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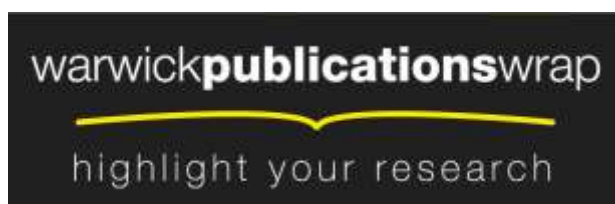
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**‘Cabined, Cribbed, Confined, Bound in’ or ‘We Are Not a Government Poodle’:
Structure and Agency in Museums and Galleries¹**

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Introduction

Public policy and administration – and political science in general in Britain – have recently seen sporadic outbreaks of concern about the relationship of structure and agency for making sense of the empirical complexities of their subject matter, alongside discussions of some of the ontological and epistemological issues with which this relationship is associated. While there has been some tradition of discussing these philosophical issues in the British study of politics (see, for example, Crick, 1959; Mackenzie, 1967; Hayward, 1999; Hay, 2002; Marsh & Stoker, 2010) it is still largely the case that it has tended to be something of a side-issue in many discussions of public policy that do not adopt a rational-choice framework for analysis where formal modelling to identify causal relationships between variables is often the preferred approach. One consequence of this is that the relationships of theory to analysis, and the linkages between ontology, epistemology and methodology, have tended to be, perhaps, less considered than might be useful (Hay, 2006). To demonstrate the relevance of this claim for the analysis of structure and agency in the context of a specific policy sector a comparison of the methodological consequences of adopting different epistemological positions will be presented. The conclusions that may be drawn from such a comparison should not be expected to be startlingly original in a theoretical or philosophical sense but may be necessary to demonstrate the importance of thinking through the implications of the ontological and epistemological choices that analysts must make. For the purposes of this comparison the strategic-relational and emergence approaches to structure and agency, exemplified by the work of Jessop (2007) and Archer (1995) respectively, will be examined in the context of museums and galleries policy in England.

Structure, Agency and Ontology

While consideration of the relationship between structure and agency has a long – if not uncontested – tradition within sociology (Bhaskar, 1979; Giddens, 1984; Archer, 1988, 1995, 2003; Parker, 2000²) it is only relatively recently that a direct consideration of this relationship has become a part of the landscape of British political analysis. This can be seen in both the large number of discussions of the ontological and epistemological bases underpinning possible understandings of the relationships between the two component elements of the debate (Hay & Wincott, 1998; Sibeon, 1999; Dowding, 2001, 97-100; Hay, 2002, 89-134; Lewis, 2002; McAnulla, 2005; Jessop, 2007; Hay, 2009a, 2009b; Pleasants, 2009; Cruickshank, 2010), and in the increasing use of the structure-agency relationship as a means for undertaking forms of analysis of issues ranging from institutional racism (Wight, 2003), to democratisation in South Asia (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004), to local political participation (Lowndes *et al*, 2006) to British governance (Goodwin & Grix, 2011). These discussions

may have their own intrinsic interest and, usually, lead to a clarification of the basic ground-rules under which substantive empirical analyses of the relationship of structure and agency can take place but they have generally been weak at developing the relationship between ontological and epistemological positions and the methodological consequences of them.

It is not the intention to discuss here the philosophical position on the relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology, or to provide yet another assertion of the primacy of one or the other of these over the others. What is more at issue here is the relative lack of precision in much of the political science literature about how methodology can be derived from particular ontological and epistemological positions. While there can be no doubt that adopting any particular methodology necessarily entails adopting ontological and epistemological positions (Hay, 2009b; 896) this does not mean that the reverse is true: adopting a stance of methodological individualism does not, for example, commit the analyst to adopting any one of the possible social constructivist methodological positions that are available, any more than it does any particular rational choice or interpretivist one. In the case of the debate about the relationship of structure and agency, for example, Archer (1995; 65) identifies a number of social binaries that are subsumed within this – voluntarism/determinism, subjectivism/objectivism, microscopic/macroscopic – and identifies potential solutions to these (normally associated with one or the other of these divisions), but these are expressed at the ontological level alone³ and the mechanisms of determining how to analyse any of them in particular are not considered.

