Title:
'Culture, Populism and the Public: New Labour's early policy innovations and a paradigm-creation of a social instrumentalism'

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Abstract:
The purpose of this article is to overturn some key assumptions on the nature of populism in relation to culture and policy. Populism is often defined in terms of a Right-wing appeal to mass culture and uneducated taste, unmediated by political institutions and the reflexive historical discourse of modernity. While the subject of culture and populism is huge, and cannot be fully broached here, this article takes a period of unique policy innovation — New Labour's first terms in government in the UK. It assesses the way culture and policy were articulated and positioned between urban and social policies, creating the conditions for a form of "social instrumentalism" that was as irresistible to the Left as it was acceptable to the Right. This article assesses the apparent paradoxes of social instrumentalism and its implications with regard culture, democracy and the political function of public policies.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to identify social instrumentalism as a significant dimension of Left populism. What is commonly identified as "instrumentalism" in policies for the arts or cultural sector, is not, I argue, simply an epiphenomenon of a putative global neoliberal order (which emerged after Reaganomics, Thatcherism and the influence of Hayek and Friedman's notions of "free market" in the 1980s: Stedman Jones, 2012). Nor is it simply an after-effect of the subsequent Europe-wide public sector reforms of the 1990s, which demanded that state agencies and local government reconcile themselves to new neoliberal realities (reforms influenced by American so-called New Public Management or "NPM": Clarke and Newman, 2009). Rather, this article worked towards understanding a form of instrumentalism that cannot be exclusively attributed to the political Right and their attempt to introduce putative principles of market competition and enterprise into culture. Instrumentalism in cultural policy has often been associated with

commercialisation and mass market appeal — or the introduction of principles of exchange, first observed by Adorno and Horkheimer in the early 1940s (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1973). Instrumentalism, however, is also a strategy of the Left — that is to say, a strategic means by which the arts and culture can meet the so-perceived social demands of democracy.

A central dilemma of democracy is instrumentalism, or the use of public assets for the perceived common good through their employment and deployment in public policies. Past public policy trends in "cultural democracy" as much as "the democratisation of culture" have suffered from both being defined as cultural assets as much as subject to the demands of the common public. An investigation into these historical conceptions of culture and their consequent requirements, implications for governance, the state and the citizen, simply exceeds the parameters of this article; moreover, democracy itself, as a form of state management, government, party-system of governance and accountability, electoral representation, and so on, is historically variable and endlessly mutable – referring to it as a "system" is perhaps misleading. Nonetheless, the basic assumption of this article is that genuine democracies are never free of populism, still less are "the opposite" of populism. Indeed, if populism is predicated on an appeal to a majority, an undifferentiated "mass" of "the people", or indeed a form of political leadership dominated by emotion, conviction or "popularity" (where charisma is as much an affect of parties as individual leaders), then populism is surely internal to democracy. And while parties Right and Left may utilise the political dynamism of populism for various or specific ends, a pervasive state of populism involves an avoidance of the institutional organisation of democracy to the extent that it always threatens to exceed any party or governments' ability to manage it (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017; Judis, 2016; Moffitt, 2016). Populism, therefore, while internal to democracy, will always remain a mere dimension or component, and of course, is rarely in itself a form of political philosophy, still least a type of party.

This article will register how the intellectual development of New Labour's public policies for culture evolved during a short period (1997-2004) and

facilitated a new form of populism. This is not a "cultural populism" in the Jim McGuigan sense (an extension of the critical cultural studies concept of mass culture), but of a more generalised form of political populism facilitated by cultural policy (McGuigan, 1992). While in one sense New Labour's public policies for culture were "radical" in demanding widespread cultural reforms that aimed for social benefit, education and cultural opportunities for marginal groups, in another sense they continued policy trajectories set in motion by previous Conservative regimes. These were for the maintenance of the institutions and structures of culture, albeit to play contributory "roles" in national economic development. This instrumentalism in itself is not significant; what is significant is (a) the dissolution of the radical opposition between public and private; (b) the assumption of an equivalence between public and State; and (c) an assumption that the mechanisms or infrastructure of cultural production have no internal autonomy or political constitution (i.e. effectively engender a de-politicisation of culture). New Labour's appropriation of culture appealed to Left and Right voters, and did so through an increasing embedding of cultural policies with other central policy agendas (i.e. non-cultural agendas).

In terms of methodology, this paper combines two approaches, both open-ended in the sense that this article can only hope to identify critical junctures or moments in a broader and historically expansive political discourse. A full assessment would, of course, take into account the institutional framings and agencies involved, and demonstrate empirically how the apparent variegated, incessant and seemingly over-complex policy initiatives of New Labour nonetheless served to generate a cohesive ideological discourse. This article will therefore proceed by way of a cursory historical discourse analysis, articulated as critical historical commentary, and identify not so much a coherent ideology (identified as populist) but an ideological strategy (where populism is often anti-ideology in its pretentions). Key policy documents, in which New Labour's credibility and political communications were heavily invested, reveal a greater policy orientation, set of values and aspirations, and this can indicate an ideology as strategy not dogma (Freeden, 1996). This article does not account for the policy deliberations, alliances and political

machinations that characterised British government during these years, as have other recent studies of New Labour (Hewison, 2014; Gray, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, Oakley, Lee, Nisbett, 2017), but rather it attempts to identify New Labour's rhetorical assimilation of paradox (as in policy positions that are both Left and Right), and so a distinctive social instrumentalism of culture.

