may have suggested that arts centres simply buy in finished products, and the relationship between arts centres and visiting companies is centred around booking and marketing. This chapter will reveal that the relationship in recent years is far more complex than that. I will firstly explore the producer role increasingly played by arts centres. Secondly I will analyse several changes in the economic and aesthetic environments within which arts centres and companies operate, which have implications on the changing relationship between the two.

4.1 Venues as a Producer

As has been mentioned from time to time, many arts centres have been evolving and changing from 'receiving houses' to 'presenting venues' and have become originators of work to a certain extent. In the Arts Council survey (MacKeith 1996, p30; O'Brien 1997, pp23-24), over half of the respondents commissioned new work, and over 70% had been involved in collaborations. There are others (about one third of the respondents) whose own productions were later toured to other venues. For one of the arts centres I studied, self-production, which may involve local community people working with professional directors, is a major area of activity and occupies the theatre spaces more often than bought-in products do.

There are a number of reasons why commissioning, own production and co-production have become prevalent among some arts centres, venues which are primarily receivers of productions made elsewhere. Firstly, in the course of organisational development arts centres have generally become more professional and better-equipped in terms of staffing and established programme patterns and recognition in the local community. Moving into the area of production is one manifestation of this.

Secondly, there has been a perceived lack of good product available in the market in some sectors, most notably in children's theatre. Unlike some European countries such as Sweden where theatre for children is a well-recognised sector and imaginative work is constantly

produced, Britain is said to lack this. For example, there is no earmarked funding for children's theatre in the arts funding system, and it is largely dealt with within the budgets for drama. Because venues by their very nature depend heavily on what is produced elsewhere, they have had to develop original work in an area where there is little to draw upon. Children's shows are, at the same time, generally profitable for venues⁷ and therefore self-production in this particular area can produce double benefits.

The third reason for self-production is staff motivation and training. By getting involved with production, staff can have deeper insights into the working of arts organisations which they host. The venue staff and the arts organisations may come to acquire a good understanding of each other and eventually share values. From the senior manager's point of view, this is also a good opportunity to get the staff to rise to new challenges. In a similar vein, self-production in particular is seen to help the organisation to sharpen its edge. By keeping up with new talents among artistic directors and their ideas, venues may become more adept at making informed judgement on what productions to buy in as well. Self-production involves higher financial risks than buying in and therefore confronts the organisations with constructive challenges.

Fourth, commissioned or co-produced work may help to raise the organisational profile in the national media and within the arts establishment. A commissioned work is most likely to be premiered at the venue and hence to be reviewed in the national press with the venue name identified. The work then tours around in the UK carrying the venue name with it. To what extent attention is paid by the arts world and by the general public to the commissioner is hard to quantify, but the heightening of organisational profile is believed to take place.

The final point has already been mentioned in Chapter 3. Having a wide range of partnerships with arts organisations particularly through commissioning and co-producing is generally seen favourably by arts funding organisations; it is often taken by them as a sign of the professional standards, imagination and artistic quality of the arts centre. To refer to these projects often helps to enhance future grant applications.

The creation at the Arts Council in the early 1990s of funds open to both venues and promoters must be seen in this context. With the funds on the one hand and the professional development and aspiration of arts centres on the other, some strands of new work have been made possible.

⁷ See Cameron (1993) for an economic analysis on the use of pantomimes at repertory theatres to cross subsidise other productions.

Some arts centres, satisfied with the effects of commissioning new work, have established their own funds by saving some money from ordinary budgets or by special fund-raising and aim to expand the number of works to produce.

4.2 The Changing Relationship between Venues and Visiting Companies

The above has explained the motivations of arts centres to move from receiving into the area of producing the arts. From the perspective of a visiting company, commissioning by venues is generally welcomed as an additional source of income. To suggest that venues and companies are increasingly closer to each other and work in collaboration may present too rosy a picture. There are a number of complexities in the relationship between the two sides we need to pay attention to.

First, the current economic climate relating to the national arts funding system is having adversarial effects. Traditionally, arts centres rely heavily on small-scale companies which tend to be 'project-funded' clients of the Arts Council of England (or of similar status at the RABs). However, the small-scale touring sector is financially more precarious than middle-scale touring companies which benefit from a certain degree of financial security from their funding bodies. Recent cutbacks in arts funding have been said to hit the small-scale sector particularly hard⁸ and some small companies have had to disband because of financial difficulties.

Unlike building-based drama companies, small-scale touring companies have lacked sectoral data regarding the number of performances, attendances, ticket yields and so on (Feist 1996, pp4-5). It is said however that the availability of product is diminishing in quantity and may well be deteriorating in quality (at least from the arts centres' point of view).

Secondly, theories of joint campaigns and strategy planning in marketing are relevant largely to a block of events (eg middle-scale projects whose productions run for at least a week and mini festivals consisting of one-off performances), but not to one-night-stands as such. Neither the venue nor the company can afford to invest in special marketing of one-off events apart from including them into venues' general brochures and placing fliers within the arts centre.

⁸ For example, grants to 'projects' by the Arts Council of England decreased by 26% in real terms between 1986/7 and 1994/5 while the overall expenditure of the Arts Council of England in drama increased by 12% in the same period (Feist 1996, p10).

Those arts centres which rely heavily on one-night-stands therefore do not develop extensive relationships with companies in the area of marketing.

Third, marketing, which is supposed to be a major area of mutual interest, can be a stumbling block to the development of a closer relationship between touring companies and venues. There is a move among some confident and relatively well-resourced companies to seek more power in marketing at touring venues. Some companies which receive the share of the box office sales (rather than a straight fee) have started to look carefully at what remains with the venue and what is returned to them. The sales from the box office will be transferred to the company according to the agreed terms eventually, but the volume of the sales and the length of the period for which it is kept at the venue can be considerable and bear substantial interest. The customer database is solely kept by the venues and it is not yet clear in data protection terms whether it can be passed on to the company or not.

For these reasons, some touring companies have set up their own direct telephone 'box office' which customers can contact for whichever venue they are going to. In this way, the companies are in effect undermining the position of the venues: part of the ticket sales may well be returned to the venue as agreed, but the venue loses interest borne out of the sales, and more substantially, the customer information. At the moment, this practice is only beginning to be tested by a middle-scale, established touring company although it may have existed among some of the small-scale companies in a limited way. Some investment has to be made to operationalise this direct marketing device, but it would not be too expensive to do so for a relatively well-resourced organisation. Even small-scale companies can form a consortium to share the costs, if they share the same audiences such as in contemporary dance.

Fourth, as far as established companies are concerned, they can be selective about venues and may prefer not to have touring circuits as such. As has been illustrated in Chapter 3, these companies would like to develop product ideas first and then select suitable venues, which would vary from one production to another. There are already other constraints on artistic creativity and therefore they would prefer not to be pre-determined by venues.

Fifth, a gap may be created between venues and companies by an aesthetic development. Some interesting developments in the arts are taking place outside 'black box' theatre spaces. The practice of Live Art is a good example, such as installation work at art galleries and site-specific work occurring in unconventional settings. There are not many who would promote

these works, as they are seen to be difficult to market, but work of this kind has flourished particularly over the last several years (Keidan undated). One definition of artistic innovation in the performing arts may be to defy convention in the art form, ie challenging the media/mode of expression and changing the nature of presentation (Crane 1987, p14). In this sense it is a natural departure for arts producers to go beyond what they see as conventional, restrictive spaces, and present work which is time-bound and/or site-specific so as to redefine the social and organisational context for the production and display of art (Crane 1987, p15).

Conclusion

There are a number of arts centres trying to expand the commissioning of work. At the same time, the good practice of collaborative marketing has been promoted between some arts centres and arts companies. Although these trends may suggest an increasingly close relationship between arts centres and visiting companies, which is much encouraged by arts funding bodies, the work environment in which both sides operate has more complexities.

There are some companies which like to avoid having fixed touring circuits. For small-scale arts centres, joint marketing is only worthwhile in certain limited circumstances. Relatively well-resourced touring companies have started to undertake marketing themselves, which means the erosion of joint marketing which should benefit both sides. Most seriously, the funding system and the economics of the arts encourage successful small scale shows to abandon the arts centre circuit to move to middle- to large-scale venues. Finally an increasing number of arts companies and artists are presenting work beyond the traditional confinement of purpose-built spaces for the arts. Given these changing trends in funding, marketing and artistic creation, it will be interesting to see what kind of relationship will develop between arts centres and non-building-based producers of the arts.

Part 2: Strategies for Programming—The Social Construction of Programme Diaries

Part 1 has provided a basic introduction to the work of programming at arts centres. A striking feature is that the arts centre programmer deals with a vast number and a wide variety of productions relative to his/her limited time and expertise. How s/he manages to make a programme diary becomes even more difficult for us to understand when we know that the programmer is often involved with other work than presentation in the running of the arts centre.

Part 2 will place the work of arts centre programmers under the microscope and analyse the ways in which they manage the complexity inherent in the shaping of season diaries.

Chapter 5 will map out various means used by programmers to acquire product. We will see that, despite the apparent variety in the methods, the use of personal contacts threads them together and is seen as indispensable to effective work by programmers. It will then analyse the mechanism through which programmers prioritise different products and project proposals and decide which to present.

Chapter 6 will investigate the implications of the large quantity and wide variety of work to be undertaken by programmers and the impacts of the multiplicity of art forms and genres covered at arts centres. It will argue that programming goals such as ‘quality’ and ‘coherence’ often lack concrete substance and these words are used to summarise programme outcomes rather than to guide programme making. The chapter will also argue that programmers employ a number of strategies with which to achieve the best possible artistic quality and minimise financial risks. Examples are establishing regular product suppliers and developing a portfolio of products with different degrees of estimated risks and benefits.

Chapter 5. Product Acquisition

Chapter 3 has illustrated the typical processes by which performing arts companies approach arts centres for tour dates and the kind of negotiation that goes on between the two. When we focus on programmers and examine the routes by which they get to know of available and potential products, however, we will see that the description in Chapter 3 forms only one part of a larger picture. This chapter will explore various means employed by programmers to acquire products and analyse the amount of attention given to them. I will argue that the degree of attention is closely related to the chances of booking for the products and that personal contact largely determines whether a product can attract the programmer's eye or not whatever route it comes through.

5.1 Various Means of Product Acquisition

Most programmers emphasise that they use a variety of means for acquiring products and just sitting back in the office to receive telephone calls and posted packs is not an effective way. Particularly since the invention of the term 'presenting venue' as opposed to 'receiving house', other more pro-active ways of obtaining information and discovering interesting companies have been highlighted. Skimming through various trade journals, magazines and newspapers for the general public is a conventional and yet useful way. In the press there may be interesting companies or quotable expressions to put into programme notes.

Festivals provide excellent opportunities for programmers to see a number of productions intensively and to meet people or see their acquaintances in the arts world. Most programmers mention Edinburgh (referring mostly to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe):

Everybody meets at Edinburgh.

August is a cultural desert, but of course everybody goes to Edinburgh.

Conferences and their tea breaks are equally important for programmers to exchange information with acquaintances and extend contacts for future use. For contemporary dance there is an even more convenient showcase scheduled bi-annually for the venue programmers to

see a large number of shows over a weekend while meeting with artists and fellow promoters at the same time.⁹

For experienced programmers, hearing from artists and independent promoters about the ideas they are formulating and shaping them into defined projects is an important method of product acquisition. The arrangement may take the form of commissioning, co-production or co-promotion, depending on what is involved, the financial position and artistic nature of the project. This is a very exciting and inspiring way of 'product development' for these programmers, much more so than the acquisition of a finished product would be.

In these ways of product acquisition, the importance of personal contact is mentioned by programmers most emphatically. They regard such contact as the essence of effectiveness in their work:

I have friends in similar posts and ask them 'Hey, what did you think of that?'

I put this band on (my boss) never heard of. I said, 'the agent said this is good.' He laughed and said, 'Of course he recommends it because he is selling it to you'. But I knew that he [the agent] would not try to sell anything that he would not think good. It is a matter of trust.

Over the years you build up trust relationships with programmers, promoters and companies. This is very much a 'personalities-driven' business.

Personal contact can help them in three ways.

First, for film programmers, the personal contact with film distributors (and the British Film Institute [BFI] officers if they are supported by it) is the only way of getting the product. This tends to be a brutally commercial deal in a closed marketplace with a limited number of players. Both film programmers and distributors play a poker game over the telephone. Distributors push forward their interests, while film programmers want to hire the print considering its audience potential, the length of hire, the days of the week for screening and cultural significance they attach to the film in question in the light of the overall artistic policies of the organisation. Equally, in an unstructured and scattered market where products are hard to locate, such as children's theatre, too, personal contact is essential: it works as an immediate way of finding new products.

Second, personal contact can place programmers ahead of others in a commercially-oriented, popular event worlds and generally in supplier-led markets. By the time programmers are

⁹ Up to around the mid-1970s several RAAs (particularly in remoter parts of England) used to organise annual booking conferences (known as 'cattle markets'), to which promoters, arts companies and local venues came together to see and buy shows.

officially informed of a possible tour of a popular show it may be too late to obtain a date. To know of the tour informally, ahead of others, through personal contact with commercial promoters allows programmers to jump the queue.

