

Manuscript version: Published Version

The version presented in WRAP is the published version (Version of Record).

Persistent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/167639>

How to cite:

The repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing citation guidance from the publisher.

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

Network-building in cultural diplomacy

A short paper delivered as part of the introductory panel at the University of Manchester conference event, 12 July 2022 (online), organised by Biyun Zhu.

PANEL 1 – Introduction to Contemporary Understandings

- Jonathan Vickery, *University of Warwick*
- Yudhishtir Raj Isar, *American University of Paris*
- Margaret Wyszomirski, *Ohio State University*

Dr Jonathan Vickery,
Director: Centre for Cultural and Media Policy Studies
University of Warwick, UK: J.P.Vickery@warwick.ac.uk

Paper title: ‘Locating the culture in cultural diplomacy networking: towards a political aesthetics approach’

I begin by reflecting on my own understanding of Cultural Diplomacy and my own experience of belonging to cultural networks, and I consider how many, if not most network members belong to multiples of networks, are motivated by many short and longer term incentives, and participate in those networks at various levels, both formally and informally, where social, cultural or political investment, risk or capital operate at various ways.

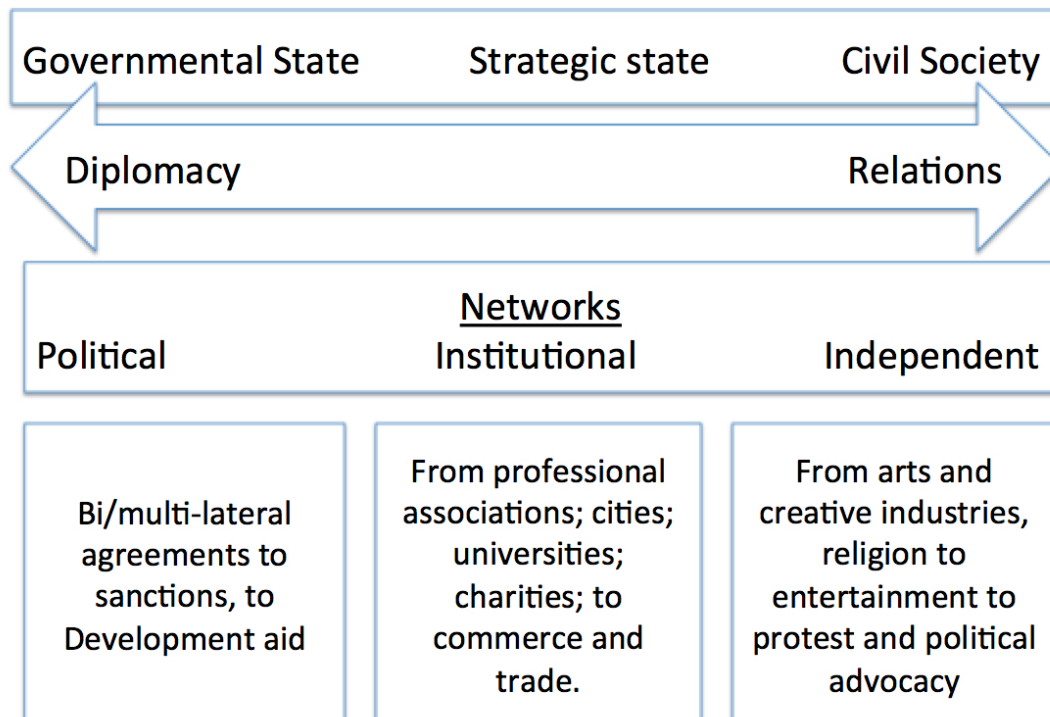
I then think of my current research projects – of co-editing a book on ICR, and participating in a ‘city of culture’ project where the British Council played a role facilitating international networks. This latter project was not formal ‘city diplomacy’ — *ambassadorial representation, advocacy, influence and persuasion, agreement and consensus brokering, alliances and agenda-setting, and so on* — but a series of events that facilitated young people in using these capabilities of diplomacy *as a form of cultural production*. (On reflection, it indicates a distinction we need to bear in mind. In the past, we rightly assume a distinction between Cultural Diplomacy and ICR (or the less procedural or formalised ‘relations’ made possible by culture). But this leaves our concept of Cultural Diplomacy to the realm of foreign policy and the agency of government. However, for the young people in the Youthful Cities programme of the Coventry City of Culture 2021, the ‘diplomacy’ was *not using culture, but culture using diplomacy*, in the sense that diplomatic capabilities were being introduced into the informal realm of cultural relations. Young people were given the mandate to re-think their city’s ‘relations’ with other cities around the world, specifically,