If a concern with ontological questions is to be anything more than a rather esoteric discussion of the nature of reality then some means of assessing what these questions actually entail is required. At this level empirical investigation assumes importance for providing information that can be used in the consideration of the relationships of key component parts of particular ontological positions, even if empirical evidence is not capable of determining whether these positions or relationships are ‘correct’ or not (Hay, 2009a; 263). Analysis, instead, can be used for a variety of less absolute issues including the investigation of hypotheses, the making of predictions, the clarification of causal mechanisms (and so on) within the context of the particular sets of assumptions which are part and parcel of any given ontological position. Approaching analysis from the bottom-up could address this concern by a consideration of ‘careful conceptualization, precise measurement, and fastidious causal thinking ... the hallmarks of political methodology’ (Brady *et al*, 2009; 1005), whilst taking on board issues of reliability, measurement bias and validity (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2009; 92-4). Such a methodological approach, however, demands more than the practical (and, seemingly,

unproblematic) application of research common sense: 'recondite problems remain such as linking theory to methodology' (Brady *et al*, 2009; 1007), and the need to 'form a coherent link between epistemology/social ontology and research methods' (Burnham *et al*; 2008, 31) both require consideration – and the solution to them is not as necessarily straight-forward as methodological concerns might lead the analyst to assume. Burnham *et al* (2008; 30-5), for example, draw some clear parallels between epistemological positions and research methodologies that may be seen to be appropriate to these but have a tendency to elide epistemology and ontology and thus fail to develop the 'coherent link' that is actually required. Indeed, it is the gap between ontology, epistemology and research methods that is seen as being one of the – many – important issues that a consideration of the relationships between structure and agency gives rise to.

Museums and Galleries as a Policy Sector

It is something of a truism to argue that all policy sectors have their own specificities which demarcate them from other sectors - although the question of what a 'policy sector' actually consists of is not as clear as might be imagined: is it simply a set of organisations that are differentiated from other sets of organisations by nature of their functional activities⁴, or does it consist of a set of organisations constructed by institutional definition (as in the case of 'local' or 'state' governments), or by some combination of these, or by other means altogether? However this is decided the expectation will be that there are particular characteristics of policy type (Hood, 1983; Howlett, 2011; 41-59), organisational structure (both in terms of institutional forms and inter-organisational patterns), sets of actors (including their relative degrees of professionalization, and democratic and functional legitimacy) and modes of working (whether, for example, in the rather nebulous form of policy 'styles', or in terms of patterns of accountability) that serve to establish a particular set of policy environments and working practices that differ from those to be found in other settings. At this level this is nothing more than a form of descriptive listing exercise that could be used as a basis for straight-forward concept definition and variable selection to organise empirical work (as proposed in many political methodology works: see Pollock, 2012; 8-12, for example).

In this case the museums and galleries sector could be characterised as being largely professionally dominated, semi-detached from other parts of the political system in terms of its own internal functioning, predominantly building-based⁵, politically uncontentious⁶, and decidedly small in terms of expenditure and staffing⁷. In many respects this shares characteristics of the cultural policy sector in general, and in Britain in particular, which is hardly a priority for central government (Gray, 2009; Gray and Wingfield, 2011), being a matter more of 'low' rather than 'high' politics (Bulpitt, 1983; 3).

In terms of the policies that are pursued within the sector there is a clear division between those that are based upon clear professional imperatives and ideologies and those which have been derived from a variety of exogenous sources. The perceived instrumentalisation of museums and galleries policies associated with the latter – policies designed to achieve objectives associated with other sets of policy concerns, such as social inclusion (Newman & McLean, 1998; 2004; West and Smith, 2005) or modernising government (Lawley, 2003) – either as an unintended consequence of changes elsewhere in the political system, or as a conscious strategy of policy attachment by staff within the sector (Gray, 2002; 2008), reinforces the idea that the sector is only semi-detached from other sources of policy activity and choice, even if actors within the sector are capable of making independent choices within the limits that external factors provide.