Third, personal contact provides excellent opinions about the content of the product being considered or the administrative/managerial capacities of the arts organisation concerned. When unsure about what appears to be an interesting (or dubious) product on offer programmers can ask other programmers or related professionals for their views and actual experiences. This can be done in-house, but given the limited specialist knowledge within organisations, programmers are much more likely to ask outside. They would ring the people whose judgements they trust and interpret or adapt the given opinions according to their specific situations. Or those people telephone programmers to make recommendations. Information obtained from external programmers and other specialists will reduce the risk involved in the booking of something unknown and such information is therefore highly valued. Companies which are aware of this practice include the names and telephone numbers of venues they have been to or are going to perform at in order to encourage reference between programmers.

5.2 Analysis of Product Acquisition—Queue Discipline

To sum up the various ways of product acquisition, they are as follows:

- 1) The company (or artist, agent, promoter etc) unknown to the programmer sends information and the programmer becomes interested. The contact starts with a telephone call mostly from the company to follow up the posted pack and occasionally vice versa.
- 2) The company and the venue have established trust relationships already. Therefore the programmer is happy to book the company even before detailed information on the next production is available. Or the programmer and the company work together to shape up a project idea to a finalised production.
- 3) The programmer conducts research and discovers an interesting product. This may be done in-house by reading journals and magazines or by literally going out to festivals and shows to which s/he may (or may not) be invited. Research may be consciously done with an aim of identifying companies or contacts related to a specific art form, genre or issue (eg gay art). Or it may be more of an on-going, sub-conscious activity of the programmer, spanning into his/her private time.

- 4) Colleagues from venues, or promoters and other people in the business, telephone the programmer to talk of a show which they thought was excellent and recommend that it should be booked.

The breakdown of all productions into these categories differs from one centre to another and from one art form to another. Table 5.1 below generalises the estimations given by the interviewees. It needs to be noted that the first method is little used by the majority of the interviewees and yet it is the most over-subscribed. For example, even for the programmer who uses this route more often than others do (ie 30% of 120 bookings he makes in total per year), the selection works as follows. He receives over 1,000 approaches per year. In the first sorting process only one in five go into his 'In-tray' and the rest are discarded, which theoretically leaves him with 200 projects to consider. From this pool, again only one or less in five manages to get booked.

The second route of trust relationship tends to be more frequently used by most programmers. The frequency of the third method may look more substantial than one might guess based on the comment that they do not have much time to go out and see products. The higher than expected percentage is due to the bookings made intensively at festivals and showcases.

Table 5.1 Methods of Product Acquisition

	Method	Frequency (Estimated Average, %)
1	Unsolicited Approach	0-30
2	Trust Relationship	50
3	Research	20-30
4	Peer Recommendation	10-20

In order to understand the priority of these methods and how the first method in particular works, reference to a study by Powell (1978) is useful. Although the study is not on arts programming but on publishing, what he explains about the behaviour of editors throw much light on our case, and hence deserves a lengthy reference.

Powell (1978, p238) identifies the ways in which editors in publishing houses obtain manuscripts (or book proposals) for publication as follows.

- 1) The author initiates the contact with the publishing house.
- 2) The author has some previous relationship with the house.
- 3) The editor makes efforts to hunt for material.

Like the arts centre programmers we are examining, editors in the two academic publishing houses investigated by Powell¹⁰ are bombarded with project ideas to make choices from. According to the author, the key for contract signing is the amount of attention a manuscript or a book proposal can receive from editors. In this respect, the first method which is the most frequent is in the least favourable position. Editors receive ten to twenty times as much 'raw material' as they could ever publish and much more than they can go through carefully. Therefore what happens is that a large number of manuscripts and proposals are piled up on editors' desks at any given time. Many of them are given only quick glances and put into 'To reject' trays.

In contrast, the second category is less frequent but more likely to receive editorial attention and hence may get published, too. The third method of acquisition is the least frequent but when a material is 'found' in this way, it is almost certain to be published.

Powell accounts for this relationship between the frequency and the chances of publication in the three categories by referring to what Schwartz (1975) termed the 'queue discipline'. According to Schwartz, organisations which process people or things created by people, such as scientific journals and hospitals (and we may add arts centres in relation to their selection of products to present), would have systems of prioritisation. Basically, the order of arrival tends to dominate; clients are queued and given attention on a 'first come, first served' basis. However, priority may be given to those at the bottom of the queue for good reasons, and this is where interesting patterns emerge. In the case of publishing, Powell explains that although the first category may have already formed a long queue, projects via the second and third categories would easily jump it because editors know that otherwise the authors may go elsewhere quickly or because editors already have personal interests. Having been moved to the top of the queue, projects via the second and third routes receive attention from editors and get processed. As a result, proposals in these categories enjoy greater chances of publication and early contract signing than the unsolicited manuscripts in the first category can have.

Most of the above description on publishing seems largely applicable to our case¹¹ and it explains the behavioural patterns of arts centre programmers. Arts centres, particularly with a

¹⁰ One publishes books of a scholarly nature and yet of general appeal in particular disciplines and the other for highly specialised monographs meant for a narrow subfield of specialists.

¹¹ There are, of course, a few differences between the work of editors and that of arts programmers, which suggest that arts programmers need to spend less time on dealing with project proposals, unsolicited packs in particular, than book

longer history and extensive contacts in the touring arts market, receive a large number of unsolicited packs and sales telephone calls. However, programmers do not have enough time to go through them one by one with great attention. There are many programmers who would in principle only book productions, companies and artists they (or their colleagues) have personally seen or known of fairly well, allocating only 5% of their available slots to the first method (ie unsolicited approaches from strangers) as a result.

Therefore, it is very important for arts companies to be known to programmers in one way or another and the packs should function only to activate the memories of the programmers. Does this, however, mean that the arts world only operates within a self-perpetuating circle that does not admit newcomers? One programmer vehemently denies this suspicion: "It's not difficult to break into a circle. If you are good, you'll get noticed." To explain how this breakthrough could happen, it is useful to return to our discussion of personal contact.

Recall the means of product acquisition I have described:

- 1) The company unknown to the programmer initiates approach.
- 2) The company and the venue know each other and the programmer receives information on work in progress from the company.
- 3) The programmer researches and discovers interesting products.
- 4) Peer recommendation.

The role played by personal contact is obvious in the second and fourth way of product acquisition in the above list. In the third way, too, personal contact plays a key role: the programmer would ask his/her colleagues where to look for or what they think of a product in question. Even in the first way which may appear the least personal, what can attract the programmer's attention is 'recognisable' names in the pack. The names may not be known to the general public but ring a bell to the professionals in this business. They can be those of artists, producers, designers, venues, festivals, or any project that companies have been associated with, which programmers would read as signs of quality and indicators of style. In this sense, therefore, packs which manage to reach in-trays are not completely anonymous: personal contact is quietly working here, too.

A parallel is found in the behaviour of art collectors and dealers in a study by the economic anthropologist Plattner (1996). His explanation of trust relationship between the buyer and the seller is interesting: this is not very different from a peasant market in a developing country where the notion of community plays a key role. Here economic transactions of goods and

editors do. First, the familiarity of product suppliers tends to be greater at arts centres than at publishing houses. Second, visual images which arts projects tend to make heavy use of helps the filtering process at arts centres.

services whose values are hard to determine require embedding the two sides in an enduring and generalised relationship where betrayal or cheating will eventually result in the culprit expelled from market participation (pp11-12, pp147-150). This theory again underlines the importance and key function of personal contact in our case.

Summary

Arts centre programmers employ various means to acquire products—performing arts productions, film prints, exhibitions for loan and individual artists for originating exhibitions. As arts centres have become more professional and proactive, the receipt of printed materials by post and telephone calls is now seen as only one of many more ways to acquire product. To find out ‘what is out there’ programmers try to skim through journals and magazines and go to festivals, theatres and galleries as much as they can. As their time and money budgets are tight, there are two more important methods. One method is to return to the same companies they can trust, and the other is to obtain information through personal contacts which can be done on the phone. Both methods are not only efficient but also reliable and effective in quality. Programmers frequently ring a variety of arts professionals, including their fellow programmers, artists, agents and promoters, development agencies and arts funding bodies to find available products, and these people would in turn phone them for recommendations.

The concept of ‘queue discipline’ has been useful to explain the relationship between the different means of product acquisition and the priority given to them in making booking decisions on the part of the programmer. Individual programmers may have different systems of sorting the flow of information about potential products, but in essence they put them into a queue. What comes through personal contact tends to jump the queue and be processed first, and hence enjoys a better chance of being booked. In short, the importance of personal contact is definitive in the business of programming at arts centres. Unsolicited packs are only likely to grab the programmer’s attention when they include ‘recognisable’ names.

Chapter 6. Strategies for Programme Making

So far I have discussed the nature of the negotiation between venues and companies over tour bookings and outlined the ways of product acquisition which programmers employ so as to broaden the scope of options and be creative in presenting, rather than receiving, professional productions in the arts and culture. This chapter draws on Chapters 3 and 5 and analyses in more detail the ways in which programmers work in shaping the season diaries.

As was described in Chapter 2, arts programmers have a very heavy work load, being not only responsible for a variety of art form and genre but also in charge of managerial duties. The implications of both the sheer volume and the eclectic nature of programme are threefold: first, programmers tend to depend heavily upon a limited vocabulary to describe or justify their programme policy. Second, programmers develop certain patterns which help to reduce the stress of dealing with uncertainties. Third, programmers aim to maintain a 'balance' in season diaries, a strategy of developing portfolios containing different kinds of product so as to spread the risks. In the following each is discussed in turn.

6.1 Policy Discourse for Justification

As was mentioned before, there are differences in the industrial structure, trade practice and lead time specific to each art form, and because of these, disparate planning processes have to go on. It is almost impossible for programmers in a venue to meet and discuss the policy for a season and set out to book things to meet agreed targets. For example, at one of the largest arts centres studied in which a number of individuals are involved in booking it is only recently that regular meetings to discuss programming philosophy, ideas, policy and strategies in a broad way were instigated. These meetings however are not expected to affect immediate actions but intended to work towards shared values on a long term basis. In an arts centre with only one programmer to cover all areas it might be easier to have an overview as s/he knows in every detail what is firmly pencilled in and how much is still to be sought. However, since each production has been placed at different points in time the whole may not represent specific aims in the completed diary. It is more realistic to understand that the programme as a whole is an amalgamation of decisions made at different points in time and by different staff not necessarily in relation to the others, rather than the result of a plan-driven, determinant approach.

Under such circumstances there is a need for programmers to have a discourse to explain and justify their actions. The key words used by programmers to summarise the events include 'variety' and 'diversity' on the one hand, and 'balance' and 'coherence' on the other. The potential conflict between these two kinds of notions is often mitigated by the heavy use of 'quality' as an overarching principle. The vocabulary is almost limited to these terms and, despite their vagueness particularly in the case of 'coherence' and 'quality', repeated in many places not only by programmers but also by funders and other related arts professionals. As is often the case with the arts (see, for example, McGuigan [1983] for the case of grant-making at the Arts Council of Great Britain in literature), 'quality' and 'coherence' remain un-defined but recognisable, at least within arts centres and between programmers and the people whom they contact. Despite the lack of precision and substance in these key terms they seem to be regarded as appropriate and sufficient at least for the purpose of communication among themselves.

To illustrate that these key words are not so much related to explicit objectives in programming as useful expressions to positively describe results, one programmer stated that:

It's terribly difficult to achieve coherence [in programmes]. We try to do it by changing the way in which we contextualise each event...Coherence is not something to be sought. It's like happiness....It's an essence, not a part.

Another example that shows the key words are for 'post-event' justification rather than for the aims to guide programming can be obtained from a programmer in her reference to the content of service agreement between her arts centre and one of its funders. The agreement which spells out the goals of programming by specifying the numbers of professional productions from different art forms and genres to be presented is explained by her: "these quantitative indicators are there, but they are what we would be doing anyway". In short, arts programming proceeds in an evolutionary, sometimes fragmented way and "what arts centres are doing anyway" is rationalised by the single term of quality.

Having briefly made a somewhat critical view of programming practice and the use of some key words by arts centres, it is however possible to suspect that the notion of 'coherence' in particular matters largely to programmers themselves and to other arts professionals, but much less to their audiences. It is generally said that the arts audience in the UK is divided by art forms. For example, there is little overlap between comedy and contemporary dance audiences in terms of age, demographic and socio-economic characteristics. It can also be assumed,

although some exceptions have been witnessed by programmers, that arts centres, particularly large ones, have a number of different, parallel audiences. There is a need for research on this issue to be systematically conducted at arts centres and also sector-wide. However, available data and informal but on-going observations made by the staff point to a hypothesis that arts centres cater to different 'taste publics'. As a whole they may draw a diverse community but the loyal core who would liberally cross-over different kinds of events is not very large. Therefore, it can be said that most audiences pay attention only to their favourite art form events in the programme brochures and do not read the diaries as a whole.