Coventry with Nairobi, Bogotá, Beirut and Detroit, and through these 'relations' they were able to 're-think' their city — its culture and policies as they responded (or not) to the lives and aspirations of young people. If we consider 'diplomacy' in terms of 'capabilities' — Amartya Sen, et al. — then this would enable us to develop our principal understanding of this as a field of innovative policy research.

And Thirdly, relating to my book project, I am aware that Cultural Diplomacy was never in any case a scientifically defined field of knowledge governed by established institutions (notwithstanding its long history). Cultural Diplomacy for us — mostly cultural policy scholars — is a contemporary confluence of cultural research, political theory and professional practice, and so for me this symposium can be described as an act of 'knowledge diplomacy' — a field-building of disciplinary knowledge, which validates certain lines of inquiry, a lexicon of professional terms, political-theoretical assumptions, setting a recognised agenda that can attract resources, stakeholders.

My short presentation is essentially about theory — we know what diplomacy is, but less certain on how the work of diplomacy — *representation and negotiation, persuasion, influence and creating the conditions for 'attraction' and so on* — can be clearly analysed and evaluated when we talk about more dynamic or informal objects, like 'relations' (be they networks or independent international cultural projects or events that forge 'relations'). *So my concern in this short paper is to find the theoretical terms that establish how cultural relations are significant in the broader context of diplomacy (our general knowledge of international relations and the global political economy).*

Cultural Diplomacy Networks?



My tabulation of our subject, here, offers a basic empirical starting point for this symposium — in simple columns and categories, which would be revised in a more nuanced critical study — with formal diplomacy (governmental, foreign policy-based) at one end, and the often informal, civil and perhaps even unintentional or non— strategic forms of “relations”. It surely makes sense, but also serves to remind us how analytical categorisations can be deceptive, and that the cluster of terms usually associated with our subject — public diplomacy, soft power, ICR, and so on — are enmeshed in a complex of culture and politics, which vary from event to event, place to place.

Concerning *assumptions*, then: the phrase ‘Cultural Diplomacy networks’ begs a lot of fundamental questions that should be cited as we will not have time to discuss — specifically, how far can we rely on classical modern liberal democracy and its categories of state vs. civil society, the public sphere, citizenship, the distinction between the market and political institutions, and so on? Most of this axiomatic lexicon of international relations is in flux and often because of exogenous pressures, like digital media. ... *and, of course, what we mean by ‘culture’ itself.* So the old tradition of classical logic, of iterating one’s assumptions at the start of a paper, has become again important:

- ‘Cultural diplomacy’: is this an actual field of knowledge, in a professional research sense? Where is the theory or methodologies on which we draw?
- *Political change* – from the ‘post-nation state’ and globalisation to digital media and rise in bi/multi lateral and regional agreements around the world; our so-called ‘new diplomacy’ and its emphasis on communication, dialogue and participatory-based methods of engagement has changed the meaning and practice of all levels of IR.
- There have been profound shifts in the *operational ideologies* of all nation states (in our classical spectrum of capitalist to socialist, from parliamentary to other forms of democracy), away from an explicit assertion of national interests (naked power) and towards participating within international hierarchies and bi/multi and regional collaborative arrangements (which ‘realist’ IR of course contests)
- *Political aesthetics* — my theoretical frame of reference (no space for justifying it here) uses CPE or ‘cultural political economy’ to understand why contemporary states require ‘semiosis’ or non-state means of creating agency; how this semiosis (or meaning-making, once a function ascribed to ideology itself) generated pragmatic and convincing ‘imaginaries’ or discursive mediations of authority, legitimacy and value.
- The argumentation dimension of my paper is that the work of new forms of state diplomacy require ‘cultural imaginaries’ — and that the traditional dyadic categorisation of ‘cultural diplomacy vs ICR’ is no longer useful, or perhaps useful for a ‘critical’ understanding, at least, and yes, in a longer paper we would need to discuss the epistemic role of the ‘critical’ and what that actually means in this research context.

