
Irina Onofrei
Art and the State

The Visual Arts in Comparative Perspective

Victoria D. Alexander and Marilyn Rueschemeyer
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Art and the State
The Visual Arts in Comparative Perspective

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in Association with
St Antony’s College, Oxford
To Katherine  
   V.A.

To AJ, Bella, Noe, Solomon, and Talia  
   M.R.
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Preface

This book was conceived at a meeting between the two of us at the American Sociological Association’s (ASA) annual conference in Washington, DC, in 2000. Although we had read each other’s work, we had met only briefly at a conference in Montreal in 1998. At the ASA, we at last had an opportunity to speak in person and at length. As we talked, we realized that we were concerned about a number of similar issues in the sociology of art; moreover, we discovered that we both had a series of surprisingly similar projects underway or in planning. These interrelated projects, each on an aspect of ‘art and the state’, cried out to be explored together.

From the extensive literature on the sociology of art, and from our own research, we knew that art is not just about artists and artworks. Artists create art within a social context – within an ‘art world’ or ‘artistic field’, as Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu put it – that is situated in the wider society. A host of factors from the art world and the society affect the production of art.

The state is an important actor (or more accurately, a collection of actors) in the social world, and actions of the state are profoundly important for art worlds, artists, and artworks. The state influences the production, distribution, and reception of art, and it can shape the life chances of individual artists. The state can affect art and artists in many ways. For instance, a state may support artists directly through salary, fellowships, or grants. It may purchase artworks. It may fund art museums and galleries, either directly through line-item or project grants or indirectly through tax incentives. It may repress artists or censor artworks that criticize it. Or it may do none of these things. Its legal climate, favorable or unfavorable to free market ideology, to private property, and to intellectual property rights, will affect the distribution strategies of artists. Its ability to maintain civic order influences artistic subject matter, as well as the ability of artists to work safely in their studios. Its educational policy affects not only the training, and employment, of those interested in becoming artists or those identified with particular visual talents, but also the reception of artworks by the general public who are educated in the state’s system.

The importance of the state in art worlds has not gone unnoticed. However, we believe that the state and its effects have been understudied
in relationship to other aspects of the art world. Comparative studies of the topic have been especially rare. The connections between art and the state that have found the most attention are those in authoritarian regimes, where art is often used for political purposes, where observers see art as highly regimented, and where art, in some of its expressions, is harshly repressed. But as we discussed Rueschemeyer’s work, we thought that even here, the importance of the state to art goes well beyond the issues of freedom and control that are most commonly mentioned. Many other factors are affected by political and cultural policies of authoritarian regimes, for instance:

- which art forms become known,
- whether artists receive support enabling them to spend concentrated time on their work,
- the level of intellectual and financial access to the arts either for small segments or for broad swaths of the population,
- the relationship between intellectually and aesthetically demanding and innovative art, on the one hand, and popular art that is enjoyably ornamental, on the other, and
- the intensity with which different audiences follow artistic developments in official art – or in underground art, which may be stimulated precisely by state efforts to control it.

While there is no doubt that regime type matters, the state policies in open, pluralistic political systems also affect these and similar issues. Just as the complexities of ‘art and the state’ within a given setting are often overlooked, so too are the similarities across countries with very different governmental structures. In ‘free’ countries, as in authoritarian ones, state control of art and artists is an issue. In the west, public art, the public place of art, and even the kind of art supported by public funds can be (and has been) subject to controversy that escalates into ‘culture wars’ which, in turn, can lead to cultural policy that, in many respects, shades into censorship.

In discussing these ideas, we found that our ongoing research addressed the subject of art and the state in complementary ways. We hoped, therefore, that we were in an excellent position to contribute to the literature on art and the state, in a truly comparative way.

In 1996, Alexander moved to England, having just finished a large project on American art museums. She was struck by the relative similarities between American and British art museums, especially in such matters as marketization, commercialization, and the prevalence
of special exhibitions and traveling blockbusters, which existed despite the differences in the arts policies of the two countries. She started to look into state funding of museums to explore how arts institutions came to converge on a similar, international model. This project has expanded into Chapters 2 and 3 of the book.