Section One: *Policy, politics and the historical context*

Though the 1970s and 1980s, subjects previously only known to urbanists and geographers became the subject of popular public debate — de-industrialisation, insecurity, urban flight and unequal mobility, social polarization and youth delinquency, and importantly, public loss of control over local land. A landmark government initiative known as *Policy for the Inner Cities* (1977), and the new legislation of the *Inner Urban Areas* Act (1978) — the "Act" of Parliament being the most powerful regulatory mechanism of government — saw for the first time "the city" conceptualised as a policy entity, and serious enough to justify state interventionary powers. Thomas Hutton is a key scholar who has articulated the key characteristics of what may be called the context — the de-industrialisation of the West (Hutton, 2010): its characteristics are the loss of community cohesion, identity and quality of life once secured by enduring "heavy" industry. The "Post-industrial" became a subject of some speculation, as factories, docklands, manufacturing plants and huge tracts of land once occupied became vacant and seemingly obsolete, and as industry declined so did central government revenues, public funds, and the powers of the State to re-invest. This increasing fiscal weakness of State apparatus, particularly local government, offered an opportunity to incoming British Prime Minister Thatcher to campaign against State monopoly on planning and infrastructure development, and with it, a strategy for re-industrialisation now famously associated with the rise of the service-sector economy and the orientation towards supply-side consumer-oriented understanding of economic production.

A central mechanism of re-industrialisation was the emergence of "partnerships" or public-private alliances, where the "private" would generate the managerial competencies for production and the "public" would ensure quality, value for money and public "access" (a phenomenon that was made synonymous with the public interest). It is against a backdrop of "deindustrialisation-reindustrialisation" that we can effectively understand the apparent paradoxes of the politicisation and instrumentalisation of cultural policies and the arts.

The two previous stretches of Conservative government were 1957–1964 and 1970-74, though dates in themselves say relatively little in an era of huge complexity. Since the so-called "post-war settlement" of Labour' post-War rule (1945-51), a fundamental social contract of welfare provision saw even the following Conservative governments retain. Prime Minister Thatcher (1979-1990) can be understood as opening an era of global neoliberalism, even if her own "free market" theories were nationalist and oriented towards small-scale British businesses and entrepreneurs. While Thatcher's free markets required a de-scaling of the State, the governance dimensions of the State increased in power (only the social and welfare dimensions shrank). Moreover, as governance and business interests coalesced in the "private-public partnership" nexus, the market became a useful mechanism with which to de-politicise growth-oriented economics.

It was "Thatcherism" that established the "private-public partnership" as a central principle for public governance (largely for cities: Stoker, 1991), and in this dissolution of the Post-war dichotomy of "public-private", the significance of what later became urban policy, is seminal. Public-private-driven urban development continued after Thatcher (Conservative rule lasted under Prime Minister John Major until 1997), and the decade of Labour Party reforms that took place during this time, in part, continued the principle into all areas of public policy. Indeed, "private-public partnership" was regarded as compatible with the European social democracy the "New" Labour Party of the 1990s emulated. It was also regarded compatible with the many European Union urban policies that Thatcher and Major's government had unwittingly allow to

pass into UK law and practice (the EU's adaptation of the principles of The Council of Europe's European Campaign for Urban Renaissance, 1982-1986, and with it the term "renaissance" as a metaphor for re-industrialisation through broad social and cultural enfranchisement).

Thatcher innovated with new public organisations — one of which were the Urban Development Corporations (known as QANGO or quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation). The UDCs were a "public-private" operation, and the central mechanism of British urban policy, continued in different forms by New Labour (Imrie and Thomas, 1999: 11). Set up after the Local Government, Planning and Land Act of 1980, where Thatcher limited the role of local authorities in planning and development, offered public tenants a "Right to Buy" public housing, and introduced the principles of the market into the development of public property and assets. The restrictions on public authorities borrowing and investing capital, meant they had to turn to private corporations and investment funds in order to finance public development. Even Far-Left Labour Party-dominated local authorities (in major cities) had no choice but to operate in partnership with powerful construction companies, design, planning and property development corporations, banks and investment funds. Within a decade, the principle of the market became a meta-concept, where even public, common or State-owned property was only maintained and developed in partnership with market-led private interests, who operate within exchange-based contracts with necessary profit-stakeholder gains. The market as a principle exceeded any previous form of commerce or business – as a meta-concept it became a principle equivalent to "civil society" and a norm of public administration.

The reason for this compressed historical narrative, is to emphasise how the "public-private" principle animating re-industrialisation (whose most visible form was urban policy and the physical development of cities), was an irresistible framework by which cultural policy for the arts was renegotiated. Huge symbolic signifiers of national economic change swiftly became political obligation, and few at the time identified the philosophical impact on the post-War consensus of values. It took a decade, but from the late 1980s, all

publicly-funded arts and cultural organisations were feeling the need to articulate their positioning within this changing landscape. The market was no longer simple a social realm of exchange and commerce – it was a new evolving civil society lexicon by which non-State actors were asserting their independence and interests and engaging ordinary people (albeit as consumers).

In 1989, The Arts Council of Great Britain (as they were then called — in 1994 they were devolved to each of the four UK nations) published a significant policy statement. The statement was brief, but called *An Urban Renaissance: The Role of the Arts in Urban Regeneration* (1989), and introduced the concept of a "role" for arts and culture in Britain's fast changing cities. The argument internal to the policy statement is explicitly economic – that the arts attract tourism, increase employment, provide public amenities and community resource and contribute to the building of identity and pride. Today, these claims are unremarkable; in 1989 they were common observation. Yet, the seemingly innocuous claims that the arts can create "a climate of optimism" and a "can do" attitude, was evolving into a more invasive series of political obligations to participate in a new "enterprise culture" (ACGB, 1989: unpaginated).