However, I need a further comment on theory — as the aim of my paper is theoretical (and why my title refers to ‘political aesthetics’). I maintain that – given the wide spectrum of practices that we loosely refer to in a cognitive landscape of shifting semantics — need a specific framework and research agenda when facing these endlessly variable or mutable situations. Political aesthetics traditionally phrased as the ‘*cultural expression of statehood or mass politics*’ [cf. Sartwell, 2010], notorious through the 20th Century, must be updated to our own age of so-called ‘post-nationalism’ [with Russia currently reminding us that this is no modish academic abstraction] and do so as a means of conceptualising the political work conducted by aesthetics – which I take to mean not so much the usefulness of culture to politics (as we tend to phrase our understanding of it) but *the expressive and affective*

dimensions of politics, of which substantive cultural activity both consolidates and allows us to apprehend as an object of critical study. This is to say, the phenomenon we study within the activities we refer to as cultural diplomacy and ICR *are more concentrated articulations of a broader political aesthetics of governmental power* (agency, legitimacy and value, as I phrase it). Influenced by Jessop, Taylor, Anderson, I understand all politics as having a constitutive *cultural* dimension – of imaginings, narratives, identity-formation – and because of globalisation and the post-national condition, nation states cannot assume autonomy, military hegemony or monocultural identity, they rather are sustained by processes of creativity, management and organisation (called *semiosis* – which involves, among other things, creating ‘imaginaries’ that the State requires to maintain a provisional coherence and productivity as an agent in the global political economy). My interest here is in the way the relation between a *semi-autonomous national state* and the world of the global political economy can be understood as ‘networked semiosis’ [this is my updated version of *political aesthetics, detaching it from the old images of nationalism with flags and uniforms and so on*]. The process of semiosis [Jessop] is the cultural means by which all dimensions of life – social life, commerce, creativity, institutions, or whatever – are composed into ‘imaginaries’ or spheres of meaning through which our multi-faceted lives become a coherent part of a political economy (become managed by this economy – we become productive cooperate citizens of an established order of things). I project this from our own agency as individual actors, to the agency of the nation state, albeit a post-national ‘assemblage’ of a contemporary State as it needs to find agency and a place in the global political economy.

So I have examples of such imaginaries — created through a *networked semiosis* – a semiosis that does not conform to the usual functional arrangements of social reproduction, political governance, discipline and order, economic management, and so on. This kind of semiosis is generated by *networked participants* of diverse interests (where, yes, it would once have been a case of national ideologies being generated by the institutions of state): as Jessop would say “imaginaries are discursively constituted and materially produced” [see web reference below], this network participates in a *provisional cultural production of diplomacy*. Each example is therefore a particular variant of political aesthetics (not simply an aesthetic expression of political meaning, but – as semiosis — the creation of an imaginary or sphere of meaning that defines a viable agency in the global political economy).

My first example [photographically illustrated – not possible here for reasons of copyright] I call ‘Meet Her Majesty’ – a press photograph of an annual meeting of the Commonwealth of Nations organisation [once, the British Commonwealth, since 1931]. As a brief analysis, I would say that this represents a *cultural imaginary* of post-colonial conviviality — how, after the protracted historical, fraught, violent and the unjust subjugation of colonialism, can be concluded through diplomatic variants of friendship, facilitated by events and associations like this. And yes, the British Royal Family are a national cultural diplomacy agency of their own; but further, the *semiosis* here was between the more established political and social institutions of post-colonial Empire (like the British Monarchy and the Royal armed forces), producing a *cultural diplomacy of depoliticised fraternity* between the social elites that replace the institutions of state that were the principal beneficiaries of political cooperation. And this is functional within a *global political economy* of the status quo and stability (through convivial relations – avoid past colonial injustice; current inequalities; etc.). Conviviality counts for a lot in the world of the ‘new diplomacy’.

