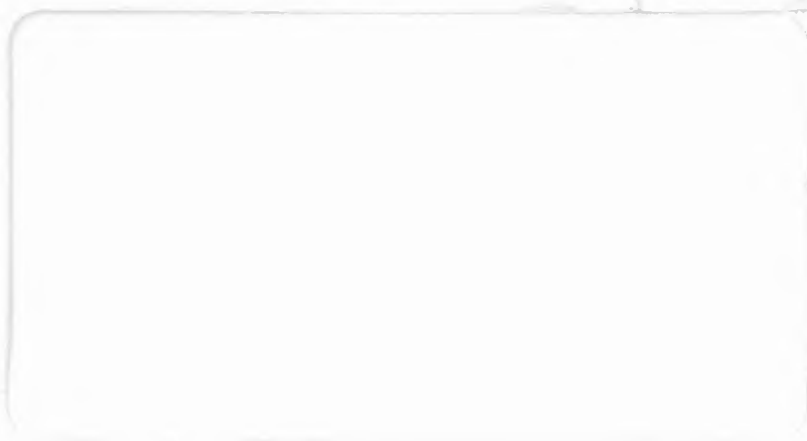


92-032



DISCUSSION DOCUMENT



## INTRODUCTION

Within this folder is a discussion document produced as part of the process of putting together a national strategy for the arts and media. It does not form part of the strategy. Neither does it express any sort of 'official' view. It was written in order to focus discussion and stimulate ideas.

## WHY?

*The arts and media in Britain are in renaissance. Over the last decade, they have shown a confidence and diversity never seen before. In quality of work and audience demand, the arts and media have never looked healthier or more central to people's lives. More than ever before, the arts are a source of civic pride as well as personal enrichment.*

*The arts and media in Britain are in crisis. Scarcely a day goes by without press stories of theatres facing closure, grants being cut or audiences declining; of a lack of good innovative work in all art forms; of the absence of a sense of direction, purpose and adventure.*

These views may not be incompatible, and each has some truth. What is beyond doubt is that ideas of what is art have expanded; that demand has rightly grown for access to the arts, film and broadcasting to be the right of all rather than the privilege of the few; and that resources, both public and private, have struggled to keep up. Growth in the variety of the arts contains its own problems. So how can the strategic injection of public money, and the growth of partnership with the private sector, encourage new developments? What should the priorities be? How do we make sure that the opportunity to enjoy the arts is spread ever more widely throughout society?

This is where the national arts and media strategy comes in. In 1990, the Minister for the Arts asked the arts and media funding bodies (the Arts Council of Great Britain, the British Film Institute, the Crafts Council and the Regional Arts Associations/ Regional Arts Boards) to prepare a national strategy. One of its purposes is to provide the basic framework for their work. The Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils are conducting parallel exercises; and the local authorities and museums funding bodies are also associated with the strategy.

A further purpose is to consider whether the public money spent on the arts and media has been used to best effect, and how those responsible can do better in the future. It is important that all those with experience of and a passion for the arts and media provide support, assistance and advice to get the strategy right. Most important, it must be seen as a strategy for the arts and media, not for the bureaucrats.

## HOW?

The paper in this folder is part of this process. It is one of a series of discussion documents; each is available free on request. Responses to them will be collated by the National Arts and Media Strategy Unit. Arising from this, a draft of the strategy will be prepared by Spring 1992. This too will be available for comment. The final version of the national arts and media strategy will be completed by Summer 1992. The hope is that the resulting document will be slim, challenging and readable - and that it will provide a mission statement for the arts and media over the next decade, as well as setting out clear goals and targets.

The national arts and media strategy will not write a single novel, put on a single play or make a single film. What it can help bring about, if the funding bodies receive the help of those who care about the arts and media, is the maximum opportunity for such creativity to flourish and for it to enrich the lives of ever more people. Your contribution to this process will be valuable and valued. Please send your views on this discussion document to the address below, to arrive by 30 November 1991.

For further information on the national arts and media strategy, please contact:

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## POPULAR CULTURE

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lijk, tenzij de publikatie inmiddels is besproken.