6.2 Routinisation for Programme Development

The second phenomenon that results from the eclectic nature of programming at arts centres is that programmers tend to establish some patterns and mechanisms to minimise uncertainty of choosing what is difficult to specify in concrete terms and before the final execution. At this point it is helpful to refer to the explanations given about commercial cultural industries for us to better understand arts centre programmers. It must be noted that the ultimate purpose of cultural industries is profit-maximisation, different from the goal of loss-minimisation commonly held by not-for-profit arts centres. However, the reference is valid insofar as they are both in the business of 'editing', as has been referred to in the Research Methodology. DiMaggio (1977) observes that:

...managers of [cultural industry] organizations place a high value on predictability. Certainty that the performance of similar tasks in similar ways will lead consistently to a desired outcome...facilitates the establishment of stable procedures, routines, communication channels, and interpersonal relationships that ensure continued performances and minimize risk, administrative overload, and interpersonal and intergroup conflict over goals and means. Research on individual psychology and organizational behavior alike indicates that individuals, including managers of firms, find uncertainty stressful and will go to great lengths to minimize it. (p438)

Hirsch (1972) provides a similar conclusion in his argument on cross-functional relationships in the industries of popular music, film and publishing in the US. He asserts that all of these industries involve a certain degree of unpredictability in the quality of source material to be transformed into consumer products and their market potential. Therefore they have adopted systems to minimise risks, such as to forge a link between the market of raw material suppliers (eg musicians, script writers and authors) and the editing organisations (eg record manufacturers, film studios and publishing houses). It is also important to build bridges with the distribution channels (eg radio stations, film distributors and book shops) so as to boost sales.

The sociology of culture literature has analysed more specific strategies of risk minimisation practised in the media. Tuchman (1973) and Golding and Elliott (1979) on news reporting find news highly dependent on scheduling predictable events and routinising the flow of information. Unpredicted events, in contrast, are covered only to the extent organisational arrangements (eg staffing) can respond. Bielby and Bielby (1994) on programmers in American television network discuss the use of 'reputation', 'imitation' and 'genre' as rhetorical strategies to justify their choice. Television programmers in explaining their expensive and uncertain choices to their executives and advertisers tend to reduce the details of projects by classifying them into easily recognisable genres (eg sit-coms and light entertainment shows), and resorting to a discourse which emphasises the reputation of artists involved (eg the script writer) and similarity to hit programmes (eg of the plot).

In our case, it is possible to identify at least three such mechanisms. The first mechanism of introducing order to programme planning is to identify high-profile events and build other things around them. The autumn is the most important season for most venues and the year should start off with some high-profile, popular, 'sexy', artistically prestigious or highly saleable events. Not only the beginning of a season but each 'diary season', so to speak, needs to have some highlight. To identify high-flyers and assemble others around them is a common way. A piece of work commissioned by the venue may be staged to mark the beginning of its season.

In practice the identification of high-flyers or good sell-outs does not contribute to reducing the number of events to book or the pressure of bringing other things in. Or this may not always work in such a chronological order. The programmer might come across a high flyer at a later stage of planning. Psychologically at least, however, this mechanism gives a focal point, or a foundation for programme development.

The second pattern seen in programme planning is to ensure the regular return of some key companies and projects. It offers a great deal of benefit to venue programmers to establish relationships with specific companies in two respects. One is that it reduces the task of research, which contributes to cost efficiency and time saving. The other is that it reduces the uncertainty inevitably involved in this business. With the regulars, the quality of the product is, albeit to varying degrees depending upon the consistency of the companies, reliable. The sales figure is also reasonably predictable as long as proper marketing is done as previously, and marketing is easier to do because the venue knows what the visiting company can provide. Both would have a good understanding about the other in relation to artistic orientations and managerial (marketing especially) capabilities and would talk the same language.

They can have realistic expectations of each other which reduce the possibilities of conflict and strain. The regular return of the same companies can also help to develop audiences and nurture their expectations of the venues.

Despite these various benefits for both parties, arts centres are aware that there is danger of ghettoisation and over-routinisation on both sides. Therefore they make no permanent commitment to specific companies, and their official position, explicitly or implicitly, is that the regular companies have no right to return each time. Arts centres which rent studios out to arts organisations and artists are also careful not to give an expectation that they have better access to public performance/exhibition than those who are not resident.

The third mechanism for stability in programme planning is similar to the second. Arts centres build up partnerships with a number of external organisations to which they partly delegate programme decision-making, and/or have regular strands of programme co-planned with them. Collaboration with annual festivals in the same city or nearby, for example, work for mutual interest and convenience. Festival organisers are looking for spaces with marketing capabilities. Venues are equally happy, as long as the kinds of performances festivals invite would fit in with them both physically and artistically, to offer slots to festival organisers. In addition to the effect of reducing the task of research and uncertainty on the part of venues, specialist focuses attached to festivals can lend a theme or regular feature to the venue. Moreover, financial costs and risks may be shared with the event organisers.

Not only festivals but also other external bodies such as development agencies for specific art forms and music promoters are often co-presenters with venues. The effects and benefits are the same as those mentioned already.

6.3 Portfolio Development and Risk Spread

In the preceding section I have outlined the strategies and mechanisms programmers establish in order to work in a more time-efficient and effective way and to increase certainty and predictability in the choice of products for presentation. These strategies contribute to the financial and artistic security and stability of the programme.

Suppose that half of the slots are already taken up by these mechanisms but there is still a need to look at the whole range of products available in the market and put them into the remaining slots. What factors affect the programmer at this stage? What are the strategies here?

As always, the market potential and artistic contribution each event would make to the whole programme would be prominent in the mind of the programmer. On top of these fundamental parameters, programmers now would have to consider 'balance' in the season diary at least and in the whole year at most. Balance has to be aimed at between (1) different art forms, (2) experimental and traditional styles of the productions and (3) what they think will be sell-outs and unpopular events. As has been mentioned, each event may be judged according to the financial and artistic risk and contribution it involves, but now care must be taken to ensure the balance between events so as to meet financial targets and achieve optimum artistic qualities. This will help not only to offer something for every segment of the local community the arts centre serves but also to build up a portfolio of different products and spread their risks.

In addition to these obvious criteria for 'balance', there is one more, very important strategy. This may be only an implicit criterion for the programmer but it is the balance between what is predictable and less so for the arts centre. I have outlined some of the mechanisms the programmer uses for introducing the 'regulars' and the 'reliables' and thereby introducing order in the work of booking and increasing predictability in the final outcome. The firmer these mechanisms have taken root, ironically, the less interesting and exciting the work can become for the programmer. A firm basis can also allow the programmer who might want to be more creative to manage less predictable events. It is also considered to be important that the programmer should not become complacent with what s/he has established but s/he must constantly be engaged in research and development.

The programmer thus starts to try something new to the organisation. This does not always mean to put on so-called experimental work, but it is about starting a new relationship. For example, it could be a booking of a new play staged by a company known to the venue for its classical work. Or it could be to start a new activity, eg educational workshops, with a core supplier of performance in the formal sense. The point is that the arts centre experiments with productions and inter-organisational/institutional arrangements new to it, while maintaining predictable patterns of relationships which provide key events in the diary. The key concept here is, as mentioned, 'balance'.

Summary

Arts centre programmers deal with the vast quantity and remarkable diversity of professional productions available on the market alongside other work they need to carry out. It is inevitable that a season diary tends to be the result of piecemeal choices which may or may not achieve coherence as a whole. 'Quality', which arts centres do not try to define in precise terms because of the multiplicity of art form and genre represented, is perhaps the only indisputable concept that holds the presented works together. 'Coherence' may be another eligible concept to summarise what arts centres are engaged with, but it is used to ratify the results rather than as an aim.

The volume and variety of the products for the programmer to deal with necessitates some kind of order in their work. There are several mechanisms used by the programmer to reduce the stress associated with dealing with unpredictability, to decrease uncertainty in artistic quality and to minimise financial risks. Ensuring the return of the regular product suppliers and forging partnerships with external bodies are important vehicles.

Having stable and predictable strands of the programme enables arts centres to experiment with less known projects. To maintain a 'balance' between different art forms, genres, target audiences and estimated financial performances is a very important strategy of spreading risks and perhaps the only definable goal of programming.

Part 3: Arts Centres in the Cultural Production System

Part 2 has taken an analytical and critical approach to explaining the process of programming. Chapter 5 outlined various means of product acquisition employed by venue programmers. The different priorities programmers attach to them have implications for the chances of products to be booked for presentation. Personal contact has been highlighted as the most useful tool for effective programming. I have argued that personal contact is the key not only because programmers constantly ask their fellow colleagues for their views on specific products but also because programmers pay attention to ‘recognisable’ names in what would, without them, be impersonal information such as unsolicited packs sent by post.

Chapter 6 has pointed out various strategies employed by arts programmers who need to cope with the multiplicity and huge volume of their work. Programmers identify flagship projects for the season and build others around them. They also ensure the return of regular product suppliers. Co-planning programmes with external partners is another effective method to stabilise the flow of product and its quality. Constructing a season diary is thus a ‘bottom-up’ act, collecting disparate decisions made at different points in time and by different individuals, rather than a ‘top-down’ implementation of artistic policies.

Part 3 will attempt a more conceptual discussion and examine the presentation of professional arts in a wider context. Whereas the analysis in Part 2 has been mostly concerned with the transactions between product suppliers and venue programmers, Part 3 will broaden the scope and investigate arts centres as a whole in relation firstly to the many sub-sectors in the cultural sector with which they are involved and secondly to the aggregate of the ‘cultural production system’ which includes not only producers but also consumers of culture.

Central to the argument of Chapter 7 which follows will be a notion that programming is collectively made at arts centres. At the micro level, arts centre programmers are involved with a large number of networks and circles, and the opinions of the members and information flowing from them influence programme making. At the macro level, economic and policy structures of specific industrial fields, be they music or film, pre-determine what can be programmed at arts centres.

Developing the findings on the ways in which programme diaries are made, Chapters 8 and 9 will explore their implications in the wider context of cultural production. Chapter 8 will argue that arts centres seem to have a vague system of reputation, unlike many sectors in the subsidised arts. It will explore the reasons and point out some strategies being developed for a reputation system.

Chapter 9 will advance this argument and see arts centres as omnipresent in the cultural production system. This is owing to the multiplicity of art forms and genres they present and the myriad relationships necessary for such multiplicity that they build up with external partners. However, this in effect means that their place tends to be ambiguous.

Chapter 7. Programming as Collective Action

Introduction

As has been argued in Chapter 5, personal contact is the thread that connects different means of product acquisition. Its importance has been elaborated on as a key resource for establishing the 'regulars' and an indispensable reference for introducing the 'experiments' to the venues. This raises a question about the degree to which programming is the result of programmers' personal choice or the projection of personal taste. Expanding on Becker's idea developed in his book entitled 'Art Worlds' (1982), this chapter will argue that programming is better seen as the result of collective action.

Becker's (1982) main argument is that the arts are the collective product of artists and their 'support personnel', a theory which can be applied to poets who tend to be seen as self-sufficient artists as well as to film producers who can more easily be understood as people who work in collaboration with others. A composer, for example, relies, among other things, upon what performers are capable of playing. The existence and workings of music publishers, concert organisers, copyright laws, manufacturers of musical instruments (and their technology) all affect what can be written. The piece of music composed will then be admitted to the cultural world through being legitimised by critics and musicologists and received by an audience. Starting with this focus on individual artists, Becker broadens his scope to inter-organisational and inter-industrial relationships to cover the whole cultural production process: creation, distribution, reputation and consumption.

Becker was most concerned with the relationship between artists and those he calls support personnel, but in our case the work can be seen to be collective not only between individuals but also in the larger context, involving inter-organisational, institutional, industrial and international dimensions. The following expands on both of these in turn.

7.1 Collectivity at the Micro Level

To begin with, the programme can be seen as a collective product at a person to person level. This collectivity can be further broken down into two types, one within the organisations of arts centres and the other across venues and other related organisations and individuals.

First, it is common that members of staff, regardless of their posts, make contributions to programming, officially and unofficially. At two particular arts centres studied which have had substantial periods of time with no Director in post, patterns gradually developed to involve and delegate responsibilities to other staff who had not previously been involved in programming. Technical and administrative staff in small organisations are more likely to have access to programming decision-making than their counterparts in larger organisations and suggest some names in the areas which they are personally interested in or familiar with.

Collectivity within the venue organisation may have a historical dimension as well. As has been mentioned, programmes at arts centres typically involve a large number of different kinds of events which are hard to summarise. Even in those cases where strong emphasis is placed on contemporary culture the programme is wide-ranging and diverse. What develops is a largely historical accumulation of previous practices, patterns and relationships. New programmers can and may modify the programme to a certain extent, but not totally unless there are major policy changes. New additions and shift in focus may take place gradually rather than radically. It would be very costly to demolish the whole of the corporate identity embedded in programme, visibility and reputation which the venue has developed in the local and artistic communities over the years and start from scratch. Therefore historical patterns tend to be inherited, and alterations and additions are made to them.

Second, beyond the organisational boundary, programme decisions are made collectively with other professionals, even if sub- or un-consciously. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, recommendations and the views of colleagues are influential. Equally the promoters and agents with whom they have trust relationships have a decisive effect on what is brought to their attention. The recommendations and quality judgement which programmers obtain from promoters and agents or swap with other programmers tend to converge over time and they come to share values, aesthetic standards and judgements. Without these shared understandings, to put it in a different way, it is impossible to work closely with external bodies. The ones whom programmers find difficult to trust or sympathise with would become redundant in due course.

This of course does not mean that programmers are devoid of their own views or unprepared to make independent decisions. However, the difference of their views from others is most strongly related to their audience tastes. In this sense, audiences can be seen to participate in

the decision-making process indirectly but very significantly. For many programmers it is important that an existing audience is interested in the product concerned. If the company has visited previously, the programmer can easily check the box office record. If not, s/he can ask other experienced venue managers, preferably those who have similar types of audiences. At the organisational level and on a long-term basis, a genre without an existing audience may be cultivated by constantly presenting such products while giving a context to them. Developing new audiences is however costly and can take a couple of years at least.

The inter-organisational collectivity described above does not always mean that programmes in different venues which are in close touch become similar. Different venues have different constraints and packaging abilities. The networks of each venue programmer may overlap but their aggregate is different in the two venues.