Why the arts community did not altogether protest is a matter of the economic context. Urban policy, as *An Urban Renaissance* pointed out, was fundamentally concerned with deprivation, poor communities, and the repopulation of inner cities (where most cultural institutions were located). Whether or not the national political rationale was free-market economics was less important than the beneficiaries, who were local people and their immediate urban environment. This presented a political paradox that animated New Labour's approach to both the arts and urban policy (separately), and inherent to the problem of populism. Free market economics were, at the time, almost miraculously delivering the UK's recessionary national economy and benefiting the populace at large in terms of available consumer goods and lowering costs of essential items, and for many, the potential for taxation and public funding was rising with these expanding

markets. Free market mechanisms were showcasing a range of management, marketing and economic development opportunities, which always-cash-strapped public arts organisations found attractive. The free market displayed extraordinary powers in creating equality (money is neutral, consumer demand is untied to class, religion or estate) and demands for small government went well with a seeming growth in civil society.

During the year *An Urban Renaissance* was written, economist John Myerscough wrote the now seminal, *Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* (Myerscough, 1988). It not only set a template for the justification of the public funding of the arts through the contribution of the arts to the "economy", but was explicit in its assumption that the welfare of the arts would be more secure by adopting an explicitly economic rationale. This "economy" was not simply commerce or retail markets — no one expected the arts to generate profit for private shareholders. The economy was the new urban economy of the changing city, and the art's economic rationale could make a social impact on the city without compromising their core competencies (producing art). And one art form that immediately adapted to the new urban economy was Public Art. The UK's Department of Environment (DOE), at the time responsible for urban policy (in its various forms), had demonstrated significant interest in the role of culture in urban development. For example, its *Action for Cities* campaign supported over 300 urban-based cultural projects, the scheme foreshadowing what would become, under New Labour, "culture-led regeneration". One research project resulted in the significant and detailed *Art for Architecture – a handbook for commissioning* (Petherbridge, 1987).

By the year of *An Urban Renaissance* (1989)*,* structural changes in the "economy" of the arts were emerging. The open space of the "public" realm of cities became a new platform for art, artists were trained in collaborating with architects, and importantly, were gaining experience in contractual, financial and sometimes political negotiation with commissioning local bodies — all increasingly operating in a "public-private" capacity. The Department of Environment also negotiated a *Percent for Art* scheme: facilitated by the Arts Council through its regional bodies, public capital development projects

reserved one percent of the budget for arts commissioning. While never mandatory, property developers were increasingly demonstrating that artists could be valued members of design and planning teams and that the expanding genre of Public art could add capital value to new property — particularly public property increasingly subject to the demands of monetisation. Attractive civic centers were attractive to rent-paying retailers as much as consumers out shopping or walking around (ACGB, 1990). Funding for art and artists playing a role in urban development was hugely expanded by the establishment of the National Lottery in 1993 and its heritage and arts-funding arm (ACE, 2002), both *Percent for Art* and the new public investment in urban infrastructure can still be seen in the legacy of Birmingham City regeneration (1989—1993) and Coventry's Phoenix Initiative (1996—2003). A further significance of this era is the emergence of arts consultancies, urban curators and a new series of management capabilities on the part of artists themselves.

Yet, the huge expansion in the professionalisation, financing and urban development roles of artists, curators and consultants, embodied a political caveat. This caveat was pointed out by Gordon Hughes in response to Myerscough's report of 1988: if the arts are to become subject to the same orders of value and quantification of value as other professional services (which they would do as one component of urban planning and development), they would surely never be able to provide evidence for the extent and validity of their contribution (Hughes, 1989). In other words, the question of "cultural value" as a function of economic capital, would become a chronic problem. Although, beyond Hughes, where the arts were increasingly playing a role in more dynamic discourses of transformation and agency, the concept of a cultural "value" would probably become irretrievable.

Section Two: *Valuing culture*

By the end of the 1990s, all artists and organisations in receipt of public funds were generally operating according to a project-management logic, and routinely obligated to demonstrate business, marketing and administration

competencies, along with evidence that they were indeed contributing value to the economy (Lovell, 1998; Everitt, 2007). The professional competencies required to operate within economic development of any kind radically changed how cultural production was managed. Increased professionalisation, remuneration, power of position and a seniority of people who were not themselves creative, also saw a huge expansion in the arts and cultural sectors. The arts and cultural organisations began to attract what, since Bourdieu's research of the 1970s, have been called "intermediaries" — professionals who facilitate creative production but are not themselves artists or creatives (Maguire and Matthews, 2014). The rise of "arts professionals", curators and the increasingly strategic funding body executives, dispelled the old "sub-culture" ethos of arts communities and the cultural politics of the arts (as a realm of ethical life distinct from the State — where the State was increasingly co-opting the public realm).

The State co-option of the "public" realm is particularly vivid in New Labour's reorganisation of local authorities and the mechanisms of public funding distribution. The revitalisation of cities became a central rationale for such organisation, and a genuine area of creativity and policy imagination. Even the otherwise dull environmental policies became a vehicle for critique and new ideas: the national sustainability strategy, *A Better Quality of Life* (DETR, 1999a), was used by Prime Minister Tony Blair as a re-statement of the party's commitment to social democracy, prefaced with his words: "Success has been measured by economic growth – GDP – alone. We have failed to see how our economy, our environment and our society are all one. And that delivering the best quality of life for us all means more than concentrating solely on economic growth [...] we must ensure that economic growth contributes to our quality of life, rather than degrading it' (DETR, 1999b: 3). This was also echoed in the urban White Paper [major policy declaration] -- *Our Towns and Cities: The Future – Delivering an Urban Renaissance,* which itself embodied the radical aspirations of architect Richard Rogers (Centre Pompidou, etc.), who in 1998 was commissioned to set up a government Urban Task Force to offer a new "holistic" template of urban transformation.