De uitleentermijn is verstreken op:

1 APR. 1993

17 JUNI 1994

09 JAN. 1997

## **NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY: DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON POPULAR CULTURE**

This paper has been written in order to generate discussion and debate. It is not a chapter of the national arts and media strategy or a definitive statement. The views it expresses are those of its author, Simon Frith.

With the paper as background, we should welcome views on all or any of the following questions, as well as on any other matters connected with the topic of popular culture on which you wish to comment.

### **The paper and the principles**

1. Does the paper raise and deal adequately with the definition of and issues surrounding popular culture? If not, where and how could it do better?
2. Does the distinction between popular culture and 'high' culture exist in fact? If so, is it to be welcomed? Why?
3. Where, how and with effect are the edges blurring between popular culture and 'high' cultural forms, and between different forms of popular arts?

### **Public funding**

4. If there is a genuine distinction between high and popular culture, what is the responsibility of the public funding system (including local authorities) towards each? Given that resources are scarce, what principles should underlie their allocation by funders?
5. Does the **current** public funding of the arts adequately reflect popular cultural forms? If not, how could it be improved?
6. What are the priority areas for funding (or extra funding) within the field of popular culture? Why, and what would the effects of funding be?

### **The arts in society**

7. Is there an appropriate relationship between the commercial and non-commercial sectors of the arts? How would you like to see it develop over the next ten years? What implications would this have for popular culture?
8. What is the contribution of the published and broadcast media to developing popular culture? Do they have a positive or negative effect?

9. Is enjoyment of, or participation in, the arts related to levels of education and social class? What effect does this have on people's cultural interests?
10. Does the distinction between popular and 'high' art stem partly from difficulties of access - financial, physical or psychological - of the latter for some sections of society? If so, should it be a priority task of the funding system to remove these difficulties? Would this break down the distinction?

**NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY  
AUGUST 1991**

# **NATIONAL ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY**

## **DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON POPULAR CULTURE**

**SIMON FRITH**

### **Summary**

This paper is divided into four sections:

#### **1. Defining the popular**

Definitions of popular culture usually confuse three arguments, about commercial art, folk art, and amateur art. Whichever definition is employed such arts have conventionally fallen outside the Arts Council's brief. They are consumer-led, they don't fit high art models of individual creativity and they can't be judged by the usual, historically based criteria of artistic excellence.

#### **2. Redefining the popular**

In the last ten years Arts Council assumptions about popular culture have been challenged by three developments: technological change; aesthetic change and political change. These have worked together to confuse the boundaries between high and low culture, between producer and consumer; between art and commerce. The major effects of this so far have been at the local level, in the development of municipal policies for the culture industries.

#### **3. The contradictions of the popular**

The longest section of the paper examines the issues raised by culture industry policies under three headings:

- i) populism
- ii) independence
- iii) access

The immediate issue is the situation of local artistic production in the global market, but more general questions are raised about the organisation of distribution, on the one hand, and of cultural authority, on the other.

#### **4. The future of the popular**

Drawing on the lessons of local policies, the paper suggests that any Arts Council approach to popular culture should rest on two assumptions:

1. The focus should be on the conditions of production rather than on producers as such. This would mean, for example, subsidising pop 'hucksters' rather than pop artists; investing in the pop infrastructure rather than in pop 'talent'.
2. The focus should be on the conditions of consumption rather than on consumers as such. This would mean, for example, subsidising 'spaces' for consumption rather than the works consumed, investing in media and interactive 'spaces' in which new modes of popular consumption could be developed.

In either case, market forces and the people themselves (however defined) remain the best measures of artistic quality. The Arts Council's task is to enable the market to work in more open and exciting ways.

## Defining the popular

The immediate problem that faces any discussion of popular culture is what the term means, and in previous debates about the popular arts at least three different definitions have been confused:

### a) popular art as art produced for the people

This is to equate the 'popular' with the commercial - pop music, popular novels, popular films, popular television programmes, popular magazines, etc. are those that command the biggest market, that sell best. The 'people' here are the audiences constituted by the various mass cultural producers.