So that’s my compressed reading of the subject of this photograph — a subject that obviously must be subject to deeper scrutiny in other contexts. My next example is The Nobel Prizes (since 1901), which are the historic accolade conferred on outstanding individuals from around the world, who’s work, in the words of the Swedish industrialist and posthumous philanthropist, Alfred Nobel (b. 1833, Stockholm; and whose name they bear), are of ‘benefit to mankind’. The now-five Nobel prizes are widely considered the greatest of conferred marks of distinction, whose ceremonial organisation and agenda (cf. <https://www.nobelprize.org/>) is an *imaginary* of perpetual progress through the human intellect (i.e. an alternative to nation state or military advancement-propelled progress); and this emerges from a *semiosis of historic European orders of civil achievement* (and recognition) in alliance with a range of institutional discourses of political advocacy (peacemaking). Altogether, this produces a *cultural diplomacy of future global humanism* for the global political economy of non-competitive global public sphere of culture-based thinkers. Despite its appearance (and comparative selection process) The Nobel Prize as an imaginary is a model of human progress that is fundamentally non-competitive.

My third example is an attempt by governmental sponsors to respond to an international crisis with a civil-professional agenda: The British Museum’s ‘Iraq Scheme’ (2015-2000): on the occasion of huge damage to the heritage and museums of Iraq and Syria, largely by the

Islamic State (IS) terrorist group (Dā'ish, in Arabic), professionals in the British Museum were able to invite and train their Middle Eastern counterparts, arranging a range of events, visits and professional programs, all aiming to restore and recover the valuable museum and heritage of these countries. For me (and you need to look at the rhetoric and strategic programme of this 'scheme') this signifies something we find in many UNESCO and other circles, an *imaginary of culture as global knowledge republic*; the *Semiosis* here is of the specialist heritage institutes/ museums methods, codes and frameworks of heritage (museum and artifact rescue and preservation), producing a *cultural diplomacy of professional solidarity for the global political economy of development aid as political partnership*.

My next example is less formal, or institution-based: it is the Chinese dissident artist Ai Wei Wei and the 'Fly the Flag' project. This began with a commission by London-based arts agency, Fuel, whereby artist Wei Wei designed a new type of flag (and symbol) for the 70th anniversary of the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Since 2018, this has caught the imagination of many stakeholders and participants, internationally, establishing an annual 'Fly the Flag' event of symbolic expression of support for human rights (and by implication, in solidarity with those who do not enjoy such). It is an *imaginary* of a pan-cultural 'nation-hood' of all peoples [i.e. not just an old-style UN human rights 'brotherhood of man']; it emerged from a *semiosis of* artists, arts agencies, cities, human rights and global advocacy bodies, producing a *cultural diplomacy of human welfare* (esp. refugees, stateless and migrants) for the global political economy of human welfare and mobility (a politicised forms of global welfare economy).

I must be more brief with the rest of my examples, given the time allocated: My penultimate example is entirely informal in the sense of being a protest-alliance — it is the New York-based but internationally-active Gulf Labour Artist Coalition. They have successfully protest and deferred the advancement of the Guggenheim museum expansion (itself a developed cultural diplomacy: see Natalia Grincheva's recent book, *Museum Diplomacy in the Digital Age*, Routledge 2020). The Gulf Labour Artist Coalition remains an *imaginary* of a global art avant-garde, emerging from a *semiosis of* professional artists, institutions and governmental officials (cities, countries); it produces (mostly by default of their protest) a *cultural diplomacy of coordinated cultural activism* for the global political economy of labour rights

and recognition.