In order to better understand the nature of the inter-organisational relationships in which arts centres are involved, it is helpful to refer to Kadushin (1976) who makes a distinction between 'network' and 'circle'. According to him, while a network is a system with a clearly defined boundary and a common interest, a circle is informal and fluid. It is a loose, non-institutionalised totality and the boundaries are unclear. There is no formal leadership; members do not have direct relationships with all other members, and hence it is invisible as a whole. The existence of circles is, Kadushin (1976) argues, typical of cultural production systems, and the concept seems to be particularly relevant to arts centres. An arts centre may be in a number of networks, including the ones for specific art forms. Within these networks, the arts centre may be in informal circles, for example, related to genre, ie experimental, cutting-edge, traditional and so on. Personal contact, the importance of which has repeatedly been mentioned, tends to be initially made in a network and then expanded and made substantial use of in a circle. Arts professionals in a circle related to, for example, jazz will ring each other and exchange information on current practice.

Through these informal and occasional, albeit strongly influential, webs of circles and more formal networks, programmers develop a sense of peer evaluation and this affects the shaping of the programme. This again is a sub- or un-conscious factor which programmers may or may not take into account in deciding *individual* event selections. However, in the *total* programming activity, peer evaluation and approval as perceived by programmers themselves influence the final product of the programme. There is no formal mechanism to judge which programme is better than others. However, programmers can sense how their work is seen at

least by their close peers because they will phone to congratulate on the success of season diaries when they think the programmes look interesting.

Finally programming assumes a collective element through formal relationships made between individuals, including venues, venue managers, artists and arts organisations in management boards and related services. One of the programmers interviewed had a wide range of experience and serves on the board of a major theatre festival and of a major producing (and occasional touring) theatre. She is therefore favourably positioned to know what will be produced by the organisations. It also enables her to work closely with them to develop and co-promote or co-produce some work, an opportunity which might not be easily accessible otherwise. Another programmer interviewed is a course tutor on the strategic management of venues at the Independent Theatre Council, a national body for (particularly small-scale) theatres. This is an excellent opportunity for her to get to know other venues in some depth as she hears from participants about their issues and major projects at the seminar she leads.

Arts centre directors and programmers are also likely to be involved with funding bodies as advisors or panel members. This provides them with the opportunity to go and see different productions and to critically watch, or assess other arts centres in different RAB regions, both of which provide ideas to bring back home. The board of the venue in turn draws on senior managers from arts companies. Board members in many cases function to connect internal and external stakeholders of an organisation (Middleton 1987) or provide sources of ‘insider’ information from other organisations and fields they are involved in. Mutual representation on the board by arts managers and venue managers is likely to result in joint projects and product development.

7.2 Collectivity at the Macro Level

Collectivity of programming can be more extensively found at the macro level, involving the impacts of institutional and industrial structures on programming. The association with festivals or mini series of events primarily organised by external bodies is a prime example of the programme as a result of collective activity at the smallest scale at this level. Collectivity however goes beyond inter-organisational relationships. Although it is an extreme case which involves the only centre in the sample which has a concert hall, orchestra booking deserves a more detailed description as it offers an interesting example for my argument. To put it simply,

the content of a concert is customarily decided by orchestras. For venues, there is room for negotiation but it is highly limited, as the programming of a concert operates at a more structural and industrial level as follows.

In Britain, the seasonal concert programmes of an orchestra is largely decided by its Artistic Director or Principal and Guest Conductors, namely, chief conductors with whom the orchestra works closely whatever the exact titles may be, in consultation with its General Manager or Chief Executive. The orchestra firstly decides the contents of the concerts it self-promotes usually at its resident venues (eg the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican Arts Centre, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra at the Symphony Hall in Birmingham). These concerts, financially onerous on the orchestra, are the highlight for the organisation and the platform where its artistic quality is judged. The orchestra has to earn income through 'engagement' at home and abroad (ie giving concerts for fees paid by venues or other promoters) and recordings.¹² Amongst many sources of income, UK engagement is very important to most orchestras. The key strategy of an orchestra in negotiating a date and the programme with a venue manager is to try to repeat the repertory of self-promoted concerts elsewhere. The repetition allows the orchestra to economise on rehearsals which unlike public performances do not earn a penny despite their costs.

In theory, venue managers may be offered, say, 10 to 20 different programmes by a particular orchestra if the date for the booking is open-ended. In most cases, both the venue and the orchestra can only offer limited availability for booking to each other. A date both can agree on may fall into a particular week when the orchestra concerned is supposed to be playing, for example, a piano concerto and a symphony by Mozart. The venue might say it is not affordable because of the soloist engaged in this particular programme, and ask if the concerto piece can be changed to a symphony. However, beyond this level of modification, major changes in the packages rarely take place in practice, for both the agent of the soloist and the orchestra would be reluctant to take on anything which requires extra rehearsal and practice.

Seen from an orchestra's viewpoint, this convention may have self-restrictive effects on its concert programming. Orchestras when desperately in need of an engagement must programme

¹²Available data shows that the proportion of earned income (including sponsorship) is 45% of the total income for the total of 21 orchestras in 1993/4 (Arts Council of England and BBC, 1994: 25). The total includes English regional orchestras, London's self-governing orchestras, BBC orchestras, chamber orchestras and contemporary music groups. For regional orchestras in England, the proportion of earned income is about half of the total revenue (Cultural Trends

their own promotion concerts so that they are acceptable to other venues. From a venue's point of view, their ability to programme orchestral music is highly limited and determined by how the industry works, which is beyond the scope of what can be negotiated between the visiting company and the venue.

When it comes to film, it is even more complicated and involves a more international, commercial world. To begin with, what is produced gets virtually no public exhibition unless there is an international sales agent who is interested in the film or the project idea and buys the rights to it. The film may not be even made in the first place without a sales agent who helps finance the production. The film is then sold to local distributors. Any cinema, whether commercial or non-commercial such as arts centres, is dependent on what distributors have on offer. The distributor's decision whether or not to buy the product in question basically depends upon the estimated box office return and profits made out of sales to network, satellite and cable television and video media in the light of the marketing costs involved.

The UK cinema market is highly dominated by US-majors both in the distribution and exhibition sectors (DNH 1995, p10; London Economics 1994, p176). Over 90% of the box office income in the UK cinema market is held by films of US origin, the highest penetration rate of Hollywood movies in the EU in 1991 (Durie [ed] 1993, p26). As a result of this, arts centres which are mostly committed to introducing non-Hollywood films are having difficulty in acquiring the kind of films they would like to screen because there are too few available in distribution. The role played by the BFI as a collective negotiator with distributors is important, but only a few arts centres are represented by the BFI.¹³ Arts centres show not only specialist but popular films too, because this is a very important part of income generating activity. However, arts centres, as a minority in the UK cinema exhibition sector, are in a weak position in making deals with distributors. The prints of the films they wish to show are, from an arts centre's point of view, insufficient in number and often only available some considerable time after first release.

The downward trend of European films shown in the UK in particular is exacerbated by the fact that television stations such as Channel Four are becoming less and less inclined to screen films

1991, 12: 8). London's four self-governing orchestras earn as much as 80-90% of their income from the market (Cultural Trends 1991, 12: 10-11).

¹³ In the light of this situation, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is at the time of writing considering whether to support the distribution of British films with Lottery funds (Arts Council of England undated; DCMS 1998).

of minority interest.¹⁴ The transmission fees paid to distributors by television stations can be high enough to effectively subsidise the distributor's deals with art cinemas including arts centres. What television stations feel able to air, depending on their financial and cultural policies, therefore, have knock-on effects on what is screened at arts centres.

Programming at arts centres is affected even beyond the realm of the narrowly-defined cultural sector. Take children's shows as an example. The availability of products tends to depend on the government's education policy and school funding as the companies' major clients are schools and colleges. With the exception of some imaginative teachers who believe that children's exposure to the arts is important both for their academic and emotional development, most schools would book shows either as an educational instrument for set texts or as a treat. This tends to work to make children's shows shorter in duration than is regarded as desirable by arts centres, but the products cannot easily be changed to adapt to the needs and expectations of the venues. Given the financial stringency and the increased complexity in booking with individual schools because of changes in school management¹⁵ on the one hand and the National Curriculum requirement on certain texts in English (Arts Council of England 1996, p19) on the other, non-curriculum-led companies are finding it increasingly difficult to survive. It is these companies however that arts centres would like to invite.

7.3 Programming as the Projection of Personal Charisma?

Through the mechanisms outlined in this and the previous chapters, the programme presented emerges as a product of collective action taken at different levels and dimensions, rather than as a projection of personal charisma and personal taste. In fact, some programmers would not hesitate to maintain that there is no need to have a great depth of knowledge in each art form but that it is very important to know the right people and have common sense. Interestingly nobody has expressed any embarrassment over the lack of specialist knowledge in some areas which they cover. Lack of specialist knowledge can be compensated for by building up 'circles of friends' from whom to obtain advice and opinion.

¹⁴ See, for example, Hood (ed) (1994) and Siune and Truetzschler (eds) (1992) for changes both in technology and in government broadcasting policy in the early 1990s which have meant a more competitive market for commercial television companies.

¹⁵ Theatre companies used to deal with Local Education Authority advisers who made collective booking for schools. Much of funding for school has been devolved, and schools which now self-manage do not tend to see bringing theatres to schools as a priority (Arts Council of England 1996, p19).

There is a structural element which tends to deny the possibility of programming as a projection of personal charisma and taste of the programmer. This is related to the mobility of individual products presented at arts centres and of the audience. On the one hand, touring companies by definition travel everywhere. A 'find' made by one venue programmer is hard to contain at a specific venue. Ironically, successful companies may start to raise their fees so that the original venue may no longer be able to afford it. Even more ironically a small company, once successful, is encouraged by arts funding bodies, and by agents and promoters in some cases, to increase its size, and will no longer fit the original venue. Arts centres with more than one differently sized space tend to encourage the company to grow from small to medium (and to large) which helps the artistic as well as financial development of the company.

The Arts Council's funding system also encourages companies to grow wherever possible. Middle-scale companies enjoy better funding arrangements and benefit from other services in touring and marketing, as has been illustrated in Chapter 3. The view that small-scale theatre groups and products are for research and development has been explicitly made in the literature (Arts Council of England 1996, p13) as well as in the interviews I conducted with funders. By implication, therefore, successful companies should progress to larger spaces. Arts centres with only small spaces lose out in this structure.

Audiences on the other hand have limited mobility. Conventional wisdom in arts marketing is that the majority would, in the regions, drive for up to 40 minutes in a single trip to venues, but not more than 60 minutes.¹⁶

The combination of the limited possibility for a product to be contained and the limited mobility of the audience has two implications. One is that it is difficult for the venue sector to develop a system of reputation in which some venues are seen as more eminent than others, for example, for frequently discovering talented artists previously unknown in the arts world or for programming special events only available at them. The lack of a reputation system for the sector, if this is called a sector at all, will be extensively discussed in Chapter 8.

The other implication of high product-mobility and low audience-mobility is that for suburban and rural arts centres with little other arts provision nearby it is very difficult to specialise in

¹⁶ Tomlinson (1993, p143) suggests drive-time 'isochroms' as 20, 40 and 60 minutes.

any specific area and thereby establish corporate identities and reputations through their programming. Even at urban centres, if not in central London, it is not easy to sustain venues of a highly specialist nature and of minority interest economically, for example, those dedicated to contemporary dance and Physical Theatre. It is known empirically that specialist arts provision needs a hinterland to draw a critical mass.

Summary

Drawing on the findings of Chapter 5 on the process by which products are acquired and the analysis given in Chapter 6 on the way in which arts centres' diaries are shaped, this chapter has presented a view that programming is the result of collective action, working at various levels. At the micro level, the programmer relies on arts professionals for information and views on products to be obtained. The programmer may not have specialist knowledge in every genre s/he deals with. S/he is not an impresario and does not have to be a connoisseur, but is more of an efficient co-ordinator with a good grasp of local audiences and good connections in arts circles. It is very important for the programmer to be able to ask for opinions and recommendations on the product concerned by using different networks and circles. The arts centre gains access to arts producers through its board members, whilst arts programmers obtain good contacts in the arts world through helping arts companies, funding bodies and professional associations as advisors or in other capacities.

At the macro level, collectivity emerges as a result of industrial and sectoral structures and workings. The cases of orchestral music and film industries have illustrated the impact of their business conventions and economics on the programming at arts centres. Government policy on broadcasting and education, albeit indirectly, affect what is available for them to book.

Chapter 8. The Reputation System

The discussion in Chapter 4 examining the future of arts centres as producers and presenters now needs to be expanded in the much larger context of cultural production. The theoretical argument to be made in this chapter has two parts. In the first part, I will examine whether arts centres have a 'reputation system' through which some centres would become more prestigious, famous and powerful than others. My main argument will be that there are structural factors that make the development of any system of this kind very difficult. However, in 8.2, I will identify some of the strategies for a reputation system being developed in recent years. These will explain why commissioning has become important, for some arts centres at least. This line of argument is carried forward to a conceptualisation of arts centres as venues in what I will call the Cultural Production System in the next chapter, where I will discuss the ambiguous place occupied by arts centres in the system and explain the reasons for this.