Meanwhile, Rueschemeyer’s own work had been moving in directions which explored similar themes. She spent several sabbaticals abroad where, among other interests, she explored the social situation of artists, the reception of their work by different audiences, and how their creative lives are affected by state policy. She had co-authored a book on Soviet émigré artists and she continued this line of research as additional possibilities for work arose in the New York area and in Israel (now Chapter 6 in this book). An earlier project on East German artists was undergoing an update to take account of the changes brought about by the unification with West Germany (Chapter 5). Her interest in gaining a fuller comparative perspective led her into work, while in Bergen and then at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences, on art and the state in Norway and Sweden (Chapter 4).

We thought that our various projects highlighted a set of important understandings about the nature of cultural policy, especially state funding of the visual arts. Indeed, each project made up a single case study that provided the basis for a comparative perspective. We decided that it was most sensible to proceed with our individual case studies independently, though with an eye to our common interests. As the work progressed we kept in touch and read drafts of each other’s chapters. We also decided that it would be best to collaborate on the Introduction and the Conclusion. In these chapters we wished to bring out the themes and ideas highlighted by the case studies.

The Introduction (Chapter 1) discusses the general topic of cultural policy with respect to the visual arts. In this chapter, we point out the various dimensions along which cultural policy may be measured. We suggest that a comparative perspective clarifies a number of issues, a key one being the degree of state control of artists and institutions involved in cultural policy. We suggest that a set of textured, comparative studies will show that issues of artistic freedom and state – or market – constraint are complex and do not fall along a simple continuum from free market states with a high degree of artistic freedom to autocratic states with a high degree of censorship and control.

The Conclusion (Chapter 7) draws out the lessons learned from a comparative reading of our five projects. This chapter, the most explicitly
Throughout the process of writing the book, both authors have learned a lot and enjoyed the collaboration. Though Alexander’s work focused initially on art institutions, especially museums, and Rueschemeyer’s on artists and their associations, we found that our interests encompassed all of these aspects of the art world. Indeed, it is difficult to study arts institutions without considering artists, and vice versa. Our differing research methods (Alexander drawing on documentary analysis and Rueschemeyer on interviews with artists, gallery owners and managers, and policy makers) and writing styles have proved to be useful levers with which to lift additional insights from the data. In writing this book, our aims were to examine the texture and complexity within the art–state relationship in individual countries and, through our collaborative chapters, to present our ideas on art and the state and to integrate our insights from the case studies. We hope that readers will find the five empirical chapters interesting in themselves and that the Introduction and Conclusion not only demonstrate the coherence and unity of the ideas behind the book but that the comparative perspective they present enriches each individual case.

Acknowledgements

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Rueschemeyer is deeply appreciative to the artists, gallery owners, and managers as well as officials in unions and government that she interviewed, often under difficult conditions. She would also like to thank the Rhode Island School of Design for its ongoing support and encouragement of her projects on the arts, the Watson Institute at...
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1

Introduction

Victoria D. Alexander and Marilyn Rueschemeyer

The government is always the guardian of tradition, and art is the guardian of innovation. If there's no friction between government and artists, it's abnormal.

– Alexander Melamid (quoted in Heilbrun and Gray, 1993: 248)

Art is not just about artists and artworks. This is the most important insight from a sociological approach to art. Artists are embedded in a social context, an ‘art world’ (Becker, 1982) or ‘artistic field’ (Bourdieu, 1993) that is situated in the wider society. Art objects are also embedded in a social context. Society and art worlds influence artists, in myriad ways, as they produce art. Distribution systems affect the size and type of audience for artists and their work. And audiences view and appreciate art in ways that are shaped much more by their aesthetic orientation – and notably, the social factors that underpin it – than by an artist's vision as reflected in a particular piece. Art is noticed, preserved, reviled, and remembered or forgotten by viewers who explicitly, or more often implicitly, refer to contemporary standards.

This book is about art and the state. Through its policies and actions, a state affects the production, distribution, and reception of artworks, and it can have a profound impact on individual artists as they pursue their vocation. We focus on the visual arts in several countries, exploring through our case studies the relationships among states, their artists, and their arts institutions.

In this chapter we situate ‘art and the state’ in the broader context of the sociology of art, and identify a number of points that the reader might like to keep in mind while reading the subsequent chapters. Key issues include the amount and type of support that states may offer,
and the degree of control they attempt to exert. While these two issues have been the most commonly discussed in the literature, we argue that ranking states on a single factor, such as the level of per capita financial support, obscures crucial complexities within and across individual states. Likewise, we suggest that issues of freedom and repression are complex in ways that render simplistic comparisons among states problematic. Further, ‘the state’ is often contrasted with ‘the market’. We argue that this simple dichotomy may lead us to miss seeing how the state enacts the market and how the market, along with the state, both supports and controls artists. We also take steps toward developing a framework for understanding the relationship between art and the state, a topic to which we will return in the concluding chapter.