The extent to which these exogenous factors act simply as a set of structural constraints and opportunities, and the extent to which these are effectively a matter to be managed purely through the choices and decisions of individual actors, or groups of actors, within the sector provides the basis for investigating the relationship of structure and agency in museums and galleries. The establishment of a binary differentiation between, respectively, a collectivist and an individualist understanding of these positions as a result of ontological conflation (Archer, 1995; 34-57) limits, however, the extent to which the active relationship between structure and agency can be analysed. The critical realist position adopted, in different ways, by Archer (1988; 1995; 2003) and Jessop (2007) focuses attention on precisely this dynamic nature to the working out in practice of the entwined nature of structural context and individual action. To do so, however, requires some consideration of what structures and agents are to be understood as, and how they are anticipated to function. The lack of clarity about how these key terms are to be defined, apart from generating problems of operationalising them – a not unheard of difficulty – also generates problems of understanding them in terms of the relationships that exist between them, and how they have the effects that they do. At this level the debate changes from being a technical, methodological one to a more serious one of the relationship of ontology to methodology. The exchange, for example, between King (1999), arguing from a position of methodological individualism, and Archer (2000), from a position of critical realism, on precisely this issue demonstrates the analytical complexities that can be generated in this context.

In a similar fashion Goodwin & Grix (2011; 538) distinguish between ‘institutions and structures’ in their comparison of education and sports policy, with the former being a collection of organisations (and organisational actors), agencies (542) and positions (546), and the latter a set of regulatory

mechanisms (545), patterns of accountability and control (549), and constitutional arrangements (543). Unfortunately there is no explanation of, or justification for, this division, although it appears to be that 'institutions' are specific sites of action, and 'structures' are behavioural contexts for action to take place within. Even if this were the case, 'institutions' at times appear to become actors in their own right through direct reification, as, for example, where County Sport Partnerships 'effectively "buy" outcomes with their funding', or where 'the state and its agents are only one set' of actors (Goodwin & Grix, 2011; 551, 539): whatever this may be it is treating these institutions and contexts as direct actors rather than as sites or contexts of action. At the very least the differences between structures and agents need to be more clearly identified, and a justification for treating a diverse range of specific examples as if they were clearly component elements of an unambiguously coherent pair of variables ('institutions' and 'structures') requires more thought. Clearly 'sites of action' are not the same as 'contexts of action' and the separation of them under different labels recognises this, but are they not also both examples of 'structures' *per se*, whether defined as 'rule-resource sets, involved in the institutional articulation of social systems' (Giddens, 1984; 185), or as 'a whole entity that is structured by the relations between its parts' or as 'the way that a group of things ... is related to each other' (Elder-Vass, 2010; 80)? This is not, however, simply a matter of definitional differences. The way in which these 'structures' are defined has implications for how they should be investigated, emphasising the importance of providing an effective link between ontology, epistemology and methodology.

In the museums and galleries case the Goodwin & Grix differentiation would see the institutional component as being made up of specific examples of individual museums and galleries (such as the National Portrait Gallery or the New Walk Museum and Gallery in Leicester), organisations with a direct role to play within the sector (such as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for national policies, or the Museums Association for museum accreditation, or the various Friends groups which provide volunteers and raise funds in many museums and galleries). The structural component would consist of, at least, the legal position within which museums and galleries are to be found (the British Museum, for example, is a body covered by specific legislation dating back to the British Museum Act of 1753, while local authority museums can be traced back to the Museums Act of 1845); their financial base (which differs between the 'national' museums, local authority ones, those in universities, military and private – both commercial and charity-established - ones); the explicit (and implicit) policy preferences expressed by relevant actors both inside and outside of individual museums and galleries; their inter- and intra-organisational relationships with other institutions and actors; the professional ideologies that exist within the sector – and so on, and so on (Gray, 2012a, 2012b, for example, has identified 13 distinct types of 'structures' that can be seen