The final report of the Urban Task Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (1999), had prioritised design, aesthetics and "social well-being" as central factors in the economic functionality of cities. While many of the Task Force aspirations were ultimately disappointed, the political discourse of transformation gained in weight and force, where the new Office of the Deputy Prime Minister [ODPM] recruited the services of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE, established in 1999) and generated what was arguably the most inventive stream of strategy and guidance documents ever published by any previous government. These ranged from public planning to public building, parks and public spaces, design and new architecture, public art and commissions for artists, and many other areas. Its design thinking is perhaps typified by the guidance booklet *By Design. Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards a Better Practice* (intended as a companion guide to the national planning regulations, the PPG1's). This booklet is significant in two respects: (i) Its inspirational graphic presentation departed from the dull, regulatory and bureaucratic procedure-based character of all previous government planning documents; and (ii) its tacit critique of urban planning as a realm of public regulation (i.e. restrictions) increasingly accommodating the capital interests of physical property development; rather, urban planning is defined as "the art of making places for people", in other words, as signifiers of identity and a loci of cultural habitation. US and Danish traditions of "place making" were in evidence, albeit with a political complexion — the appearance of new city plazas or "squares" was one such visible expression of the emergence of European social democracy.

New Labour's urban policy can be described as a 'Europeanisation' of British civic life, where the traditional English industrial (Victorian) city was deconstructed and reconstructed. As a social class system in architectural form, the Victorian city prioritised State institutions, banks and churches, but was increasingly modified by pedestrianisation, reassigned building uses, new tenants and housing arrangements and a "mixed economy" (of retail, leisure and residential) aiming to re-populate the city centers with access for all. This re-population was not with the old gentry and their servant-class of workers,

but with a representative spectrum of "multicultural" Britain. As the Arts Council's 1993 policy statement, *A Creative Future,* put it: "The United Kingdom is made up not of a single culture, but a multiplicity of cultures [...] it is a kaleidoscope, constantly shifting and richly diverse" (ACGB, 1993: 72). However, the infinite hybridity presumed by the metaphor of "kaleidoscope" did coalesce in socially-specific forms. The "cappuccino culture" of the new urban centers of multicultural Britain, was of course, less diverse than the political rhetoric that celebrated it. For the millennium year 2000, New Labour established a Millennium Commission (1993-2006), which distributed billions of pounds by the National Lottery for new cultural centers and urban facilities. This was, ostensibly, to mark the Millennium occasion, but was also as a way of justifying a fast public-private-driven upgrade of city centers whose neglect will be exposed during the planned Millennium mass gatherings and media attention.

Urban commentators often focused on these developments, and whose pointed observations can be paraphrased as follows (Miles, 2005; Miles and Paddison, 2005; Julier, 2005): (i) the economic structure of the new British city was no longer governed by need or tangible production, but by leisure and services; spaces of production are slowly being eclipsed by spaces of consumption, and the arts are increasingly occupying this space; (ii) the spectrum of architectural style is not evolving but only adapting a set stylistic lexicon of quasi-European postmodernism: its formal vocabulary has little place-specific engagement; (iii) the aesthetics of the urban landscape are increasingly organised by brand and the symbolic landscape of luxury, visitor facilities and signs of 'gentrification': cultural organisations are playing a major role in this process; (iv) the new "public spaces" of art galleries, festivals and cafe restaurants, are economically less accessible to those outside the incoming upwardly mobile professional class; and the economy of the new city entails a generational displacement of the lower class indigenous population, who will not meet rising property values; (v) the policy rhetoric of local authority urban planning and development celebrates the locale, inclusion and participation, and yet whose flagship facilities position each participant as visitor: the "professionalisation" of the city center meant that

only employees could consistently play the role of "participants", and that this genre of participation was not the social or community phenomenon celebrated by the policy rhetoric.

Nonetheless, while the new urban development of an emphatic cultural dimension to cities became increasingly subject to academic criticism — the criticism remained academic. The New Labour policy rhetoric that increasingly framed economic development was that of inclusion and participation, offering a sufficient amelioration to the public costs of development. Moreover, the arts and cultural sectors were by now populated enough with professionals who were increasingly impressed by the changing city, the enfranchisement of culture in urban development, city branding, and huge financial investments in facilities and visitor numbers — culture had rarely been so valued.

The increasing insertion of the arts and cultural facilities within urban development emerged in tandem with another significant phenomenon — the rise of the so-called creative industries. While "industries" in design, communications, entertainment and media, have always populated London, *The Creative Industries Mapping Document* of 1998 (revised in 2001) was extraordinary in its ability to position such industries as a national infrastructure. The new government ministry of the Department of Culture Media and Sport (a New Labour invention out of the old Department of National Heritage, 1992-7) literally invented a new industrial sector, and defined that sector in ways that gained recognition and resource within a public-private oriented government heavily invested in the power of the private, or market. Initially inspired by the Australian Labour government's 1994 "Creative Nation" strategy, New Labour harnessed a range of high-profile personnel and generated significant publicity, policy statements and brand expressions ("Cool Britannia"), whose impact still resonates around the world today (Economist, 1998). A "task force" for the creative industries had paralleled the Urban Task Force, and Minister for Culture, Chris Smith, immediately published a high-profile book, *Creative Britain* (Smith, 1998). A major newspaper of the time, *The Independent*, questioned whether Smith was more "vital" than Gordon Brown (the Chancellor, or minister of finance)

observing: "Cool Britannia could be a form of post-industrial capitalism that combines hard-nosed profits with a fuller recognition of the human creativity on which they hinge" (Koenig, 1998).