8.1 The Reputation System

In explaining why arts centres are becoming more of a producer in Chapter 4, I have left out one possible explanation, that is, the role of producer can enhance the arts centre's reputation. This is now taken up for close examination. A useful way of starting the discussion is to refer to the sociological theory, developed most notably by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, that artistic and cultural production (in a broad sense, encompassing the primary creation of an art work, its interpretation, distribution and consumption) operates in a system of allocating symbolic as well as material rewards (eg Bourdieu 1985). In the commercial sector,¹⁷ material reward may carry primary weight, but the symbolic reward has some significance as well, whereas the reverse pattern is the prevalent norm in the subsidised sector.¹⁸ It is symbolic rewards that subsidised artists, interpreters and distributors of culture seek for professional satisfaction and this may lead to material rewards personally and organisationally as well.

¹⁷ Bourdieu calls this the field of large-scale cultural production.

¹⁸ The field of restricted production, according to Bourdieu.

8.1.1 Reputation and Reward

Having identified the two types of reward—material and symbolic—which exist in what we might call a reputation system of cultural production, another angle from which to examine this system can be obtained by reference to Lang and Lang (1988). In their paper on the survival of artistic reputation among etching artists they distinguish two components of reputation, namely, recognition and renown. *Recognition* is established largely by peers and other significant ‘insiders’ such as the juries of awards and prizes. *Renown* in contrast refers to a more universal world beyond an esoteric one, including the general public. Renown is dependent on the publicity generated by critics and the press and promoted by dealers, and can be measured by press notices, sales in the market and purchases by museums. An artist may be well-recognised in the small, former world, but may not always be so in the latter and vice versa.

Crane’s (1976) typology which elaborates on evaluative systems of innovation is also helpful. She identifies four ‘reward systems’ (ie systems for rewarding innovation) in a broadly defined culture including arts, knowledge and religion. The key to her categorisation is who controls the system by allocating resources. The first is a self-contained, or ‘independent’, system operating in, for example, academia. It is the members of this community themselves who set the norm and standard for quality judgement and allocate symbolic and material rewards accordingly. An excellent scientist is recognised by his/her peers through publishing articles in journals refereed by peers and obtaining an academic post in a prestigious university again through peer selection. One should not assume that in publishing a book the scientist’s work is now judged by the editor who is unlikely to be a scholar: the editor would ask academics for professional opinions on the quality of the proposal or ask them to act as ‘series editors’ (Coser et al 1982, pp302-307). This is therefore in effect a system of peer evaluation again.

In the second reward system identified by Crane (named semi-independent) a major difference from the first is that material rewards are allocated by consumers, entrepreneurs or bureaucrats. For example, in the public arts funding system in Britain, artistic judgement is largely made by peers in various panels and committees collectively or individually. Grants will be allocated according to their views, although the material rewards may well be obtained from the market as well.

The third system is called subcultural, which is similar to the first one in a sense that it operates within a narrow community of participants. In this system, it is innovators that set norms but

both symbolic and material rewards are allocated by consumers. Crane gives examples such as black urban music, religious sects and radical science.

The fourth reward system is called heterocultural, and is characteristic of cultural industries for heterogeneous audiences. Here entrepreneurs set norms and innovative work is tested on consumers. If they provide symbolic rewards, then entrepreneurs (or bureaucrats) allocate material rewards to innovators. This then goes back to consumers who would materially reward cultural innovation. Examples are film and record industries and technology.

To integrate the discussions of Bourdieu (1985), Lang and Lang (1988) and Crane (1976) introduced so far, the amorphous concept of reputation may be better understood by delineating the following three points.

First, it is useful to have a conceptual distinction between symbolic and material rewards in a reputation system, although they may well be closely related to each other in practice. Arts organisations in the subsidised sector which obtain symbolic rewards (eg good reviews by critics) then perhaps stand a good chance of getting material rewards as well such as grants, awards and commercial gains from the market.

Second, it is also helpful to note who controls the process of resource allocation and which resources are in their hands. It might be peers of artists and the members of esoteric circles who provide symbolic rewards by making artistic judgements and providing rationale, legitimacy and validation for particular genres or works. In a more popular kind of culture, external actors such as consumers and the lay public may do the above. It is, however, useful to understand that reputation is made, not by a particular person or institution of influence, but by the dynamics of various agents involved in the whole field concerned. In other words, it is in the struggle for the power which the relevant agents and institutions seek to legitimatise art that artistic reputation, or the value of art works and belief in it, is continuously generated (Bourdieu 1980, p265).

Third, it is necessary to pay attention to the definition of quality, ie the criteria used for resource allocation, employed by resource allocators particularly in a system where more than one actor exists for different kinds of rewards.

8.1.2 A Reputation System for Arts Centres

In reviewing what has been discussed on arts centres in this paper and in the light of the above delineation, it seems that arts centres have only a vague reputation system and it is very fragmented. Programmers' sense of peer evaluation mentioned in Chapter 7 certainly exists, but only in a limited, unsystematic way. A particular arts centre may be seen as more prestigious than others in one sense, but in other respects this arts centre may fall behind others.

For example, one of the arts centres investigated, because of its size, may have a generally good reputation particularly in the field of middle-scale touring theatre and to a certain extent in contemporary arts within the established canon. When it comes to the contemporary arts of still more experimental nature, however, despite its policy of presenting 'challenging work' particularly in the Studio, much smaller arts centres can be found to have a better track record and reputation. Another arts centre I examined whose income is only 6% of the previous one mentioned above and is run virtually by one member of staff is well-known in the genre for its singular emphasis on cutting-edge, experimental work, attracting audiences from even 100 miles away. It is not that this tiny arts centre is particularly well-resourced, but due to its very smallness this space has managed to find its niche market very well.

Arts centres may however be highly-regarded by audiences in their individual localities, and service to the local community may be what really matters. However, regional producing theatres, which are also locally-based, seem to form part of a national overview and professionals would rank different theatres in one way or another. There is an implicit competition between theatres for recognition and renown, even though they do not compete for the same audience. Regional Repertory Theatres have this mutual awareness, particularly because they had been drama clients of the Arts Council until the early 1990s.

The main reason why a reputation system is unclear for arts centres is related to the diversity of the activities undertaken by arts centres and the different degrees of emphasis placed on each area. However, even when we focus on the area of professional presentation alone, arts centres only have an ambiguous reputation system. The reason for this is firstly the diverse range of the controllers who allocate resources and secondly the criteria they employ. Table 8.1 below shows the complexity of controllers and their criteria for assessing arts centres. The fact that arts centres are assessed by diverse 'juries' may not be particularly distinctive in itself, but rather the number involved especially when multiplied by the number of art forms represented at arts centres.

Those who belong to the ‘internal’ reputation system which is close to the ‘recognition’ of Lang and Lang (1988) would include arts centre programmers and funding organisations, albeit to different degrees in terms of the explicitness in making judgements about the quality of the arts centres. There are other ‘insiders’ such as festival programmers and promoters with whom arts centres work closely particularly in co-planning diaries. Visiting companies are also important judges of arts centre qualities. They can be seen as a constituency in the internal system, as they have specialist, professional knowledge about certain aspects of arts centres which the lay public does not possess. Noticeably, there are hardly any critics or aestheticians, who would normally play a very important role in reputation systems for symbolic rewards.

As to the ‘external’ system of reputation, or ‘renown’ by Lang and Lang (1988), and which is more related to the market and material rewards, an important feature to note is that visiting companies which have been discussed as part of the internal system can be included in the external one as well. Arts centres in fact work to two distinct (and related) markets: to attract as many good companies as possible is no less important than to attract a large number and a broad range of audiences to sustain arts centre activities. By being sought after among arts organisations and artists, arts centres can become selective. The quality of particular shows and the programme as a collection of them is almost entirely reliant on what visiting companies can offer.

Table 8.1 Reputation Systems for Venues—Different Actors with Different Criteria for Assessment

	<i>Internal System</i>			<i>External System</i>	
	<i>Participants in Programme Networks and Circles</i>	<i>Other Arts Centres</i>	<i>Funders</i>	<i>Arts Companies</i>	<i>Audience</i>
Particular Show(s)	*	(*)			*
The Whole Programme	*	*	*		(*)
Space, Building Customer care				*	*
Marketing, Management	*	*	*	*	

Note: * denotes the area with which the assessor is concerned, and (*) a weak concern.

The second complexity of a reputation system for arts centres is that the criteria with which different constituencies judge the arts centres is multiple, including each show; the whole

programme; space, the building and customer care; and marketing and management capabilities. This list is perhaps more wide-ranging than for many other kinds of arts organisation and artistic products.

What is noticeable in Table 8.1 is the lack of artistic concerns about venues (the items in the top two rows) on the part of visiting companies, different from other participants in the system. In fact, the value judgement visiting companies make about arts venues is quite distinctive in Table 8.1. It looks as if visiting companies and customers share the criterion of the physical features of the venue and its friendliness. However, the specific expectations of each are totally different. What visiting companies would like to have in terms of physical elements is a good stage, adequate dressing rooms and friendly staff to welcome them on arrival and chat away after the performance. Customers in contrast want easy car parking, comfortable seats, a nice restaurant, clean toilets and the welcoming Front of House staff. Moreover, visiting companies think highly of venues with good marketing and audience development capabilities. The artistic visions of venue programmers may well be personally respected by the staff of visiting companies. Generally speaking, however, what they expect of venues most of all is suitable space, bookings and good marketing to fill the house. They talk about venues based on these criteria but it is not their business to judge venues on the quality of their programme as do the participants in the internal system.

Such a diversity in terms both of 'reputation builders' and of the criteria they use in relation to arts centres inhibits the development of a reputation system for arts centres particularly for symbolic rewards and at a national level. As far as the local level is concerned, however, the system for reputation is clear; it is centred around audience and of paramount importance at least in terms of material rewards.

8.1.3 Inhibitors for a Reputation System of Arts Centres

Even when we only look at the artistic aspect of arts centres, namely, the individual events presented and the programme as a whole, there are a whole range of factors that hinder the development of a reputation system. First of all arts centres as non-producing venues are inherently dependent on the external product suppliers. Quality control is exerted mainly through the selection of products, which ultimately leaves a certain degree of uncontrollability.

The second major disadvantage for the development of a reputation system among arts centres is that touring companies by nature go to many places. In order to gain symbolic recognition, the property with which those assessed are associated must be scarce. To illustrate this point, a prestigious artist exclusively contracted with a particular art dealer can be a symbolic as well as economic asset to the dealer because this resource is unique. Insofar as professional presentation at arts centres is concerned, this kind of exclusive relation with the product is nearly impossible.

One of the strategies arts centres have employed so far so that some arts centres may become more prestigious than others is to create a speciality attached to individual products by commissioning work. However, in the current financial structure of the performing arts sector in Britain it is impossible for any arts centre to retain the commissioned piece of work within it. The product once premièred needs to travel. Attention may be paid to the name of the commissioning organisation when the performance goes elsewhere, but it is not sufficient as a key indicator around which a reputation system could be created. Furthermore, the involvement and the credit given to the venue is often limited. There are companies who would say that as far as artistic inspirations are concerned they would have done this work anyway and the commissioning money was effectively a subsidy. If the commission is to compose music, the completed work might be more strongly associated with performers of the music than where the performance takes place.

Quantity as well as quality is important as a contributing factor in reputation (Cole and Cole 1967). A genius may write a book and stay famous for a number of decades or even centuries, but this is rare. Normally an effective way of building up a reputation is to be productive and have a large number of opportunities for exposure. High productivity is important also because in an area where output quality is less predictable in the developmental phase, such as science and the arts, quantity is in a sense a necessity for the occasional production of excellent works (Cole and Cole 1967, pp387-388). At the moment, the level of commissioning at arts centres is so marginal as to be hardly recognisable by the wider artistic community. Also unlike repertory theatres performing arts productions at arts centres last only for a short period except for children's Christmas shows. This is not enough for the reputation of the commissioning arts centre to emerge and spread.

As an alternative strategy, a venue may want to emphasise its 'discovery' of some artists or arts companies at their emerging stage. Through the accumulation of such practices, a group of 'innovative' arts centres would develop differentiating themselves from others which might be

secondary disseminators. The irony, as mentioned before, is that the more prestigious visiting companies or artists become, the less likely they are to come back. Once established a company starts to charge more for a performance and can no longer be afforded by arts centres. Or the previous venues start to look too small for the company. A successful company may feel, on a personal level, sorry to abandon the small-scale venue circuit where it has been nurtured, but it is more sensible and rational to move to larger venues at least economically and also artistically (provided that their artistic dimension expands to meet the demands of the larger spaces). Moreover, a company keen to establish its reputation in its own world would, if possible, choose to perform in London for a substantial period to allow for word of mouth to spread. Though risky, the most effective way of doing this is to hire a theatre and exert total control over marketing rather than being booked for no more than a week into presenting venues.

The third structural factor which prevents the development of a reputation system for arts centres and arts venues is related to what has been discussed as the 'collectivity' of programming. It may be financially successful for a venue to host a series of concerts largely organised by an outside festival organisation. The artistic success however may well be credited to the festival and much less to the venue, depending on the degree of involvement and agreed arrangements between the two parties.

The fourth factor is related to the eclectic nature of activities undertaken and the mixed nature of professional works presented at arts centres. The mix makes it extremely difficult to assess arts centres in comparison with each other. The formal assessment conducted by the Arts Council and the RABs on their clients and funded projects is firstly art-form based. Traditionally assessment has been developed in drama, music, visual arts etc, but much less on venues for presentation. The product is made elsewhere, so the presenting venue must be praised or criticised for its collection of products in conjunction with customer care, marketing and its management in general. Also the assessment is based on 'comparison' of similar and comparable organisations. In the case of arts centres this would have to be done in totality, considering educational and other activities but not just focusing on presenting. The range of activities differs from one arts centre to another, depending on the combination of the parameters described in Chapter 2. It is therefore extremely difficult for assessors to make reasonable comparisons between arts centres.