as operating in the cultural policy field in general and the museums and galleries sector in particular). Needless to say neither Giddens nor Elder-Vass would see 'structure' as simply operating in such a descriptive fashion, with the former seeing 'structure' as only making sense in the context of specific agency action, and the latter identifying structure as residing in particular relationships which are emergent in nature⁸. This is not to say that Goodwin & Grix are 'wrong' in any absolute sense, their analysis in terms of the separation of 'institutional' and 'structural' factors is clearly developed and argued. Whether it functions as an appropriate means to 'bring structure back in' is, however, another matter given that it rests on simple labelling and description rather than on anything analytically stronger. Indeed, whether it can serve as a means to make an adequate comparison of policy sectors as divergent as sports and education is also open to question: the specificity of every policy sector will inevitably mean that cross-sectoral comparisons will be difficult, even without the lack of clarity about the key concepts that are involved. Difficulty is not, of course, the same as impossibility, and comparison can serve as an effective tool for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of alternative approaches to the analysis of specific topics in public policy and administration. This comparison, however, might deserve to rest on a firmer basis than that provided by the relatively positivist basis that Goodwin & Grix provide⁹.

In this respect the comparison of the approaches towards structure and agency that have been adopted by Jessop and Archer to a single policy sector is not intended to argue for the superiority of one over the other but is meant to demonstrate the importance of being much more explicit about the relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology in the analysis of issues of structure and agency in public policy. Jessop (2007; 45) and Archer (2000; 465) both start from an ontological position of critical realism and their approaches have been applied in areas ranging from globalisation (Jessop, 2007; 178-97) to the development of state educational systems (Archer, 1979: 1995; 328-42). While these approaches share a common ontological basis, however, they are quite distinct at the epistemological level: Jessop, and associated authors such as Hay (2002; 126-34), arguing that the distinction between structure and agency is entirely analytical, while Archer argues that it resides at the ontological level. In the context of the museums sector this raises questions about how the role of particular actors within the sector can be understood, and the extent to which they can act independently within the constraints that the sector faces as a consequence of its lack of political centrality, its limited strategic capabilities and its location in an external environment that continues to be 'complex, uncertain and diverse' (Lawley, 2003; 75).

How museums function is through a combination of the choices and actions of individuals associated with them – whether as managers, employees, volunteers, visitors, trustees or owners – and the contextual setting within which these are made¹⁰. The dynamics of the relationship between the structural and agential factors that form it will inevitably vary over time - although it can display long periods of consistency as well - and can be investigated for the purpose of understanding how and why change takes place, how and why stability within the relationship can be generated, as well as for the identification of explanations of the role of these factors in affecting specific events at specific times. In this respect what counts as ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ is analytically important (see Deacon, 2004, on the consequences of adopting different understandings of ‘agency’ for understanding social welfare and for the production of different models of welfare reform). There are numerous ways of interpreting what is to count as being an example of either context-setting or action-defining variables, with it being possible to have the same variable appearing to be an example of either structure or agency depending upon how they are defined or interpreted – or analysed: Fyfe (1996), for example argues that galleries can be seen to have both an institutional and structural form, *and* to be an active agent in the production of cultural meaning at the same time.