Finally, I want to refer you to a perhaps unexpected example, the ‘urban creative cluster’ known as M50 (after its location, no.50 Moganshan Road, at the north end of the city of Shanghai, China. Effectively established in 2000, it was only a redundant state-owned factory space, used as cheap and spacious studio space by artists, and now a primary visitor destination featuring many open studios, exhibition spaces, design-based companies and an association of artists who maintain this as a cohesive facility. Whatever its continued compromises between producers and consumers, state and civil ownership, it has become an *imaginary* of global creative economy from a semiosis of older post-industrial state property holders and contemporary international creative workers, producing a *cultural diplomacy* of producer-centered international markets for the global political economy of new transnational spaces of creativity. This may seem an elaboration, but there is a strong sense in which buildings, property ownership and control, is no longer central to the mediation of international cultural relations as it was – or was in the era where to gather like-people in any consolidated professional endeavor one had to form an organisation and develop an institution. This is no longer necessary — it is not relevant, for example, to the new global discourse of creative economy, who actually owns the buildings that form M50.

All these examples, of course, require a thorough analysis and sustained interpretative argumentation; here, for this conference, they are simply indicative of how our concepts of cultural diplomacy and ICR are becoming porous and hybrid.

But I must conclude with something more specifically pertaining to networks, and this is the rationale for my choice of examples. In all these examples, networks play the principal functioning role

- (i): That role is participatory – part of a *cultural production* that is centered around the persuasion, influence and attraction of certain post-national formations of solidarity.
- (ii): A political aesthetics (updated with a cultural political economy theorisation of the centrality of ‘semiosis-imaginary’) identifies how influential sources of political change are now being negotiated outside the political institutions of state.
- (iii): Networks might therefore be conceived as post-national (post-industrial) forms of cultural production, and now a central facilitator in a globalisation of cultural imagination —

where culture, through diplomacy, can take find the conditions of authority, legitimacy and value that are required for political agency.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
- Balta, J. (2021) 'Key Approaches in Fragile Contexts. How Cultural Relations Can Enhance Peace and Stability', EUNIC, British Council, IFA, found at : <https://www.eunicglobal.eu/news/cultural-relations-key-approaches-in-fragile-contexts-report-available> (accessed 22 June 2022)
- Cull, N. (2021) 'From Soft Power to Reputational Security: Rethinking Public Diplomacy and Cultural Diplomacy for a Dangerous Age', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 18: 18-21
- Doerer, J. & Nisbett, M. (20017) *The Art of Soft Power. A Study of Cultural Diplomacy at the UN Office in Geneva*, London: King's College London.
- Grincheva, N. (2021) *Museum Diplomacy in the Digital Age*. London and New York: Routledge.
- ICR Research (2021) *Soft Power and Cultural Relations Institutions in a Time of Crisis*. London: British Council.
- Jessop, B. (2015) 'Cultural Political Economy and Critical Policy Studies', at <https://bobjessop.wordpress.com/2015/01/26/cultural-political-economy-and-critical-policy-studies/> (accessed 22 June 2022)
- Nye, J. (2004) *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs Books.
- MacDonald, S. and Singh, J.P. (2017) *Soft Power Today. Measuring the Influences and Effects*. British Council and The University of Edinburgh.
- Paschalidis, G. (2009) 'Exporting National Culture: Histories of Cultural Institutes Abroad', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 15, no. 3: 275-289.
- Rivera, T. (2015) *Distinguishing Cultural Relations from Cultural Diplomacy: The British Council's Relationship with Her Majesty's Government*. LA, CA: Center for Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California.
- Rawnsley, G. (2012) 'Approaches to Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in China and Taiwan', *Journal of International Communication* 18, no.2: 121-135.
- Singh, J.P. (2919) *Culture and International Development. Towards an Interdisciplinary Methodology*. Arlington: The Schar School of Policy and Government.
- Taylor, C. (2003) *Modern social imaginaries*, Durham NC.: Duke University Press.

.....