### b) popular art as art produced of the people

This is to equate the 'popular' with the communal - popular art is art which expresses a people's shared cultural values and experience. This is argued either historically, in terms of cultural heritage (as in the case of folk music, for example) or ethnically, in terms of various 'ethnic' arts (usually themselves historically defined). The 'people' here are therefore defined culturally, as people with shared linguistic, symbolic and aesthetic traditions.

### c) popular art as art produced by the people

This is to equate the 'popular' with the amateur (or the 'primitive', the self-taught, the naive, etc.). Popular art is art which is produced by people in their everyday lives, whether we are talking about holiday snaps, local dramatic societies or graffiti. The 'people' here are organised as interest groups, whether such interests mean shared tastes (as in youth subcultures) or family ties (as in the production of home videos).

From the point of view of traditional state policy on the arts in Britain, each of these versions of the popular has been problematic.

The Arts Councils and Regional Arts Associations are reluctant to invest in commercial art, either because it doesn't need subsidy (such popular art, by definition, pays for itself) or because the market is taken to have the authority to determine what should or should not be produced.

Ethnic and 'folk' arts have been financially supported, with the aim of sustaining a heritage that would otherwise die out, but this leads to the problem of the artificial preservation - folk arts often seem to have more appeal to cultural tourists than to the communities they supposedly represent. Regional Arts Associations in the



1980s, for example, found themselves embroiled in arguments about the meaning of Asian-British art: why should traditional folk dancing be supported but not Bhangra? Folk arts policy shifts attention from the quality of art to its authenticity.

Amateur art is something which, by its nature, can't be systematically subsidised. It depends on spontaneous enthusiasm; its value derives from people doing it for themselves! State support in this area tends to be a matter of welfare policy rather than arts policy. This is most obvious in youth policy: giving young people a space in which to be 'creative' is encouraged because it might keep young people out of mischief rather than because it is expected to produce work of artistic value. The same welfare thinking lies behind the provision of local authority venues for the annual amateur opera.

In short then, we can say that until the 1980s popular culture (however defined) lay outside the brief of British arts policy for two broad reasons:

(a) Because the normal criteria of artistic excellence couldn't be applied to popular work.

The point to stress here is that this was not because of a high art assumption that all popular art is worthless (though there were often enough traces of this attitude), but because popular art seemed to rest on different criteria of excellence, to refer to different sources of artistic authority and judgement. To put it simply, the popular arts were assumed to be consumer-led (whether or not the consumers were themselves produced by market forces), while the high arts were artist (and critic) driven.

(b) A related point, because popular art didn't seem to involve artists anyway. It was either collectively produced (as in commercial mass culture), anonymously produced (as in folk arts) or spontaneously produced (as by amateurs).

### **Redefining the popular**

In the last ten years these policy assumptions have been challenged by three historical developments.

#### **a) technological change**

The development of digital technology, the spread of domestic computers, and the huge increase in the sales of home recording equipment of all sorts have changed the relationship between the mass producer and the mass consumer. On the one hand, the cottage production of high quality, easily reproducible goods has meant the rise of 'independent' producers in all media (music and video production,

desk-top publishing, video game design and graphics, etc). On the other hand, it is increasingly easy for 'consumers' to do their own productive work on commodities - programming (and remixing) music tapes; rescheduling (and scratch mixing) TV programmes; photocopying and recomposing print material. Distinctions between the commercial and the non-commercial, the amateur and the professional have become blurred, while new forms of individual production have become a feature of mass art (most obviously, perhaps in the impact of the fanzine on magazine production and the DJ on recorded sounds).

b) aesthetic change

One feature of post-modern art (whether we talking about the fine arts, literature, film, theatre or music and dance) has been its denial of the modernist distinctions between high and low culture. Nowadays 'popular' forms routinely feature in 'high' performance (rock scores for ballet) and popular genres (like romance or melodrama) are exploited by 'serious' writers and film-makers. At the same time traditional 'high' concerns have become a feature of popular entertainment - whether through the marketing processes recently adopted for classical music and opera, or through the development of magazines (like The Face) and magazine TV programmes (like The Late Show) which treat high and low art forms as aesthetically equal.