Archer (1995; 89, 90) argues that structure necessarily pre-dates agency, even when the effect of agency is to change these structures into new forms, and that structure and agency operate over different time spans. Thus, the legal frameworks within which museums operate – covering everything from the discretionary legislation allowing local authorities in England to provide them, to charity law which is a central feature of many private museums, to anti-discrimination legislation which affects them all as a general principle – and which can be considered as structural characteristics, generally operate over a much longer time-span than is the case for the making of decisions (through the direct exercise of agency) about what exhibition a particular museum or gallery will be mounting during the next school-holiday period. But this decision can then set limits to what else might be done in terms of the utilisation of space within the museum or gallery, and thus becomes, in effect, a short-term structural constraint for the immediate future. Clearly there is an interaction taking place between structure and agency in this case, but this interaction depends upon them operating in different ways as well as over different time-spans. Indeed, a major part of the Archer-inspired argument is that agency and structure do not just have different temporal effects but that they are ontologically different as well, and it is this difference that leads to the requirement for an analytical dualism (Archer, 1995; 132-4; see also Willmott, 1999) based on the principle of emergence - ‘one term diachronically or perhaps synchronically arises out of the other, but is capable of reacting back on the first and is in any event causally and taxonomically irreducible to it’ (Bhaskar, 1994; 253; see also Elder-Vass, 2007) – with the focus of analysis being upon the inter-

relationships of structure, agency and socio-cultural interaction (Archer, 1988) in creating the conditions of social life. Jessop (2007; 34), on the other hand argues that the differences between structure and agency are not ontological at all, but are purely analytical, and, as a consequence emergence is something of a red-herring with 'dualism masquerading as duality' (2007; 41). Instead a dialectical form of analysis is stressed as being the appropriate mechanism for investigating the relationship of agency and structure, as while they may have different effects and separate causal powers they are not essentially different in nature and neither are they, in practice, independent of each other (Marsh, 2010; 218-9). The focus in this case is as equally on the relationships between structure and agency, even if these are understood in a rather different fashion, take a different form, and involve different ideas about the nature of the variables that constitute the component elements of each part of the relationship to Archer.

The consequences of these differences for the specification of the variables that will be employed in empirical investigation mean that each approach to the analysis of the relationship of structure and agency will lead in different directions, and will incorporate different understandings of how and why each component of the relationship will have the effects that they do (see also Harrison, 2013: 32-5 on differing understandings of agency and their consequences for analysis in the field of heritage). Given that the emphasis in each approach is on the nature of the relationship itself then it would be anticipated that the conclusions that are likely to be reached about this will also vary between them as a consequence of these ontological and epistemological differences. By making use of the museums example it is possible to identify how these differences have real effects on the nature of the analysis that is undertaken, and, as a result, imply the existence of real methodological differences between the approaches. These differences are themselves the end-product of the differing ontological and epistemological positions that are associated with the approaches concerned, and reinforces the importance of clarity in the derivation of the methodologies that are employed in investigating questions of structure and agency in the context of public policy.

The first example to illustrate this is derived from the differences between an emergent and a strategic-relational view of structure. In the former position structures differ in terms of their causal impacts as a consequence of their embedded location within a network of relationships that provide multiple determinations of empirical events that are independent of the individual actors who are a part of these structural forms (Elder-Vass, 2010; 47-53): in the latter it is the role that is played in providing a strategic context for action to take place within that determines structural effects. As the emergent position sees structure as having a distinct ontological status then structural variables must

operate in distinctly different fashions to how agency variables operate. The strategic-relational view, on the other hand, does not, and cannot, distinguish between the causal roles of structure and agency, particularly as they are seen to be operating in terms of a dialectical relationship – which necessitates an acceptance that they are simply different facets of the same underlying process (Jessop, 2007: 42). A second example from the position of agency could be seen in that the strategic-relational view sees actors as behaving strategically within particular structured contexts that can provide both limits and opportunities to them (Jessop, 2007: 41; Hay, 2002, 127-8). This entails an acceptance that actors operate on the basis of some form of means-end rationality (even if they get things wrong in the application of this rationality) within the particular context that they find themselves, and this context sets limits to the appropriateness of agency choices, leading to a version of contingent path dependency (Hay, 2002: 209, 212). The emergent approach, on the other hand, is open to the prospect that actors may operate on the basis of forms of rationality (such as a ‘ritual’ rationality [Royseng, 2008]) that are decidedly non-instrumental in nature, but which provide as equally as compelling a justification for action. In this case the basis of action derives from the ‘internal conversation’ (Archer, 2003) that actors are engaged in (in other words, it derives from agency itself), rather than from the dialectic of structure and agency that the strategic-relational argument proposes. The same ontological starting-point (critical realism) has led, in these examples, to two distinct epistemological positions – emergence and strategic-relational. An examination of the methodological consequences of these positions can demonstrate the impact on the shape and direction of the analysis of the relationship between structure and agency that they have.