The significance of the "invention" of the creative industries is twofold: it provided an economic framework within which the arts and culture were both allocated a role as well as being validated as contributing to a national net contributor to the economy; it also collapsed the previous dichotomy between art and commerce, business values and the value of culture (whose "autonomy" was increasingly regarded as elitist, romantic, institution-based, and only for the educated). The brave new world of the creative industries was radically egalitarian, with few social hierarchies, and in fact (including pop music, fashion and video games) could include a range of hitherto excluded social groups (ethnic, gender or simply young people, who were rarely included in the echelons of the arts and cultural institutions).

However, while the creative industries generated shifts in the social contextualisation of the arts at the level of policy, they were themselves symptomatic of a colonising of marginalised areas of social life in the cause of re-industrialisation — according to the principle of public-private partnership. On the level of policy, where most creative industries were ruthlessly commercial (advertising, marketing, art auction houses) and otherwise uninvolved in matters of public policy, the policy rhetoric of the creative industries represented them as a cohesive realm of public-private value all working towards national development strategy aims (where public had become private value and private was of public value). The British political consensus on "public" and its political opposition to "private" was gradually eroded, private and public interests were, rather, mutually enhancing, and so the reigning concept of "society" was re-framed as a series of institutions and public mechanisms favoring the liberty of the individual and the motivation of private interests. In this scenario, the "market" became the only transcendental signifier of collective solidarity (albeit a solidarity of individual interests). The difference was, where previous civil society consolidations of a solidarity of individual interests were, categorically, against State intervention

and interference, the State in this case was the safeguard of the public-private alliance and guarantor of the benefits of this alliance. On a mass scale, this indeed generated an industrious, ever-growing national infrastructure of shared interests, albeit where "shared" interests were both (and neither) public and private — a vital contradiction that generated vital ideological ambiguities.

Thatcher's society was not an Hobbesian "bellum omnium contra omnes" as some Left critics argued: it was, rather, a post-Lockean landscape of atomised social contracts, made possible by the dynamism and inventiveness of a civil society-dominated market. And the market was no longer simply a trading space — it was a social expanse in which even artists re-framed their activity as a form of exchange mediated by contract-based self-interest. Established organisation, brand, legal personality, became essential for any kind of agency in this new social landscape.

This was evident from the outset, even as the Creative Industries Task Force was mapping the creative industries, the DCMS issues *A New Approach to Investment in Culture* (DCMS. 1998a), after which followed the policy statement *A New Cultural Framework* (DCMS, 1998b). The "new" prefacing many policy statements of this time indeed echoed "New" Labour, but more importantly, ushered in a new vocabulary by which to define an historic policy field — of enterprise, investment, partnership, measurement, and other terms that at once disabled the older regimes of management by artist and empowered the business manager, albeit a business manager who recognised the State as the ultimate executive. For the new economic regime was not calibrated to increase the productivity of arts and culture, or even make it more commercially viable. New Labour's core constituency remained socialist, and the new frameworks framed their call for management competencies with a call for civil society autonomy (i.e. increasing responsibility for self-management) presided over by an increasingly entrepreneurial policy executive. There thus emerged a rapid creation of new organisations (for museums, arts, crafts, film, and so on) concurrently with a dispersed governance of empowered civil society and a new force for

centralisation driven by a quest for monitoring and data gathering. Most vividly represented by QUEST (the DCMS Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team, or the monitoring 'watchdog' as it was referred to (DCMS, 1998b), increased detailed compliance procedures for local government and cultural institutions were introduced.

The paradox of New Labour's centralisation was that it shifted the axis of instability from the realm of producers to the realm of government — and no one of New Labour's innovative national cultural management organisations amassed any great and lasting power; most have been since dissolved and re-constituted (except NESTA, which remains autonomous as an independent charitable endowment set up by a 1998 Act of Parliament). What centralisation achieved was control without responsibility, or where continued funding was always on condition of compliance with a policy executive and its monitoring procedures. As policy was always in motion (New Labour's co-option of all significant private-public dynamics was a governing "over-reach", and inherently unstable), tracking progress and production became symptomatic of an insecurity generated by chronic instability. Inevitably, this "tracking" gained an authoritarian dimension whereby the entire arts and cultural sector was required to restructure their entire understanding of cultural value according to the interests of those outside of the realm of cultural production — other policy agendas. While the arts and culture have historically always had to satisfy a range of policy demands outside their core competencies, New Labour created a political line-management dynamic, for monitoring and continual assessment, which began with the Treasury (finance ministry), to DCMS, to funding bodies (like Arts Council England) and local authorities (such as cities). The lexicon of value and production that ensured the cohesion of this line management arrangement, begun with the Treasury. It was formalised in 1998 in terms of a "Public Service Agreement" with all recipient organisations of public funds (abolished in 2010 by the Coalition government on account of the way their powers of diktat subverted actual public priorities).

Section Three: *The social turn*

This era, curiously, attracted few if any cultural researchers or political scientists who investigation the transformation of public culture, the emergence of a strategic ideological force and the reconstruction of national cultural value. Values involve a profound experiential dimension (operational ethos and lexicon of production, shared understandings of quality, acknowledged critical perspectives, and so on), and only those who worked through the early years of New Labour are able to articulate the sense of political manipulation, reduced sense of autonomy, political homogenisation and intellectual conformity, and not least the acceptance of the rise in power of institutional managers — who arguably represented political authority and demands of policy implementation much more than they did the political conditions of cultural.