c) political change

The shift of local state investment - from culture policy to cultural industries' policy (a shift pioneered by the GLC at the beginning of the 1980s but since taken up by virtually every major city council) - has had the effect of forging new state/commercial support systems. It is now acceptable, for example, for local authority funds to subsidise 'commercial' art in the name of industrial development and employment policy. Market forces have thus come to play a positive role in arts funding; the 'popular' arts are now as likely to command local state investment as the traditional vehicles of 'serious' performance.

**The contradictions of the popular**

The question to be addressed here, though, is whether the new thinking about state policy and the popular arts has solved the Arts Councils' original problem: how to measure the value of the popular? To answer this I want to look in more detail at the thinking behind cultural industries' policies, and at its three legitimising concepts.

a) populism

Cultural industries policy can be contrasted with cultural subsidy policy by reference to its support of contemporary, technology-based popular culture as against the support of traditional, elite culture. The switch from supporting a certain sort of 'excellence', by subsidising the primary producers, artists, to investing in the means of mass cultural production and distribution, is a move from a high to a low cultural policy. But such a populist approach does face its own problems, pitching one definition of 'popular culture', the market (measured by national consumption patterns), against another, the community (measured by local production patterns).

The question is whether a city (Sheffield, say) or a nation (Scotland, for example) can be both effectively 'represented' culturally (by its own television programmes or pop records or magazines) and compete efficiently in the provision of cultural goods for the national (or international) market. Two sorts of constituency are represented here (two definitions of the people) and the question is whether both can be satisfied by the rhetoric of cultural pluralism. Local authorities face a constant battle between the community arts approach - supporting neighbourhood art and artists, ethnic forms and identities, local self-expression, the folk arts - and the cultural industries' support of production processes determined by much broader marketing conventions. The opposition here is less that between high and low culture than that between folk and commercial culture, two versions of 'the popular' (this is a particularly obvious tension in Scotland).

The most common solution to this problem is to pull all cultural forms together under a single celebratory umbrella, as in Glasgow's Mayfest - the Halle Orchestra lining up with the Wedding Present, the Grumbleweeds with Womack and Womack, the People Show with the European Juggling Convention (this list is taken from the 1988 Bradford Festival). By the end of the 1980s, indeed, it could be argued that in Britain, at least, so-called 'world music' was entirely subsidised by local authorities' need to include African, Caribbean and Asian performers in their multi-cultural 'representative' line-ups.

Another solution, apparent in nearly all localities now, is to define local culture itself as the object of consumption, as a communal heritage, competing with other heritages in the leisure market, as each city rewrites its history in terms of a trademark, a sales point, a market niche. The paradox here is that cultural industries policy, despite its rhetoric of seizing new technological opportunities, comes to depend for its sense of the local on the most restricted form of cultural 'tradition'; what started as a progressive move, a challenge to 'elite' culture, a determination to take popular values and tastes seriously, ends in reaction, in a sentimental story of a 'people' who never existed.

Such policies mean, in the end, the professionalisation of community culture. The cultural industries approach means devaluing amateur dramatics, amateur music making, amateur writing, amateur history (local versions of national middlebrow culture) in favour of professional packagers of the 'local' as the 'different': the required skills are matters of styling and interpretation. In this model, to be 'cultured' is to understand the market place (the first stage of cultural policy now is market research), and the new 'experts' on the popular (festival programmers, arts centre directors) have their own ideas of what best fits the local market profile.

From this perspective arts centres are just as 'anonymous' as shopping centres - the same music programmes, film schedules and touring exhibitions in the former; the same chain-stores in the latter; the same sense of ubiquitous up-to-date taste whether one visits the Bolton Octagon or the Reading Hexagon, the Watershed in Bristol or the Riverside in Hammersmith. Public developers of city spaces have just as clear an idea of 'acceptable' popular tastes and practices as private developers, and are just as selective in their reading of popular culture. In British cultural industries policy the 'popular' is not the same thing as the 'vulgar' - to replace the 'ugly' or the 'sordid' with the 'attractive' or the 'dynamic' is an exercise in cultural ideology in both Liverpool's docklands and Glasgow city centre.