These consequences can be seen in how both structure and agency can be operationalised. In the case of structure the emergent position identifies this through the application of a series of analytical tests that establish the causal attributes that ‘structures’ have, and the theoretical and epistemological validity of treating variables as structural in nature (Elder-Vass, 2010: 71-6). The strategic-relational position, on the other hand, holds structure to be simply contextual, ‘the setting within which social, political and economic events occur and acquire meaning’, with the assumption that context provides a means for the ordering of political behaviour (Hay, 2002: 94). At the methodological level the two approaches end with distinct versions of what may be relevant ‘structures’ for analytical purposes. The strategic-relational tends towards systemic variables, such as the nature of capitalist economic relationships and the discursive role of ideas (Hay & Rosamond, 2002; Hay, 2013), whilst the emergent approach incorporates, in addition, less systemic and more locational (or ‘regional’ [Benton & Craib, 2011: 5]) variables - such as the specific nature of both inter- and intra-organisational relationships and the specific, direct, control of financial resources that organisations have - for the production of policy (Elder-Vass, 2010: 48-53; Gray, 2012a, 6-12).

In terms of agency the differences tend to be between the strategic-relational emphasis on forms of instrumental, means-end, rationality within the context of structured relationships with these assuming a 'knowing', if not positively reflexive, proactive agent (Lowndes et al, 2006; Jessop, 2007: 212-7); and the emergent view of multiple forms of rationality (as well as irrationality and irrationality), with agents who may be 'knowing' and reflexive but who can equally be utterly reactive and totally non-strategic in their choices. The former view has the advantage of a certain parsimony in analytical terms, while the latter makes fewer assumptions about the bases of choice and action. Accepting the strategic-relational position allows for the development of a clear methodological approach based on the analysis of outcomes and their relation to the behavioural assumptions that have been made. The emergent position, however, is less clear-cut and depends as much upon the processes of choice, and their relation to the outcomes that these produce, as it is on anything else. This implies something of a mirror-image analytical strategy that requires the use of distinctly different methodological tools. While both approaches are concerned with the inter-relationship of structure and agency the strategic-relational approach implies more of a structural emphasis in analysis, and the emergent more of an agency focus – even if the proponents of each approach would probably deny this reading.

Structure and Agency in the Museums Sector

Examining the inter-relationships between structure and agency in the museums sector brings these methodological issues to the fore. The epistemological differences between the strategic-relational and emergent approaches to this issue that have been discussed above mean that methodology is not just concerned with differences in technique, but also that it is concerned with differences in kind. At the practical level, as evidenced in policy practice, there are clear differences in the structural contexts that publically-funded national, local authority and university museums inhabit. Indeed, the specificity of these contexts for individual museums and galleries means that it is necessary to establish a means by which a differentiation between individual component variables at the structural level can be undertaken if sense is to be made of the actions that are undertaken within them: not all national museums are operating under the same conditions in terms of their collections for example – as a superficial comparison of the National Gallery, the Royal Armouries and the Natural History Museum would demonstrate - with these differences having a considerable impact upon the perceived requirements for display, exhibition and conservation over and above the professional choices that may be made by individual agents in the shape of curators and conservators (for example). Equally, not all local authorities are the same either, for example, in terms of their

political control – not only as between party group control, but also which faction within party groups is in control – or in terms of the size of their museum service, both of which have independent effects upon the context within which agency is located. The causal effects of these organisational variations are quite distinct from each other and it is doubtful that a simple analytical division is capable of capturing this, even allowing for the idea of a selective form of understanding of the relationships that exist between structural variables and the actions of agents.