The state and art worlds

Art is not independent of the political, economic, and cultural environment in which it exists, even if it appears that way in certain idealistic understandings of the arts. Our aims are sociological; we concentrate on the interaction of state policies and the art world in which painters, sculptors, and graphic artists work. We do not concentrate exclusively or primarily on the content of art, as art historians often do. Rather, we consider ‘art worlds’ in the same, broad manner that Howard Becker (1982) does. Becker’s term refers to ‘the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of artworks that art world is noted for’ (1982: x). An art world encompasses not only artists and people such as critics, dealers, curators, and collectors in close orbit around them, but traditionally peripheral actors, including technicians (studio painters, welders, printers, and the like who work to artists’ specifications), the manufacturers and purveyors of paints, canvas, and other materials (both artistic and non-artistic) that are used by artists, and institutions that shape the artists’ milieu, such as art schools, museums and their funders, and the state and its policies. It includes, as well, the receptionist in a sales gallery and society’s general education system. Further, for Becker, art ‘consists of a work being made and appreciated’ (p. 4). Thus, the art world always includes the audience for art, whether this audience consists of large numbers of the general public or of mainly specialists and fellow artists. Becker suggests that each element or actor in the art world provides resources to artists, and this affects what artists are able to do: ‘Available resources make some things possible, some things easy, and others harder; every pattern of availability
reflects the workings of some kind of social organization and becomes part of the pattern of constraints and possibilities that shapes the art produced’ (p. 92).

Art worlds, in this sense then, include not only the artists but also arts institutions, and audiences. Among other things, art worlds reflect what materials an artist has available, how artists make a living, which groups are reached by their works, and how the actions of government and other institutions affect the reputation of artists by shaping the basis on which reputation is judged. When it comes to the art itself, however, we do not suggest that the social world in which art is embedded directly determines the kind of art that is produced. We do not find deterministic arguments about art convincing. Artists remain thinking and creative human beings in their relationship to the system in which they work, and no single element of that system can force them to work in wholly prescribed ways. Even in the Soviet Union, where the state actively encouraged the socialist realist style and actively censored visual artists of all other stripes, the most interesting developments in the art world were influenced, but decidedly not determined, by the state. The vibrant underground network of artists that sprang up in the Soviet Union did so as a consequence, but not a planned one, of the state’s policies.2

In a narrow view, studying art and the state means to focus on public funding and government control. These issues are indeed important. We examine them, and come to some counterintuitive conclusions. While most studies of government censorship and control of the arts focus on authoritarian regimes, our book demonstrates, in a variety of currently ‘free’ societies, that issues of censorship and control cannot be separated from the issue of monetary support. At the same time, it is a mistake to see problems of censorship and influence through funding as the only issues involved in the relationship between art and the state. This book highlights the many indirect and nuanced ways in which state policies shape the world of art.

It may be tempting to think of states as situated on a continuum that ranges from one pole characterized by generous support and a public mission for the arts to its opposite, a pole characterized by meager support and the privatization of artistic reception. It may also be tempting to divide states into those that value artistic freedom and those that do not, and to see the former as celebrating artists and the latter as submitting artists to strict control and censorship. But there are a number of distinctive dimensions in the state’s relationship to the arts. These must be separated analytically in order to discover how the particular pattern of support and control works in a given society. While states may both
support the arts and seek to control it, as was the case in the former East Germany, the degree of state generosity does not simply vary in step with attempts at control. Nor is the public place of art determined by the amount of direct state support. Changes in the composition of the audience and in the intensity of interest represent yet another dimension. All of these are affected by state action, regardless of whether this is the case through conscious arts policies or through more general policy decisions that shape the artists’ milieu.³

Support

The most obvious way that states may support the arts is through direct financial subsidies for artists. States vary in the degree to which they offer official, salaried positions, grants and fellowships and educational opportunities for their artists. States also differ in the amount of artwork they might directly purchase for public display and in their support of art museums (owned by national or local government, public trust, or private concern), which in turn purchase and exhibit the works of living artists. States may also arrange for sales through state-owned galleries, or may leave distribution to the private market.⁴