#### b) independence

The place where Labour and Conservative thinking about popular culture coincides is in the support of small business. But for Labour strategists the quality that matters isn't size as such, but 'independence'. Thinking here - the small versus the big - derives from the music industry, but 'independence' has an ideological resonance in all the media, and if the GLC, for example, drew directly on post-punk ideology, it assumed that smallness guaranteed creativity everywhere - in publishing and the film industry, in television and magazine production.

The problem of this argument is that the small/creative/marginal vs big/exploitative/central model is not a very helpful way of understanding how the popular cultural industries work. In the record industry, for example, the majors and independents have a symbiotic rather than oppositional relationship, with the small labels acting as the research and development departments of the majors which, in turn, take on the task of marketing any promising 'discoveries' (and many 'independent' companies are, in fact, part owned or bank-rolled by the majors). And one could point to the similar dependence of the theatrical 'fringe' on mainstream impresarios, of independent TV producers on the major broadcasting companies, of 'alternative' comedians on mass media exposure.

To put this another way, even 'creative' independents are dependent for their livelihood on the sale of their products, on their competitive edge in a market place

where the rules of exchange are defined by the 'big' operators. This doesn't preclude their producing 'radical' work, but it does suggest that such radicalism is not, in itself, a matter of marginality - independent publishing companies mostly produce mainstream culture (their independence a reflection of market specialisation rather than experimentation); 'radical' art and ideas are just as likely to emerge from the cultural bureaucracies. In television, for example, as soon as 'independent' producers extricated themselves from bureaucratic control (within the BBC or LWT or Scottish TV) they become dependent on the advertising industry; what's involved here is less an increase in creative freedom than a change in the location of dependence.

In the end, then, local investment in artistic production works to increase cultural competition and thus to strengthen the power of the centralised systems of distribution that determine market success. To make sense economically, independent films have to be exhibited, independent TV programmes broadcast, independent records promoted, and independent magazines displayed. Local authorities can guarantee none of this.

c) access

Many cultural activities, however 'popular', are not systematically profitable, whether because there are limits on increases in productivity (live performance is unable to compete in price terms with its mass mediated or 'mobile' forms, has to be subsidised, whether by the state, business sponsorship or advertising), or because there are limits on market size, as in the case of certain sorts of 'minority' arts. The 'radical' GLC, like all local authorities, thus deployed traditional subsidies as well as cultural industries investment, supporting live music, theatre, poetry and dance, whether through its control of the South Bank complex or in various festivals and outdoor events; the purpose here was to make sure all Londoners' tastes were represented. The conventional policy distinction was thus preserved: some arts 'deserve' state support, others must take their chances in the marketplace. The GLC provided a new account of the 'deserving' but kept its distance from the 'commercial' (which, note, is not the same thing as the profitable).

Such 'radical' subsidy policy isn't, then, simply a matter of moving from a high cultural to a popular cultural definition of 'excellence'; it also involves an argument about access. The classic statement remains the Greater London Enterprise Board's initial strategy document for the cultural industries:

In the past, bodies like the Arts Council have concentrated their funding on the older art forms - such as theatre and opera, rather than recorded music or video. Partly because of this they have tended to ignore the diverse and rich currents of popular culture which use the new forms - the record, sound

system or pirate radio station rather than the concert hall; the poster, record sleeve or cartoon rather than the painting; the dance floor rather than the ballet. The assumption has been that because these forms of popular culture are commercial there is no place for state intervention of any kind.