The central questions in terms of analysing structure and agency in the museums sector are not necessarily the relatively simple ones of considering the relationships of a range of exogenous and endogenous variables in affecting how the sector functions (although this can be informative of wider political issues: see Gray, 2007), but, instead, are also to be found in the more complex issues of how stability and change within the sector are produced and maintained (Archer, 1995: 294-7, 308-24; Hay, 2002: 136-9). It is not simply the case that people within the sector are confronted with often conflicting demands from a range of internal and external sources which require managing on a daily basis (in one case this has been described as involving ‘gentle flirting with older men’ and in another as ‘dealing with the Council shit’), it is also the case that these processes have wider implications for the roles and functions which museums are expected to undertake and fulfil within society, whether in terms of education (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007) or of combating prejudice (Sandell, 2007), or of any other activity that is deemed appropriate by actors within individual museums and galleries, individual museum services, or within the sector as a whole. These roles and functions are multiple in nature and are subject to reappraisal at both the structural level and in terms of the decisions and choices that are made by actors within the system. At times, at the agency level, these reappraisals would indicate that elements of strategic choice are evident (Gray, 2002; Nisbett, 2012), but also that at other times there is little, if any, evidence of instrumental rationality at all (Gray & McCall, 2013).

This would indicate that an open methodology that is capable of capturing the variations in agency behaviour that exist is potentially likely to be more effective than a methodology that already makes assumptions about the motivations that actors have. Again, the advantages of simplification and parsimony could be used as a means for justifying the methodological choice of motivational assumption, even if this does run the risks of turning into either forms of methodological collectivism and structuralism which deny an independent role for policy actors (Hay, 2004), or into forms of methodological individualism that potentially over-simplify the cognitive basis upon which actors operate (Hampsher-Monk & Hindmoor, 2010). The alternative, however, potentially runs the risks

of developing into forms of crude positivism (where the 'facts' are assumed to speak for themselves) or individualist discourse analysis (where the actors are assumed to speak for themselves) (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003, 31-40: although see also Bevir & Rhodes, 2006, 18-9, and footnote 2 on 176). In this respect approaches based upon an emergent epistemology provide a means to identify the relationships that underpin the operation of a policy sector without assuming particular underlying motivations for action or definitive structural effects: each requires identification in their own right.

The consequences of these epistemological and methodological issues for understanding how the museums sector functions can be demonstrated through a brief example of an element that could be interpreted as being either 'ideational' in the strategic-relational approach, or as part of the socio-cultural environment in the emergent approach, but in each approach operating as a structural variable. The 'new museology' (Vergo, 1989; Stam, 1993; Ross, 2004) that developed from the 1970s onwards brought together a range of ideas about the functions of museums and the focus of museum work that had wide-ranging managerial implications for the sector, and which developed into an ideological framework of some popularity. The relative failure of the approach to totally replace already existing professionally-dominated ideological beliefs that centred on traditional concerns with the centrality of collections - even though it has had an impact on museum practice this has been partial in terms of both breadth (not every museum has adopted it), and depth (some museum staff have been more enthusiastic in their acceptance of the new ideas than have others, even within the same museum or gallery) (Janes, 2009) – would be explained in the strategic-relational approach as being a result of the strategic selectivity that staff utilise for the purposes of managing and controlling their operational environment to allow them to achieve their goals (in a similar fashion to Dunleavy's (1991) bureau-shaping model). From the emergent approach it would be more a consequence of differential responses to ideological change that are mediated through a range of structural variables, such as functional and professional status, organisational patterns of work, degrees of managerial independence, and so on (Gray, 2012a). In some ways this is simply demonstrating that the two approaches will differently interpret the effect of a particular component part of social action, but in other ways this raises questions about how analysis can be undertaken to generate these conclusions.