The lack of comparability is not only relevant to the assessment by the funders but also to the internal system of symbolic reward. For literary work, for example, de Nooy (1991) argues that

classification and comparison are the key routes through which reputation emerges: “in order to make a name, an author’s work has to be compared to the work of contemporaries and predecessors. Thus, a reputation specifies the artistic affinities and differences between authors.” (p513) As a common method of art criticism, critics and other gatekeepers classify art works and artists into manageable groups and compare individuals in that category or assess the historical place of the whole category. This discussion can be well illustrated by reference to a work by Levo (1993) on British theatre critics of the 1960s. Levo (1993, pp529-534) argues that Martin Esslin, one of the critics he examines, categorises otherwise disparately working playwrights as a group by identifying a common strand. Esslin then labelled them as ‘Absurd Theatre’ and compared them with other established forms of drama. This label given by the critic Esslin, according to Levo, significantly helped the success of the playwright in subsequent years. In short, historical as well as contemporary cross-reference and comparison serve as the basis of judgement on the contribution made by a work of art to its field.

Arts centres, however, are not conducive to this kind of comparative assessment. They present various art forms and art styles, ranging from music, visual arts to dance, and from the familiar, to the experimental and highly innovative. As was mentioned in Chapter 6, the quality of the whole and the degree of coherence may be recognisable to a certain extent and can be agreed upon at least by programmers and RAB officers for combined arts. But they are not definable, and hence their total activity does not easily lend itself to reputation building.

The fifth factor that inhibits the development of a reputation system for arts centres is the economic nature of the industry itself. Arts centres present many events, and each stake is relatively low. Although some may not recover the costs with box office returns, they tend to be for one night only and the gap can be filled by booking a predictably lucrative event. Compared with what is done by commercial galleries, producing theatres, record producers and film makers, programming at arts centres can be characterised by low risk and low return. In contrast, those cultural organisations which I have listed tend to involve, albeit to different degrees, high risk and high return. The risky nature of the business facilitates the differentiation of players in respective industries. Typically, this occurs firstly by some of the major players becoming oligopolies of the market while the rest of the market comprises hundreds of small entrepreneurs. The latter, because they are small, tend to specialise.

In a similar vein, the stake is relatively low for arts centre customers, too. Consider the purchase of a ticket at an arts centre in comparison with that of a painting from an art dealer. The latter would typically involve highly speculative and considerable spending on the part of the customer who would need some kind of reassurance that s/he has made a right decision. It is for this reason that legends abound of art dealers whose disinterestedness and dedication to art led to their association with new art movements (see for example Bystryn 1989 [1978]; see also Peterson, K 1997). Art dealers therefore need to perform the role of cultural connoisseurs and command authority and charisma to spellbind their customers (Moulin 1987 [1967], pp37-65; Peterson, K 1997, pp256-257). The individual and personal relationship of the dealers with collectors from relatively high socio-economic class adds to the glamour of this business. At arts centres, a similar strategy could be taken, for example, by profiling the programmer as a cultural critic. Generally speaking, however, such practice has been limited and customers do not need charismatic persuasion in order to make a purchase.

Finally, the fact that arts centres are building-based makes it difficult to establish a reputation system around artistic output. The costs of general maintenance such as heating, lighting and security take the bulk of their expenditures (see MacKeith 1996, pp44-45), and a programmer who tends to be a venue manager at the same time must keep an eye on the management of customer-related facilities. Festivals in contrast can be provided at lower marginal cost in comparison with regular building-based activities in the arts (Frey 1994). Being not only free from the heavy duties of building and equipment maintenance and customer care but also able to shop around for spaces as needed for presentation, festival programmers have fewer constraints on the physical nature of their programming. Furthermore, because festival performances take place intensively during a limited period, it is easier to achieve a sense of a whole in a festival programme than in an arts centre which regularly puts on performance all the year round.

Given all of these structural disadvantages pertaining to arts centres, it is no wonder that no single reputation system regarding their artistic quality has developed. In contrast to the numerous awards, prizes and competitions for artists and arts companies which are associated with varying degrees of prestige, there is currently only one award for venues in the UK which is for being 'welcoming'. There is no academy or exclusive society for the arts centre sector which individuals can only join through invitation. No venue programmer has ever been awarded a knighthood for his/her achievement and contribution to the arts. One may laugh at these ideas and can argue that there is nothing wrong with the lack of these institutions and that

it is healthy and desirable not to have a hierarchy which would stifle artistic development. The counter argument however would be that the absence of awards does not facilitate artistic competition which is often believed to help artistic development. In other words, the reputation mechanism is significant for artistic innovation because it rewards innovators by enabling them to appropriate more returns from their innovative exertions (Wijnberg and Gemser 1998).

8.2 Strategies for a Reputation System Building

Nonetheless, there are movements which are working toward the development of a reputation system for arts centres. The first strategy is an obvious one: arts centres bring in products which are regarded as prestigious in each genre or renowned to the general public. Owing to economic imperatives, producing theatres with their own buildings have been encouraged to tour more than before, which is an opportunity for venues looking for good products. When competition among venues for this kind of occasional touring is high, those which can secure these 'scarce' products have more prestige than others.

The second strategy is for arts centres to differentiate themselves in one way or another, for example, in relation to art form or audience groups. This does not always create a single hierarchy but helps establish some degree of reputation for the quality of work in the specialised area or for having a specialised area itself.

The third strategy is to increase the general visibility of venues in the national media and the arts establishment. The latest appointment of the Director to one of the arts centres studied is a good example. Having been the only freelance board member of the Royal National Theatre she convinced the recruitment committee of her good connections and reputation in the theatre industry. More importantly, the prospect of her continued voluntary service to this prestigious institution is expected to heighten the profile of this arts centre on the national scene. Janssen (1998), writing about the literary status of Dutch writers, finds that 'sideline' activities, or the writers' versatility of performance in the literary world (ie writing literary reviews and being members of juries for awarding literary prizes etc, in addition to their core activity of writing books), are important to stimulate or retain the interest of critics and give the writers a higher profile in general. It is for this reason that the staff at well-resourced arts centres are encouraged to be engaged in these side-line activities, for example, serving on boards and committees of other arts organisations and their intermediary bodies of various kinds.

The fourth strategy is to increase originality in the programme. There are some arts centres which aim to invite more international work from abroad because of its high quality and the culturally different dimensions it would represent. International work, except for orchestras and visual arts exhibitions which have a tradition of world travelling and dance to a certain extent, is however at the same time less likely to tour around in the UK. Theatre has less of this tradition, and hence introducing the works in this area from abroad seems to promise a certain kind of originality.

The move to commissioning and producing found among a surprisingly large number of arts centres is also an effective way of enhancing originality. Ultimate originality would be acquired by commissioning site-specific or one-off work by definition, produced by arts centres' initiatives in particular. This would enable arts centres to claim original editorship of an essentially unique work.

There are however two issues in considering the effectiveness of this strategy. One is that this would require substantial resources, not only the money for commission fees but also the space for creation such as a workshop and studio. For this reason commissioning has not been as highly developed as the programmers would like. The other issue is that there are a growing number of freelance promoters who can dedicate more time than venue programmers can to finding ideas and talents and shaping projects which are manageable and affordable for venues and artists. It should be noted that this is an 'issue' only insofar as arts centres strive for originality and creativity in the internal reputation system of symbolic rewards and that in practice arts centre professionals would be more than happy to have competent freelancers to help them. Ironically, the more artistically discerning and aspirational the venues, the more likely it is that competent intermediary people would gain power in the reputation system rather than venues.

Summary

In many fields of cultural activities systems of reputation operate whereby innovation is recognised with symbolic and material rewards by a number of participants such as funding bodies, critics, commercial distributors and consumers. Arts centres and venues in general do

not seem to have a strong reputation system in which they are given differentiated recognition and renown. Individual arts centres may be locally appreciated by audiences, but one rarely hears of an arts centre which is considered to be artistically superior to others except for a very small number of national institutions. There are many reasons for the lack of a reputation system. Most significant is the existence of the two markets arts centres work in, namely, that of visiting companies and that of consumers, each of which judges the qualities of arts centres by totally different criteria. The eclectic nature of arts programming does not lend itself to classification and comparison, the two essential techniques in criticism and assessment used in the arts. Some arts centres have used various strategies to develop originality and specialism by commissioning work, but not to a sufficient extent to create differentiated arts centres or a cultural hierarchy of them as seen from a national perspective.

Chapter 9. Arts Centres in the Cultural Production System

Chapter 8 has discussed the lack of a reputation system for arts centres and analysed the strategies employed at some arts centres which are working towards developing some form of reputation nevertheless. In order to examine the future direction of arts centres as venues in more depth this chapter will attempt a conceptualisation of the arts centre sector as a whole in the larger ‘cultural production system’. I will discuss the ambiguous place occupied by arts centres in the system and explain the reasons for this. This line of argument will be carried forward to an examination of whether arts centres form a sector at all.

9.1 The Cultural Production System

What I call the cultural production system (henceforth CPS) here is a total entity that comprises primary creators (ie people who conceive the idea of the work such as composers and playwrights), secondary creators or interpreters (ie people and organisations who execute the work conceived by primary creators, such as musicians, orchestras, actors and theatre companies),¹⁹ gatekeepers and disseminators, evaluators and finally consumers. Therefore the CPS is larger than the ‘cultural sector’ which would normally be concerned with producers and distributors of culture and exclude evaluators and consumers.

Arts centres have always played a number of different roles in the CPS. They are often disseminators of work, but are sometimes secondary creators in co-production. There are centres which run artists-in-residence programmes, which makes them quasi-primary creators. This multiplicity of roles in the CPS however can obscure their place in it. Even when we focus on the presentation role alone, as we have done in this paper, the place of arts centres in the CPS is unclear. The first, obvious reason is that the boundary between arts centres and Regional Repertory Theatres has become increasingly fuzzy in recent years. Arts centres are becoming more of a producer, while the latter are receiving productions of various art forms from elsewhere (see Chapter 1).

The second reason why the presenter role for arts centres is difficult to locate in the CPS is related to the distinctions between creation, editing and distribution (see Table 9.1). The predominant artistic ideology in the CPS as a whole tends to place a much higher value on

¹⁹ See Becker (1976, p703) for the distinction between primary and secondary creators.

creation than on editing and distribution. Editing and distribution in contrast tend to be rewarded more by material gains. The morally higher status given to original creation is a tradition established by modernism and the Romantic artists, and enhanced by the rise of the cultural industries in the first half of this century. This tradition lingers despite some challenges made to it. The national arts funding system in Britain has largely been developed to allocate grants and other resources to the creator sector, leaving the functions of editing and distributing to the market.

Arts centres and subsidised non-producing venues in general are difficult to locate in this schema. They are constitutionally either part of the subsidised arts which is dominated by creators or part of public service organisations funded by local authorities. They stage subsidised art work (though not exclusively), share the values of subsidised arts and the ethos of putting quality and serving the local community first while financially aiming to break even. However, the key feature of the artistic side of their work is much more similar to that which prevails in the editor and distributor role, namely, managing other people’s talents and repackaging them. The major difference from the so-called cultural industries is that arts centres do not work to make a profit, although such behaviour is possible to the extent that loss is subsidised. Self-financing venues, therefore, would not behave very differently from for-profit distributing organisations.

Table 9.1 Distinction between ‘Creator’ and ‘Editor and Distributor’ in the CPS

	<i>Creator</i>	<i>Editor and Distributor</i>
Participants	Individual Artists and Organisations of High Art and Culture	Cultural Industries Cultural Entrepreneurs
Function	Conceive ideas, execute them	Find talents, commodify and distribute them
Values	‘Originality’, ‘Creativity’ ‘Innovation’	Popularity, Profit
Reward	Symbolic	Material
Finance	Subsidised	Commercial
Reward System (Crane 1976)	Semi-independent	(Semi-independent to) heterocultural

As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, it is difficult for arts centres to assert their originality, a crucial condition for the ‘membership of the creator sector’. Ironically, despite the usual image of work in the cultural industries being profit-driven and mass-produced, at least some producers can claim authorship of the product. For example, the film producer

would claim his/her product however collectively it is made. Book editors too would be able to name *their* authors and books (Coser et al 1982, pp89-91).

9.2 Different Art Worlds

While the above theory on the lack of originality can be applied to non-producing venues in general, one major feature specific to arts centres, namely, the diversity of art forms and genres presented, pose more problems in our search for the place they occupy in the CPS.

At this point it is necessary to understand that the CPS, which has been discussed as a large single unit, should be seen as an aggregate of a large number of smaller CPSs specific to particular art forms and genres. Even within one art form, there may well be different CPSs co-existing with little interaction between them. The components of each CPS and the principles of organisation are generally the same across different CPSs. In painting, for example, as Greenfeld (1989) depicts the Israeli situation, there is a CPS of abstract, avant-garde art and another one for figurative painting, each comprising different artists, commercial dealers, buyers and gallery visitors. Each has its own distinctive group of these and is unlikely to mix with the other. The dominant reward for each is, however, different. The CPS of figurative art is more oriented towards commercial success and their galleries represent the majority of the sector in Israel (p124), but is almost totally neglected by art critics. The CPS of avant-garde art by contrast is seeking to make art history, and work in this world seeks the approbation of its agents such as critics and museum curators. Overall the two art worlds form a CPS of painting, but remain mutually distinctive with different kinds of value system. Each value system gives rise to a hierarchy in their own field and an invisible system of legitimisation, validation and resource allocation.