It is important, however, to recognise that popular culture is not always mass culture. Its newest and most dynamic forms exist precariously at the edge of the commercial world and the powerful established structures of the industry often work to exclude new voices and cultural forms. (GLEB: Altered Images, no date, p5)

In thinking through ways in which such 'new voices' could get access to the means of artistic production and communication, Channel 4 (at least in its original form) became a major source of inspiration. Its organisation as a 'publishing' house, at once open to all comers, briefed to serve 'minority' audiences, and indirectly commercial (its advertising income not dependent on its own audience figures) was taken as a model for municipal policy. Sheffield, for example, pioneered a strategy of 'leasing' production facilities to local producers; the aim was both to increase the number of voices heard in the media nationally and to give local people access to the means of cultural production for their own non-commercial purposes. Red Tape Studios (its sound facilities soon supplemented in Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter by video, photographic, and design studios) have thus enabled all sorts of local people to make their own recordings while also providing a source of skill training. Cultural production is thus defined both as an economic activity and as a process of self-realization.

Here, as in much 'access' thinking, the emphasis is on young people. In this respect, cultural industries' policy reflects a double thrust: on the one hand, an emphasis on training and developing arts and service skills to substitute for lost manufacturing crafts; on the other hand, a sense that the expanding media industries are, in themselves, "young" - the means through which young people now express themselves.

What are the problems of this argument? Firstly, there is the problem of distribution which I have already discussed. 'Access' to the means of production, if it is to mean anything culturally, must also involve access to the means of distribution; training is pointless if it doesn't lead to employment. The problem, again, is that local authority support can only go so far and, on practice, to become a 'professional' artist (to make a career in the arts) means either becoming an artist of the traditional, subsidised, 'excellent' type, or learning to meet market demand. In either case it seems accidental where people come from, and while access policy might therefore be effective in improving local people's opportunities for cultural employment, there is no reason to suppose either that this will have local consequences or that different sorts of 'local' voices will now be heard.

This points to the central problem of access policy, the notion of the local involved. If a local arts industry can only survive by supplying national markets and national tastes, local authorities nevertheless persist in believing in the value of 'local experience' (to be culturally expressed and represented). And the same point applies to national/international markets - in the debates about Scottish TV and the Scottish music business, for example: is the point to express 'local' concerns, or to get a fair share of the total British (or global) TV and music market?

The 'local' artist is, these days, the mobile artist, whether in terms of training and employment or, more importantly, in terms of peer culture; and the multi-national leisure corporation is equally mobile, its control of cultural distribution resting on any number of local (risk-taking) units of production.

The question we have to address, then, is whether the 'locality' (as defined by the relevant 'local' authority) is the 'community' that really matters in the arts. For if that 'community' is, nowadays the community created by consumption, then it is unclear that the 'local' or the 'regional' has any purchase on popular culture at all.

### **The future of the popular**

I have rehearsed the arguments around cultural industry policies at some length for two reasons: first, because this is the political arena in which the most interesting recent arts debates have taken place and second, because any discussion of the popular arts must be a discussion of production processes rather than of particular artists or artworks. To put this another way, popular arts policy cannot simply be a matter of adding new practices to old lists of the 'worthy' arts. Indeed, one could argue that it is precisely at the moment when a 'popular' artist gets state support that he or she ceases to be 'popular' (think of the history of jazz in Britain, for example).

Popular culture, to put this another way, is defined against high culture, against the art that is constituted by state subsidy, by the academy, by experts and critics, by concert halls and galleries. This is one reason for the inaccurate British assumption that high/low culture is a form of class distinction - popular culture is, in fact, as much a middle class as a working class affair (think of Jeffrey Archer, say, or Andrew Lloyd Webber).

Popular cultural policy, in short, is not a matter of searching for and supporting 'excellent' individuals (the most talented graffiti artist, the best disco dancer, the wittiest pub comic) but of supporting their conditions of production. The Arts Councils need, then, to drop two of their most cherished principles:

### **i) art versus commerce**

Traditionally, the Councils have assumed that their task is to support the art which the market can't or won't. Although the distinction may be blurred (especially over time), there has thus been a difference in principle between subsidised art and commercial art, and an agreement in principle that it is not the state's task to fund money-makers.