Yet, this situation, faced by countless artists, performers, curators and administrators, was animated by a vital contradiction: an entire generation of arts professionals supported (whether intentionally or not) a growing consensus on the nature and role of the State in culture. Where public and private value became categorically inseparable, the State becomes the only viable arbiter. And where intra-communal arts solidarity was, within a decade, replaced by individual competition and careerism, that seemed less important than how the arts and cultural sector was in receipt of ever-growing State support, of funding and acknowledgement, and a role in the most important social policies. Moreover, a trusted Left-wing, not a Right-wing, government was creating a command economy of market forces within public space and infrastructure, promoting business skills as a means of development and capital generating powers. Indeed, the 2001 DCMS landmark policy framework, *Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years*, was a trenchant promise to both cut public bureaucracy as well as the inappropriate (older, commerce-style) market-orientated demands of the previous Conservative government. Free market forces were a well of resource to be used, but not to which the arts must become enslaved. The priorities were the needs of society (children, schools, artists, associations and other public bodies). This

framework publication was prefaced by Prime Minister Tony Blair's foreword, in which he stated that above economic value is that the "the arts and creativity set us free", reassuringly confirming that "It is in that liberating spirit that the arts are part of the core script of this Government' (DCMS, 2001b:3).

Despite the aspirations of the Arts Council's *An Urban Renaissance* in 1989, little policy headway has been made in framing a strategic arts intervention for, specifically, urban policy. Perhaps there was little point, given the rapid progress made by the private entrepreneurial realm of public artists and consultants, and the large institutions and flagship galleries patronised by city-based urban regeneration programs. Only in 2004 did DCMS issue a major policy statement, albeit as an initiation of a national consultation for the arts sector. It was called *Culture at the Heart of Regeneration*, and its aims were telling: Even by 2004, and with many vivid examples of the role of the arts in urban development, the political regime was such that its purpose was to create "a common way to measure the social, economic and environmental impact of [urban cultural] transformational projects" (DCMS, 2004: 3]. Its examples of cultural icons and landmarks, place-making and community cohesion — along with the urban projects that commissioned and validated their work — was not enough. The lack of "measurement" was not merely a lack of data to be used in gaining more funds from central government; it was a lack of credibility and validation. For in the same year (2004), culture minister Tessa Jowell published a personal essay as a policy document (under the DCMS imprimatur), expressing quite openly the vital contradiction at the heart of New Labour's cultural policies. Called *Government and the Value of Culture* (2004), she argued that culture was an "end in itself" and central to human self-actualisation. And yet, "As a Culture Department we still have to deliver the utilitarian agenda, and the measures of instrumentality that this implies, but we must acknowledge that in supporting culture we are doing more than that, and in doing more than that must find ways of expressing it" (DCMS/Jowell, 2004e: 9).

The essay was an eloquent and intellectually informed expression of cultural value and the role of the arts in society — only to be rendered meaningless by

the admission that we "lack convincing language and political arguments".
The "lack" in this case was, again, not a lack in any substantive sense but a
discursive disorientation at how policy has become so vacated of any
reference to cultural production (and experience) nothing we could employ
from thousands of years of cultural and philosophical history, or the
increasingly innovative terrain of contemporary practice, could count.

Two years previous, the DCMS watchdog QUEST had issued a strategy
paper (to be used by funders and local authorities) called *Making it Count*. Its
subtitle was "The Contribution of Culture and Sport to Social Inclusion"
(DCMS 2002). As with Jowell's use of the term "impact", the real object of
assessment for QUEST was "contribution". The challenge of cultural policies
was not to generate powerful, meaningful, internationally influential art or
culture so much as to define how art and culture related to (in a helpful way)
other policy fields. 2002 was a significant year, insofar as urban policy began
to wane as the most visible articulation of New Labour's politicisation of the
public realm. Social policy was the new favoured flagship of innovation, and a
lot of otherwise low-visibility policy work since 1999 began to emerge as
significant for the arts. This included two key areas signified by two key
documents — *Arts and Neighborhood Renewal* (DCMS, 1999a); and *Local
Cultural Strategies: Draft Guidance for Local Authorities in England* (DCMS,
1999b).

The fate of urban policy and cultural policy was affected by a broad and
complex innovation, influenced by various "neighborhood" projects in US
cities. From 2000 New Labour (in part motivated by a philosophical flirtation
with US Communitarianism) developed, through wide consultation, a National
Strategy for Neighborhood Renewal. A Neighborhood Renewal Fund (the
NRF) was one of many social funds that included the urban environment --
with funding categories like Decent Homes, Housing Market Renewal, New
Deal for Communities (NDC), Excellence in Cities, and others. A Social
Exclusion Unit (SEU) was convened to advise government strategy and no
less than eighteen Policy Action Teams (PATS) gathered civil society actors
to come up with radical solutions to neighborhood problems. It looked as if a

properly nuanced and critical understanding of the "social" could be more effective in informing urban policy development, than architects and planners. It was between 2000-2002 that a noticeable "social" turn in cultural policy could be detected, with local cultural strategies were employed by local authorities as strategic tools in broader local and social development. Cultural strategies were not compulsory, but many neighborhood and other vital funds (including admission to National Lottery funds) were only forthcoming if local authorities had implemented the cultural (and a number of other) strategic frameworks.