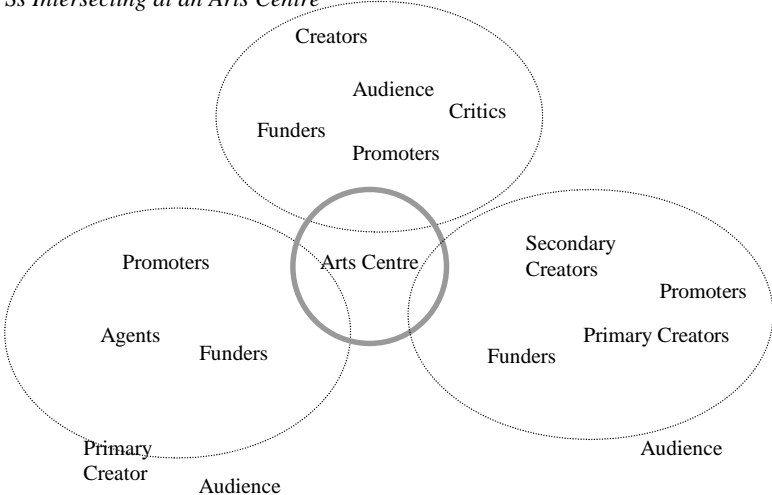
Gilmore (1988) offers another analysis of different art worlds by inventing the concept of 'schools of activity' (as opposed to 'schools of thought') referring to social organisations of activities in an open system. He suggests that this is one of the mechanisms through which artistic creativity and practice develops. Schools of activity are constructed through the interaction of the participants, who actually collaborate and develop conventions. These are different from 'schools of thought' which are labels devised by critics and historians and based on aesthetic similarities. In his study of concert activities of Western classical music in Manhattan, New York City, Gilmore finds three distinct concert subworlds involving different kinds of participants, sites and styles. In the Midtown Repertory Concerts, conservatory-trained

players perform the classical music canon at the Lincoln Centre and Carnegie Hall to a distinct type of audience. What counts here is artistic virtuosity. In the Uptown Academic Concerts, composers and performers are university-affiliated and organise concerts mainly at studios on campus. The aesthetic emphasis is on compositional ideas and techniques and gradual changes from the traditional basis. In the Downtown Avant-Garde Concerts world, participants include composers such as John Cage, Steve Reich and many more relatively unknown ones, as opposed to Brahms in Midtown and Elliott Carter in Uptown. The composer/performers live in small performance lofts in SoHo and Greenwich Village. This world is the least institutionalised and the most informal. The aesthetic emphasis here is the avant-garde, radical innovation and pluralistic forms of music.

Although the writings and theories introduced above have different nuances and their theories are developed for different research purposes, they in essence point to the importance of developing distinctive aesthetic and organisational conventions for each genre, school of activity, art world or CPS of this paper.

Each arts centre, however, is involved with many different CPSs which include different creators and taste publics. This is the case because arts centres deal with a large number of art forms and genres and also because they are embedded in a web of personal and organisational contacts. This means that there is a variety of conventions to adopt (or fail to understand) and shared values to develop with other participants in each world. The fact that each CPS involves arts centres as a disseminator in the middle of the production system and hence many different CPSs meet here (see Figure 9.1) does not, however, mean that arts centres have a strong position in the comprehensive CPS. On the contrary it means that their place is ambiguous and peripheral to any CPS, unless they have staff dedicated to a CPS.

Figure 9.1 CPSs Intersecting at an Arts Centre



This ambiguity in relation to art worlds is enhanced by the fact that for each art world there are a number of alternatives to arts centres for the function of dissemination (see Figure 9.2). For middle-scale events there are receiving theatres and multi-purpose halls. For small-scale events, there are a large number of college studio and studio spaces attached to larger auditoria and even non-arts spaces such as community centres. There are places of all scales which art world participants can hire if they can afford them. For visual arts and crafts, there are a number of commercial and non-commercial galleries dedicated solely to art exhibitions. Therefore, although arts centres are broadly defined as a disseminator for every genre, resources are too thinly spread to make it easy for them to have a firm position in each small CPS and subsequently in the large CPS.

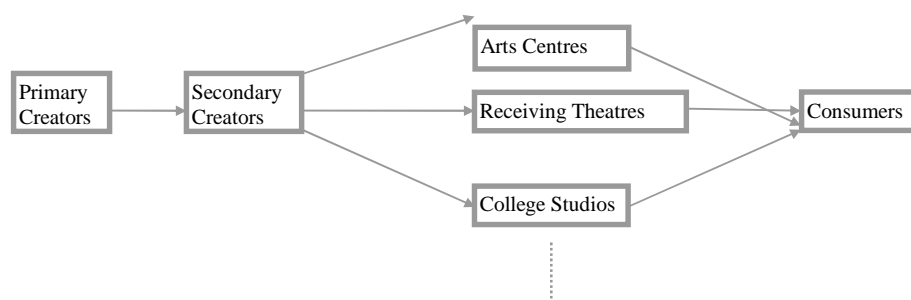


Figure 9.2. Different Disseminators Co-existing in a CPS

There are two implications drawn from this frequent and yet ambiguous appearance of arts centres in the CPSs. First, arts centres tend to carry less symbolic than material importance in the CPSs. Second, when we take a look at the arts centres as a whole, although they overlap with each other occasionally, it is difficult to see the aggregate as a sector. The fact that a major function, namely, the presentation of professional activities in multiple art forms, is almost a common feature does not, in itself, lead to the development of a sector.

9.3 A Sector of Arts Centres?

So what is prerequisite and/or facilitating for the development of a 'sector'? One obvious factor may be commonness in terms of function. Museums can be easily identified as a sector, despite their diversity in terms of size, collection disciplines, constitution and funding because they share the same set of multiple functions including conservation, collection, exhibition and so on. This set is even applicable across national boundaries. There are a few more conditions of a sector. In order to explore them reference to what DiMaggio (1983) calls an

'organisational field' is useful.²⁰ Although much broader than a sector, this concept is helpful for us to understand why it is difficult to see the totality of arts centres as a sector.

In explaining how an organisational field emerges, DiMaggio (1983) refers to field 'structuration' which Giddens (1979) describes as a process that includes five components:

- 1) an increase in the level of interaction among organisations in a field
- 2) an increase in the load of information on organisations in a field
- 3) the emergence of a structure of domination
- 4) the emergence of a pattern of coalition, and
- 5) the development, at the cultural level, of an ideology of the field.

DiMaggio (1983) illustrates this process by explaining the development of a federal government policy for the arts in the United States. Before the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, there was limited interaction, communication and awareness of each other among American arts organisations around the country. With the development of funding from the federal government and some private foundations such as the Ford and the Rockefeller Foundations, there emerged so-called service organisations, trade journals, training opportunities which cut across individual organisations in the same fields and an increase in the exchange and mobility of creative and administrative talents from one company to another. Gradually, structures of domination and coalition have emerged.

When we look at arts centres as a possible organisational field, none of the phenomena ascribed to the process of 'structuration' seems to apply. The absence of trade associations specifically for arts centres is the epitome of this. The National Association of Arts Centres (NAAC) which was founded in 1975 collapsed in 1989 as did the Arts Development Association (ADA), an expansion of the NAAC, in 1992. Since then nothing has replaced these national bodies. The lack of a trade body is significant, because a trade association would normally enable members to collectively negotiate with, for example, arts funding bodies, and to generally manage the environment in which they operate in their favour (see Hirsch 1975).

²⁰ It needs to be noted that any organisational field is an analytical construct to examine inter-organisational relationships. It is somewhat similar to what has been mentioned as a school of activity or an art world, but it is more flexible in that what it actually involves depends on specific research purposes. This concept is used here to look at the inter-organisational relationships between arts centres, rather than the relationships between arts centres and other partners.

The closest substitutes might be the Independent Theatre Council for small-scale venues and the Theatrical Management Association for the large-scale ones. However, both include producing companies and hence their scope is broad. There is no newsletter or trade journal circulated among arts centres and venues in general to specifically address their common issues and interests. As I have repeatedly mentioned, information is constantly swapped between the participants of arts worlds to which arts centres have relevance, but little between arts centres per se. There is no structure of domination, either. As I have explained in Chapter 8, it is not easy to state which arts centres are seen to be more prestigious than others and in what sense. There are possible indicators such as the size of the organisation, whether programming is contemporary or classic, whether management is creator-oriented or market-oriented, and so on. Nevertheless, the point is that it is difficult to apply these indicators and construct one (or more) measure(s) of prestige. The fact that arts centres, with the exceptions of the South Bank Centre and the Institute of Contemporary Art, both in London, have primarily been financed by the RABs (formerly RAAs) and local authorities still makes it hard to identify a central point for coalition building.

In terms of the development of an ideology or professional standard in this field, there are some positive signs, such as the emerging ideology of 'presenting venues' as opposed to receiving houses and the existence of some experienced programmers. There is however no particular career ladder for venue programmers, nor is there any fixed definition of what they are as a profession. Their job titles are various, including many which do not emphasise the job of programming but indicate the wider remits and responsibilities of venue management. All in all, the characteristics of 'structuration' can not be found among arts centres and it seems safe to conclude that arts centres do not form an organisational field as such, or a sector.

Summary

This chapter has argued that arts centres in Britain as a whole do not form a sector or a defined world of any kind. The essence of arts centre operation is in the multiple and complex networks and circles in which the programmers are involved. Arts centres have relevance to many different CPSs but do not have their own CPS. The obscurity and ambiguity of the place occupied by arts centres in the total Cultural Production System may well be one of the reasons why arts centres have received little research attention.

Conclusion

The main objective of this paper has been to examine the framework, processes and mechanisms of arts centre programming in the presentation of professional arts and cultural activities. The particular aspect of arts centres focused on in this paper has given little weight to the social aspect of arts centres where different groups of people can meet informally, an aspect which arts centres tend to value highly. My interest has been in analysing arts centres as venues for performing and visual arts, media and other cultural activities. The theoretical contribution this study can make is therefore more relevant to other arts venues of non-producing capacity in general than to the arts centres which have no programme of professional presentation.

Summary

Before moving on to suggest future issues for research drawing on the theoretical implications of this paper, it will be useful to review the findings and arguments made in Chapters 1 to 9. The paper firstly has provided contextual information on arts centres and discussed their place in regional arts touring in Britain. Arts centres which tend to be small in seating capacity provide an important circuit for small-scale touring companies in the regions. They may be the core provider of arts activities not otherwise easily available in rural areas in particular. While the contributions (and their support for local community participation in the arts) made by arts centres are widely acknowledged by their funders, financing has over the years become tighter for arts centres and they have had to become more professional and entrepreneurial in artistic and managerial terms. The change in terminology by which arts centres and venues have changed from being 'receiving houses' to 'presenting venues' captures the spirit of the early 1990s in which these changes were taking place.

The middle part of the paper has analysed the process by which artistic projects which exist in the supplier market in a possibly unstructured way come to the attention of arts centre programmers and how the programmers mix and match different products. Balancing economic constraints and artistic qualities and juggling the different expectations of stakeholders and participants in programme making are the basic features of decision-making by arts centre programmers. Both the fixed and the variable factors of individual arts centres,

such as their financial structure and geographic characteristics affect the patterns of programme choice. Thus, potential art products, both in complete and formative stages, are roughly filtered to identify possible candidates for presentation.

The paper has brought the relationship between arts centres and visiting companies to light and explored the mechanisms used by the programmer to sort the numerous projects and fit those selected into the programme diary. The job of arts programming can be frustrating and stressful, not only due to the heavy workload but also due to the range of art forms and genres the programmer needs to include. The work is complicated also because of various factors about the product which must be assessed such as its audience potential and its relevance to the rest of the programme.

In order to cope with such complication arts centre programmers need some kind of absolute priority, stabilisation mechanisms and rules in organising demands and needs. This paper has pointed out four methods of product acquisition and the different, implicit priorities given to each. The choice of work for presentation made by the programmer inevitably involves a substantial degree of uncertainty and unpredictability in terms of artistic and financial outcomes. The establishment of regular product suppliers is one of the best ways to minimise such risks. To check out the views and previous experiences of relevant professionals whom the programmer trusts is effective, particularly in trying something intriguing and yet unknown to the organisation. Contacts are constantly cultivated by the programmer also for the purposes of research and development. Soliciting expert opinions thus constitutes the core of their work. By asking what they think of a particular product, the programmer will also come to understand what specialism a particular contact person has and establish the degree to which his/her view should be accepted. Only by confirming what can be known in advance, either by previous experiences or through the circles of friends the programmer uses for different purposes, can the arts centre take a risk and introduce some element of experimentation. Only after identifying what is reliable and definite, can the arts centre start the jigsaw puzzle of juxtaposing the old and the new and mixing the safe and the risky.

Applying the theory of Becker (1982), these findings have led to an argument that the presentation is collectively framed by meshed relationships between arts centre programmers and people in the circles which they turn to for opinions and recommendations. The arts centre's formal relationship with external project suppliers (eg festivals) form another dimension of collectivity. Voluntary service mutually offered by senior officers of arts organisations, arts centres and funders may also work at subliminal level to affect what is

presented. At a more structural level arts centre decisions are indirectly but strongly affected by the mechanisms and the funding structure of the particular sector concerned.