These differences in explanation also generate differences in how explanations are produced: the methodological component of consideration. In the strategic-relational approach it would be necessary to both identify the strategic context within which action takes place, and to make a statement about the motivational basis upon which strategic selectivity is undertaken by individual

actors. Both of these can be undertaken through the usual processes of concept and variable selection and definition, the specification of inter-relationships between them, and the development of means to measure and/or assess their effect and to establish their validity and reliability. In the emergent approach clarification of the causal status of structural and agential variables takes priority before the inter-relationship of them can be examined and this establishes a two-step approach to establishing the basis for empirical analysis. For added complexity the emergent approach also argues that there is an ontological difference between structure and agency and this requires the establishment of distinctly different understandings of the empirical nature and status of variables and concepts in each case. While the strategic-relational approach can adopt the same methodological approach to all of the variables with which it deals - as it is based upon the assumption of a dialectical relationship between structure and agency - this is not a viable option for the emergent approach.

Concluding Comments

It is often the case that the empirical analysis of political life is assumed to be based upon a relatively simple process of methodological clarification within the context of a particular set of ontological and epistemological presumptions. The comparison of two approaches to the analysis of structure and agency that share a common ontological basis demonstrates that differences at the epistemological level do affect methodological choices. This philosophical point is probably not surprising but it is certainly one to which too little attention tends to be paid in political analysis, leading to a lack of questioning of the basis upon which findings are built. Recent discussions of structure and agency have tended to favour a focus on issues of ontology and epistemology with too little consideration of the methodological consequences of the choices that are made. It is hoped that the current paper will serve to re-establish methodology as a subject that deserves more concentrated consideration than it normally receives.

Footnotes

¹ The quotes are, respectively, from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Act 3, Scene 4, line 25) and the title of West and Smith (2005)

² This is only a very small selection from the available literature and derives from the continuing debate between proponents of the structuration and realist approaches to the topic – other approaches - from that of methodological individualism, as seen in much interpretive sociology, to methodological collectivism, as seen in structuralist approaches - also exist but are not discussed here for reasons of space.

³ Archer does have her own solution to these issues using emergence (Elder-Vass, 2010, 13-39 provides an extension of Archer's position on this) as a means to incorporate both structural and agential factors in analysis in a manner that is argued to go beyond approaches that in one way or another are either monolithic or conflationary (Archer, 1995, 33-64; 93-134).

⁴ In the case of museums and galleries it is a moot point as to whether they can be simply distinguished in this fashion as they are, at the very least, multi-functional organisations, and their functions are also undertaken by a large number of other organisations within societies around the world.

⁵ Although there has been an increasing concern with ideas of intangible heritage within the museums and galleries sector in many parts of the world, particularly following the production of the UNESCO (2003) *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage*, this has been less readily accepted in many Western nations – including Britain (see Waterton, 2010).

⁶ With the exceptions of outbreaks of concern about the Elgin marbles and charges for admission, there is little of the turmoil that more frequently arises with examples of public art (in particular), or individual artists. Given the limited life-span of most of the debates that take place in either political circles or the media about museums and galleries a view of them as politically uncontentious is probably not excessive.

⁷ In common with all policy sectors complaints of under-funding tend to be common within the museums sector, and have existed for many years: cf Wilson's comment (2002, 196) on the British Museum in the 1920s – 'The Museum was starved of money and there was little sympathy for it within government'.

⁸ This is, inevitably, a simplification of the respective positions that are adopted by these authors.

⁹ Goodwin & Grix (2011, 537-8) state their intention to be to provide an empirical analysis of two policy sectors to bridge the gap between interpretivist and structuralist forms for analysing the changing nature of government and governance within the British political system – which raises considerable numbers of ontological questions in itself.

¹⁰ This may appear to be a return to the Monty Python idea of 'stating the bleeding obvious' but, in practice, it is far from being so, with interpretive and structuralist lines of analysis that abstract from the overall picture in favour of a focus on either agency or structure as the dominant means of explaining policy action still being common.

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