From 2002, the principle aims of national cultural policy were not invested in ways of articulating the shape and dynamics of culture under increasing globalisation, migrations and diasporas, the rising force of religion and minority community authoritarianism, the rise of the creative industries and their central role in advertising and entertainment, or a huge range of other vital issues facing artists and cultural organisations and historical public culture. The principle aims were equally not the intra-communal development of artistic production, new artistic ideas, communication and the rising internet, or the role of culture in the public sphere. Rather, the principle aims of national cultural policy were a response to New Labour's increasing investment in the capacity of public management in maximising the use of arts and culture for addressing huge social issues identified in terms of "social inclusion", such as museum education for children, or arts outreach as a means of increasing the "participation" of the disabled or elderly, or audience development or marketing that targets ethnic minorities as a means of generating "diversity". Other social aims were now the responsibility of "cultural service providers" as the phrase was, where increased funding followed ever specified project schemes. At the time, the DCMS Social Inclusion Action Plan (2001) seemed innocuous and a welcome statement on the social relevance and social significance of culture. Yet it simply presaged a new political meta-framework of obligations for cultural policy, (as well as re-stating the growing assumption that "the urban" was part of "the social", not the other way around).

The Local Government Act 2002 actually stated that the new local cultural strategies needed to become part of the (equally) new Community Plan (part of the neighbourhood spectrum of policies). At the national level (and this is something yet to be subject to scholarly analysis) arts policy and funding (such as Arts Council England) was becoming more a funding strategy body than simply an "enabling" champion of artistic culture. The difference was that a "strategic" body defined strategy (priorities and delivery) for its designated "sector" — thus assuming anyone in receipt of public funds were now directly working for national government policy priorities. Furthermore, a strategic funding body was itself under intensive monitoring scrutiny, and inexorably so, its funds were increasingly articulated so as to demonstrate it was meeting government social policy aims — not engaged in cultural sector capacity-building or as catalyst of production). At the local level, like cities (whose funding powers, oddly, remained unconnected to national funding bodies like Arts Council England) cultural policy was a new unchartered territory, (and thus without suitably trained policy officers). Yet, as stated by the Guidance (2004), local authorities had to work "maximising the overlap between the work and outputs of community and cultural planning' (DCMS/Creative Cultures, 2004:12). The Guidance (2004) also stated that "cultural planning" must not be entirely sunk into the "wider community development agenda". Yet, that was the very purpose of the local cultural strategy.

Section Four: *Auditing culture*

In 2002 when QUEST assessed the work of DCMS (highlighted in the Executive Summary of their report *Making it Count*), an interesting issue emerged: "the objectives of social inclusion work for the cultural and sporting sectors are not clear, partly because they have not yet been translated into cultural or sporting terms" (DCMS/QUEST, 2002: 2). The apparent failing in a "translation" of the social into cultural (and sporting) terms, was indeed symptomatic of a larger failure — to conceptualise culture itself as distinct (and autonomous from) the social, or any critical understanding on how "culture" has presented challenges with its integration into "society" or its

appeal to broad sectors of society who are seemingly uninterested or uninvolved. The QUEST comment also pointed out that very different concepts of culture were in circulation and use within key agencies (whether DCMS or local authorities) (DCMS/QUEST, 2002: passim). The emergence of differing concepts of culture coincided with the emergence of different categories of requirements on culture's social roles. The above cited Guidance (2004) defined culture as "an inclusive concept that embraces a wide variety of activities, places, values and beliefs that contribute to a sense of identity and well-being for everyone in our communities" (DCMS/Creative Cultures, 2004: 6), and despite this quasi-anthropological vagueness insisted on its specific usefulness in a multitude of specific social locations. These social locations, however, were heavily managed by professionals of fields other than cultural policy.

The integration of culture with a social agenda and its spiraling series of policy initiatives generated some important opportunities for artists and the many beneficiaries. But no one agency of policy was invested in research to the extent that the necessary theoretical work could be accomplished and acted upon. In 2006, however, Arts Council England illustrated some of the opportunities that had emerged for artists — albeit, the artists themselves were barely mentioned. The priority of the colourful 2006, three-part report, was "impact": Called, *The Power of Art: visual arts: evidence of impact* (ACE, 2006), the 'urban' was, again, just one of a broader social field of political challenges, with Health and Education the others.

The aforementioned Neighbourhood Renewal national strategy (Cabinet Office, 2001) had not even mentioned arts and artists, despite its increasing breadth of named stakeholders (from universities to local business). But it did stimulate some good responses from cultural agencies, such as the London Arts' Creative Neighborhoods scheme, targeting young people, racism and disadvantage in London' State housing areas (ACE, 2003b; Arts Council England initiated similar projects with Art in the Centre and Artists in the City projects). However, again, a lack of research and theoretical work mean that no genuine and sustainable field of socially-engaged arts emerged (absorbing

older activist forms of community arts and social art practices already in place, many emerging from the now booming field of Public art).

By 2003, many if not most cultural organisations found themselves under an explicit political mandate, rhetorically framed in such a way that seemed to promote public culture, participation and social inclusion it could hardly be resisted. However, the political mandate required a return, and a range of mechanisms were demanded in obtaining data and other specific genres of information by which "evidence policy making" could be established. A government modernising government initiative, begun in 1999 (DETR, 1999c), had enrolled the government Treasury and all other agencies in obtaining a data return for any public funding (even routine or core funding to which an institution had a right by law). The Treasury had operated with a "white book" [guidelines for obligations to funded parties, including strict monitoring and reporting mechanisms] for some time, and in 2004 the DCMS devised its own *White Book*, establishing the practice for data submission and reporting for all cultural agencies or personnel in receipt of public funds (DCMS, 2004b).