Throughout the interview process, it puzzled me that there was very little consensus that suggested a sector-wide view of arts centres. This has resulted in the discussion of Chapters 8 and 9. Different interviewees would name different places they think are good (for whatever reasons) and the various names of the programmers they respect. As to the particular individuals with whom arts programmers are in constant contact, again, different names would be given. People may well have different views, but I have argued that this is due to the lack of a reputation system for arts centres and have given explanations for why this is missing. Arts centres are involved in too many different art forms and genres for a system to emerge. More critically, it is very difficult for a not-for-profit distributor of the arts and culture to claim originality and establish a leadership position in the market. Chapter 9 has advanced this discussion by arguing that there seems to be no hint of a sector for arts centres. This is not only because they are diverse in terms of their activities. It is also because they operate in a web of circles and networks involving various arts professionals.

Issues for Future Research

The findings and discussions made so far have given rise to the question already posed in Chapter 9, and this is now examined from a cultural policy point of view: do arts centres need a sectoral identity and structure? This paper suggests that it may be necessary and possible to develop a sectoral field, turning the collectivity in the programme making at arts centres into a strength for this purpose. If arts centres wish to have empowered status and a higher profile in the national arts scene, something which may lead to a stronger case for investment, the development of a sectoral field is very important. Another benefit might be that it would encourage specialisation and differentiation which would stimulate artistic development. These advantages are however double-edged: the other side of the coin would be the institutionalisation of culture in arts centres. It is important to recall the argument made by sociologists (eg van Rees 1987) that most artistic innovation in our modern history is the result of 'orchestration' involving agents in the support structure who provide legitimacy and material reward for new forms and styles of art.

In any case, to make a definitive judgement on the future of an arts centre sector is beyond the scope of this study. It would be difficult to do so, particularly because of the current financial difficulties experienced not only by arts centres but also by Regional Repertory Theatres and

local-authority-run receiving theatres which together make up the arts touring scene in the regions. The lack of a CPS for arts centres and the resulting weakness of arts centres in the large CPS despite their omnipresence in different CPSs would suggest, however, that arts centres may have the strength to survive the current economic climate and the arts market trend. The traditional multiplicity in activities and art forms presented gives arts centres not only flexibility (MacKeith 1996) but also a high degree of freedom from extraneous constraints. Such a view may be underpinned by my argument that the operation of arts centres is based on a 'low risk and low return' principle.

The eclecticism of arts centres which confuses some audiences may also be an advantage if traditional arts attenders are increasingly crossing over between different forms and genres. This is a trend seen in the US at least, as Peterson (1992) and Peterson and Kern (1996) argue. Based on the analysis of national statistics on arts participation in the US collected in 1982 and 1992, they assert that a historical shift is taking place among the social élite. This group which has traditionally only been concerned with limited genres of arts (ie so-called high culture) is now consuming much more diverse cultural products. According to the authors, the dividing line between different socio-economic status groups in relation to cultural consumption can no longer be correlated with the division of high arts and popular culture; but the number of art forms and genres to be appreciated still matters, with the élite being omnivorous and the non-élite univorous. They suggest one of the reasons for this change is that members of today's élite need to demonstrate flexibility and versatility by being able to talk about diverse subjects and be widely knowledgeable in contemporary culture. The more tolerant disposition of contemporary society towards diverse cultures and the nature of so-called postmodernism, characterised by wide-ranging aesthetics, may have contributed to this trend.

I have mentioned the possibly parallel existence of different taste publics at arts centres in Chapter 6, but this needs to be more closely researched. The theory of omnivore emergence has not been yet systematically examined in the UK, but if this can be applied, it would be an opportunity for arts centres. This in fact is an age-old idea; it has been said that one of the strengths of arts centres is that by presenting multiple art forms under one roof they can encourage audiences to cross over from one art form to another. There is little evidence to prove whether this has taken place in practice or not. MacKeith (1996, p24) concludes that this is no longer a key strategy for arts centres, while the views of the arts programmers interviewed vary on this point.

Original research or reinterpretation of the existing data is most urgently needed to gain insights into the applicability of Peterson's omnivore theory to Britain and to see in what ways arts centres might benefit from the changing pattern of cultural consumption if that proves to be the case. The first task would be to identify the already existing omnivorous group (supposing that there is one) which liberally crosses over different arts and to expand the group. In this audience development process, it is necessary not just to employ the usual marketing techniques based on life-style and consumption patterns but also to understand the social psychology relating to the reception of culture.

Elsewhere I have argued extensively for the importance of consumer aesthetics and visitor studies approached from a range of academic disciplines such as anthropology and psychology for museum and art gallery marketing (Kawashima 1997, chapter 9). The reception aspect of culture has been most notably analysed in the area of cultural industries such as television, film and literature (for the context of the research development in this area and literature review, see Crane 1992a, chapter 5; Press 1994). Visual arts is another area where reception has been researched by art historians (eg Freedberg 1989), psychologists (eg Parsons 1987) and art educationalists (see Raney undated for a summary of issues on visual literacy). Research in this category has examined the extent to which audiences are more active than had hitherto been assumed and whether they interpret cultural products in various ways depending on their own backgrounds and particular contexts (eg Griswold 1987; Radway 1991 [1984]; Liebes and Katz 1990). The literature is still divided between different views, particularly on whether it is the qualities of cultural objects or of audiences that facilitate their interactions (Crane 1992a, p91), but a similar line of enquiry is much needed for the subsidised arts in Britain. There are a number of unanswered questions for audience research, among which are the following:

- To what extent are people 'medium (ie art form)-loyal' or 'message/content-oriented'? (Hirsch 1978, p329)
- In what way do people acquire tastes and aesthetic preferences in the first place and how do they develop them? (Hirsch 1978, p319)
- What dynamics exist between individuals with different degrees of commitment to a particular taste culture? Who influences whom and in what way? Who tries things first? Whose assessments are respected by others and why? (Lewis 1977, p434; Becker 1982, p55)
- To what degree are audiences sensitive to varied levels of 'quality'? If a product becomes less good in quality, does the number of consumers decrease accordingly? (DiMaggio 1977, p445)

It is important for us to not only understand audience behaviour but also to throw light on how the perceptions of cultural producers about their audiences affect the creation of cultural products. The conclusion of Turow's (1982) research conducted on publishers of children's books is suggestive. According to him, the publishers examined admit to having little specific information on who read their products but the impressions they have of the audience play a significant role in the production and distribution of books. More importantly, however, the images of the young readers are largely constructed through the organisational requirements and opportunities of the industry.

Turning our attention from the issue of audience-producer interaction to audience reception again, it is crucial for us to have a better understanding of what goes on in the minds of audiences. On this point, Halle (1992) provides an interesting case study. He has conducted research in the New York City region and shown that the viewers of avant-garde, abstract paintings do not always exercise intelligence and aesthetic sensibilities which they are supposed to possess but often use the same kinds of judgement as their counterparts of more familiar art styles. The findings are striking, contradicting a sociological theory that audiences of so-called high art tend to have higher socio-economic background because high art requires cultural competence to interpret and appreciate it.

He finds that upper-middle class people may like abstract paintings largely as objects for home/office decoration in the same way as the lower socio-economic group of society would buy 'calendar art' to hang on the walls of their living rooms. Furthermore, although abstract art collectors would say they like it because it permits and arouses the viewer's imagination, what they imagine is interesting: abstract art purchasers would refer to the visualisation of landscapes such as the ocean, the beach, the clouds and so on, just as the consumers of water-colour pictures see more directly in their favourite paintings. Thus, Halle has revealed that abstract art spectators consume art for utilitarian purposes and appreciate it in an un-creative way like their counterparts in the world of less abstract pictures.

To extend the implication of Halle's conclusion to other art forms and styles and to Britain would require more research. It is worth noting, however, a brief comment in the marketing research carried out for an experimental contemporary dance company, which suggests similar findings to Halle's.²¹ This research report written by a marketing consultant points out a discrepancy in the perceived values of work between arts professionals and audiences: critics

²¹ The report was given to me by the interviewee from the company. To be consistent about the principle of anonymity, the reference is not provided here.

and programmers generally praise the performance as intellectually exciting and (positively) unapproachable, whereas the loyal customers who are enthusiastic about the company make comments on their visual and emotional (rather than intellectual and conceptual) apprehensions, expressing the work as 'graceful', 'colourful' and 'fluid'.

The research is an audit of the dance company's marketing in general and this is only a small part of the whole paper, having different objectives from Halle's research. Another thing to note is that audiences may simply not possess the generally accepted vocabulary of arts criticism. Nonetheless, we can perhaps start to form a proposition that the audience response (even those which may look full of enthusiasm and appreciation) may be different, if examined in depth, from what sociological theories have imagined to be the case and from the experience of arts professionals. This might be the case, as Halle finds, even where the audience is culturally competent and well-informed, because the arts attenders of the lay public look at the arts with a different agenda from that of those in the profession. We may also have a proposition that audience responses themselves, even when they appear equally enthusiastic on the surface, may be different from one individual to another. This is an area which venues aspiring to provide a better service to the audience community ought to investigate more.

Another significant implication of the omnivore theory advanced by Peterson (1992) is related to the blurring of the distinction between so-called high culture and popular culture as far as the audience is concerned. If this is the case, it would be imperative to revisit the whole notion of cultural policy and public funding for the arts. This is particularly important these days when public support for the arts has been declining in monetary values and the rationale for it is being shaken, or 'collapsed', as Bennett (1995) sees it.

It can, if crudely, be argued that the distinction between the arts as being worthy of collective support and commercial entertainment and the development of many institutions of culture are historically associated with the rise of the middle-class in Britain. From the early nineteenth-century to the early decades of this century industrialists and entrepreneurs used culture and the arts as an expression of class solidarity and demarcation. They were the patrons and consumers of what they gradually marked as high arts, often by imitating aristocratic taste but also through identifying what suited them. Also in an attempt at social reform (or engineering) the influential (upper-) middle class used culture as a means of controlling what they saw as the unruly mass by determining which culture deserved reverence and in what manner it ought to be appreciated.

There are historical writings which provide evidence for the above argument. For example, Weber (1975) gives details on how concert-life in London during the 1830s and 1840s was shaped by the bourgeoisie's redefinition of their social status in the capital, as a consequence of various societal changes caused by modernisation and industrialisation. Seed (1988) depicts the cultural infrastructure, including not only artists but also art dealers and exhibition organisers, built up by the middle class of nineteenth-century Manchester. In many ways art was a means for bourgeois families to display their wealth and taste in the private sphere. It also functioned in the public sphere in three ways: to create the local 'power élite', to enhance the cultural power and autonomy of industrial capital as against landed aristocracy and to civilise the uneducated mass of the working class at the same time.

Griswold (1986) in examining the revival of two specific drama genres (city comedy and revenge tragedy of the Renaissance) reveals that the genres which tend to be intellectually challenging and more than mere entertainment have appealed to the middle-class while cinema and commercial television have come into being to satisfy the entertainment needs of the less educated class. Theatre, which was once "an arena of symbolic class conflict" (p163), gradually came to be dominated by the middle class. This facilitated the de-commercialisation of theatre culturally throughout this century, even in the West End, and also financially in the post-war decades. The same, more salient process of the American case is well described by Levine (1988) and by DiMaggio (1982) in particular relation to nineteenth-century Boston.

The 'nationalisation of culture' in Britain (Minihan 1977), or the take-over of private patronage for the arts and culture by the state, was initiated in the museum sector and was supplemented by the creation of the Arts Council for performing and visual arts in the post-war era. Public authorities involved in cultural policy have subsequently determined what culture is deemed worthy of public support, although there have been struggles in the public funding structure to redefine 'the arts for subsidy' (Bennett 1997, pp68-69).

The American sociologist Gans (1974) was one of the early writers who opposed the usual allegation (made particularly by the Frankfurt School sociologists) that popular culture was a commercial menace with uncontested power of imposing vulgar tastes on the mass. He did not, however, pronounce his relativist position by abandoning the distinction between high and popular cultures. Instead, he maintained that all cultures were equal in value to the extent that they reflect the characteristics and standards of their publics. Therefore, in order to redress the imbalance of subsidising one culture at the expense of others it would be necessary to invest in educational and other opportunities so as to enable people to appreciate higher taste cultures.

Since then, aesthetics and societal values on culture have changed while research has advanced in the sociology of culture. The view of the division between high and popular cultures may be outdated in aesthetic terms, as Crane (1992b, pp66-67) summarises the interpenetration of the two cultures. DiMaggio (1977) and Hirsch (1977, p402) as well as Crane (1992a) have offered different classifications of the arts and culture by paying attention to market structure, form of organisation and technology as more determinant than alleged intrinsic values of cultures with vertically segmented audiences attached to each. The changing modes of production in culture further confuse the traditionally-held distinction between high arts and popular culture, making it even more difficult to clarify what is worth public money and to change the historical patterns of resource allocation.

Unfortunately, this is not the place to expand on such a huge topic. Suffice it to say that such a relativistic idea is by no means novel; it has long been advocated by postmodernists, but is particularly relevant to arts centres which embrace both subsidised and unsubsidised—commercial, popular and amateur—activities. Given that they are part of the powerful gatekeepers of culture insofar as they determine what deserves public exposure, it would be interesting to research the extent to which arts centres contribute to the eradication—or enhancement or re-configuration—of the divisions between different cultures.

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