In the popular arts the reverse principle should be adopted. To enable popular artists to flourish, to open popular media to new ideas, to ensure a diversity of popular pleasures, what we most need, as Colin MacInnes once put it, are hucksters, hustlers, people who can sell the pop talents and ideas which are always in plentiful supply. Such entrepreneurs are necessary for successful local arts scenes, whether we are talking about the Scottish music business or the future of the British film and television industry.

While this may seem to go against the grain of arts subsidy, it should be stressed that this already one aspect of the Arts Councils' policy for the high arts: the support of artistic institutions - opera and dance companies, orchestras and theatre groups, galleries and publishers - means supporting administrative as well as artistic employment and training. It is the lack of such institutional support in the popular arts (especially given the concentration of entertainment corporations in London) that is the most immediate funding problem. What needs subsidising (what the market won't or can't) is the cultural infrastructure, the framework of lawyers and accountants and promoters and agents and publicists and distributors and managers and sales teams through which popular entrepreneurs peddle popular artists, within which success is, as it must be, determined by market forces.

### **ii) producers versus consumers**

Traditionally, the Arts Councils, in subsidising artists, arts companies and arts spaces, have assumed a basic difference between artist and audience: the special status of the former justifying their patronage; the latter passively, contemplating the results.

In popular culture the artist/audience relationship has always been more playful, more mutually manipulative (the relationship is well symbolised by the latest pop cultural fad in Britain, karaoke). 'Popularity' is determined by audience response, and the 'value' of the popular cannot therefore be measured by removing popular art from the context in which it lives.

How can we reconcile an audience measure of popularity with the Arts Councils' equally important role in supporting the 'unpopular', the new and experimental work which doesn't have an audience yet precisely because it is new and



experimental? The point to stress is that this is just as important an issue in the 'low' as in the 'high' arts; populism means philistinism in rock and fashion and comic books and television too. And British pop music, for example, would have remained stagnant both commercially and aesthetically if it hadn't been for an implicit state support system - art schools and the college circuit, the BBC, John Peel.

What now needs developing is Arts Council support for experimental modes of consumption (and this is the area in which to develop policies on cultural diversity, on the needs of women, the young and the old, the disabled). This is usually thought of in terms of venues for live performance, whether festivals or fixed spaces (and this remains a need, especially given the domination of the live music scene, most obviously in Scotland, by commercial sponsors, brewers, with their own agenda), but such policy needs to be more broadly conceived in at least two respects:

a) with reference to the mass media

The tradition has been to support live performance as superior to media packages, but in popular culture media spaces are the most important. The Arts Council should therefore be thinking in terms of media access rather than media production, supporting a radio or TV show rather than a radio or TV production company; a shop or distribution system rather than a record company; a design studio rather than a comic artist; a public hoarding rather than a fine artist; a cinema supporting-short slot rather than a film production outfit. The Arts Councils (?), in short, should behave more like commercial sponsors, but with nothing to sell except the art itself.

b) with reference to interactive media

The interactive possibilities of the electronic new media have been developed for entertainment and educational purposes - most obviously in theme parks and museums like MOMI. But little has been done with their artistic possibilities, with their challenge to the notion of a 'finished' work; their questions about the fluid relationship between artist and audience. The popular arts are, in this context, the pioneers.

## Conclusion

My assumption in this paper is that the arts Councils should be enablers - enabling things to happen that otherwise wouldn't. But I've also assumed, for reasons that I hope I've made clear, that in the popular arts, at least, the Arts Councils' task is not to fund artists or artworks. It is pointless, in my opinion, to draw up specific proposals for specific popular art forms; there couldn't be a sensible policy for

graffiti or fashion or rock music or comic books; it doesn't make sense to have popular subject committees and experts and selection policies. Such details should be left to the market. The policy task is to enable that market to work in more interesting and creative ways; in ways that are more accessible to 'minorities', more diverse in their consequences; more surprising in their results; more disruptive in their relationships. My final slogans are, then, simple.

**Support hucksters! Develop spaces! Build structures!**  
**Challenge consumers!**

And let the artists look after themselves.

# NOTES

# NOTES

# NOTES