The emerging "audit culture" in the arts (Power, 1997; Gray, 2007) seemed to prompt the odd personal statement of the culture minister, Tessa Jowell, cited above, where her support for evidence-based policy making was put into question by a series of statements on the intrinsic value of culture. In *Government and the Value of Culture*, she insisted that public accountability — the very epicenter of democratic governance — was a "force" that politicians responded to by accounting for cultural expenditure in terms of "its instrumental benefits to other agendas". She lamenting the apparent lack of political ability to allow culture to be "for what it does in itself" (DCMS/Jowell, 2004: 8), but the publication was written following a series of public speeches advocating "public debate" on value and culture.

Yet, for all that, DCMS continued on its own quest to become a mainstream government ministry and respectable bureaucracy — not a political advocate for the value of culture. Its annual reviews bore no trace of Jowell's initiated public debate; and where by 2007, huge political interventions had made

museums free of charge, promoted culture in schools, funded huge international touring, the digitization of many museum holdings (including the British Museum), policy statements remained fixated only on "evidence" defined activities and their social function.

A good example is the *Culture and Creativity* report of 2007 (DCMS, 2007), which served to demonstrate the progress made by cultural policies since the election of New Labour in 1997. It featured no reference to advances in cultural research, cultural ideas, new technologies of cultural production and professional learning, and many other of the ways the arts were developing in 2007. The progress made was articulated as polemic — funds well spent, the evidence for which was social access and visitor numbers (and by extension, volunteers, and new jobs or employment). Moreover, culture as a category, is itemised in terms of tangible benefit to individuals (even when an urban regeneration project is cited) — a form of social return on (public) investment. This approach to enumerating consumers, stakeholders, distribution and demand, employment and sectoral growth, was not fortuitous but demanded from Treasury de facto line management. What was demanded indeed seemed perfectly reasonable, and in the cause of an increase in public access and visitor numbers, public relevance and transparent expenditure of funds, the arts and cultural sectors transformed their practices of production

Conclusion: *Social Instrumentalism and populism*

The DCMS *Culture and Creativity* report of 2007 is significant is it portrays the basis of the arts and cultural sector as it largely stands today. National policy is defined in terms of "investment", and whose objects remain established organisations and events — along with the professionalisation of management and administration, increased data sets on visitors and audiences (and the increasing revenues they generate), and all explicitly benefitting a "public", where no substantive public is available (where the public has been de-politicised through its integration with the new "private" of national development partners). And despite an emphatic social policy framework acting a defining mechanism for culture's strategic aims – no

substantive social achievements in applying cultural creativity to "society" was ever recorded (without denying the genuine impact of a range of single, small scale projects).

Since 2004, politicians (most of them) and even policies have changed, but an historical intellectual-policy substrate still remains, and this can be defined in terms of social instrumentalism. The decisive shift away from urban policy as a principle mode of social transformation (and the potential for the arts within that) to a "neighbourhood" agenda, signified a significant repositioning for cultural policy outside a past political realm structured by a public-private dichotomy. The neighbourhood (not a term common to British policy) was an imported categorisation of an integration socio-urban environment, into which the arts and culture could be inserted according to social strategic targets (often to ameliorate the damage wrought by the "private" dimension of the public-private dynamics of development). This policy movement either absorbed, instrumentalised or marginalised other fields of social thought, such as community arts, arts therapy, public arts and rising strategies of artistic intervention.

The perceived demands of democracy (at least, for the European Left since the 1980s) can be defined in terms of social inequity and the political de-legitimation resulting from the social disenfranchisement of large segments of the traditional labouring class emerging from the deindustrialisation of the 1970s. This article identified re-industrialisation as the principle political project that situated the arts and culture as valued participants in urban development and cities. The urban policy rhetoric of "renaissance" and "regeneration", of European origin, became persuasive as Britain's major cities became again centres of social and cultural change. As the commercial bent of the previous Conservative regime began to bear fruit in the increasingly gentrified and confused cityscape, New Labour offered the cultural sector a means of reversing this with explicit social aims but at the cost of a de facto partnership in the strategic management of the arts and cultural sector(s). (The use of the economics term "sector" was one rhetorical means by which the arts and culture were redefined both as creative

industries and in need of strategic management). The strategic management of culture was characterised by what I called a "vital contradiction". It was vital as the emergence of the free market was offering huge potential public funds as much as popularity with a consumer public, and the increasing complexity of multicultural Britain was spawning huge social divisions and alienation. It was a contradiction in that the cultural realm was compelled to participate in a project of social justice that threatened the very basis of its cultural autonomy, and asserted the State as manager and mediator of a newly constituted civil society realm of integrated public and private interests. And few resisted the imposition of a spectrum of detailed policy orders, reducing cultural value to social indicators, generating a new cultural executive (and largely uncreative) management over national cultural production, and a regime of monitoring and auditing whose psycho-social impacts were outside the scope of any research evaluation.

Populism can emerge as one enterprise or internal to a policy field, where a government or party can stimulate the "popular" through an appeal to the assumed interests of the "public" as "mass" public, justify huge public expenditures, command obedience or engage in expulsion of party members for non-compliance. Populism can take the form of a political pragmatism of social conscience, seeking to reward the uneducated, the excluded, the marginalised majority of hard-working citizens. It can take the form of a complex social policy, yet charged with sentiment, emotion and accusations of injustice, and so evading all political deliberation or the procedural assessment formative for public policy. Populism, this article observes, can emerge as a spectrum of policy initiatives that appeal to the interests of national development — in critical resistance to the commercial values of the previous Conservative regime — and champion of "society". Its uncompromising social agenda was at once undeniably warranted and yet which positioned the State as arbiter of national cultural production. Policy rhetoric convinced most that radical change was in the interests of "society", but where society and "the social" had been de-politicised and objectified as recipient of State patronage. Where State patronage took the form of huge rises in welfare and public funding, culture as public culture was easily

enfranchised as another function of State.

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