A key issue related to economic and political supports for the arts emerges clearly in a longer historical perspective. The support for the arts through the market rather than through individual patrons is an historically important development, with the market freeing the artist from personal dependency. Baxandall’s (1980, 1988) work demonstrates the different conditions under which artists worked during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In Renaissance Italy, for instance, painters were seen as craftsmen, and their social status was low. The concept of the ‘artist’ as a creative genius who needed freedom to create did not exist. Renaissance painters worked to the directions of their patrons, and received detailed contracts about the subject, content, and materials to be used in their works. Patrons could demand changes or refuse payment if they were not satisfied (Baxandall, 1988).⁵ In Renaissance Germany, sculptors and painters were also considered craftsmen, but worked under a system of craft guilds which had continued from the medieval period. As guilds controlled all access to training and employment, they tended to suppress innovation. They were designed to oversee trade and to manage competition in favor of established masters and did so ‘by regulating away the outstanding’ (Baxandall, 1980: 117). Nevertheless, some of the extraordinary limewood sculptors Baxandall studied were able to create genuine masterpieces by generating an interest in their
own unique styles. Interestingly, however, these artists were located in areas where guilds were relatively weak.

The Royal Academy was established in France in 1648 as an improvement over the earlier guild system that existed there (White and White, 1965 [1993]; see also Pevsner, 1940). The academic system was successful in raising the status of painters, and presided over the creation of much of France’s great art. But the academic system became rigid in its stylistic preferences, and as White and White (1965) show, by the mid-nineteenth century, it was not able to accommodate all the artists who were working in Paris at the time. The dealer-critic system, in which artists sell their works in a free market system, arose from the failures of the academic system in the late nineteenth century.

The emergence of the market system for distributing art freed the artists from the constraints of the patronage, guild, and academic systems. At the same time, the romantic conception of the artist, with its motto ‘l’art pour l’art’ came into full blossom (Grañá, 1964). These two developments gave artists much greater stylistic freedom and allowed them to explore topics of personal interest. The dealer-critic system is not merely a story of freedom, however. Along with the new freedoms came a new set of constraints. Instead of pleasing a patron or the academy, artists now had to please an amorphous group of dealers, critics, and collectors if they wanted to sell their works. Or they might subscribe to the ideology that art has a higher calling than sales and shun the bourgeois, or the popular, art market (Simpson, 1981). And in market systems, artists are often left to their own devices in their artistic training and in procuring materials.

The concept of ‘art for art’s sake’ and our contemporary western ideas of the artist as ‘creative genius’ are, therefore, relatively recent inventions. Today, art is seen as a personal expression that may, nevertheless, articulate important public issues. In contrast, through the centuries and in many cultures art typically had a public mission and was produced in highly constrained circumstances; yet this did not necessarily diminish artistic value. It is useful, therefore, to remember that all support systems for artists come with some sort of constraint. The particular mix of freedom and constraint in a given system will influence the type of art produced, because some types of art will be more amenable to a given system than others. It is also useful, on an analytical level, to separate issues of artistic merit, per se, from the system in which the art is produced. Good art and bad art – whatever aesthetic criteria are chosen – are found everywhere, though clearly some systems will favor innovation and diversity more than others.
Introduction

In western countries, as well as in post-communist societies, the market system is the characteristic distribution system for art. However, the contrast between art production for the market and for sponsoring patrons is easily overdrawn. Personal and institutional sponsorship (such as by economic enterprises, foundations, or private galleries) remains quite important within the context of the market. Sponsorship continues in various forms, including sponsorship by state agencies.

The bureaucratic aspect of much of present-day sponsorship (applications to local or national art councils and foundations) is a phenomenon that is taken for granted but that is new in historical terms. The state itself may in some cases be the most important financial supporter of the arts; the region or municipality may have major or minor impact on its development and accessibility. In the United States, the ‘patron state’ plays a relatively small role in the sponsorship of artists, but programs exist at the federal, state, and local levels. Diversity in types of support is notable at the state and, especially, the local levels. In Germany, state sponsorship of the arts exists at a greater financial level overall, but the federal government plays a small role. State governments and municipalities are the key sponsors of artists. But given the disparity in wealth of the former East versus the former West German states, the support given to artists varies greatly by location. France, by contrast, has a more centralized system through its Ministry of Culture. Great Britain funds the arts through a series of arms-length agencies, which directly support the national museums and also devolve funds to agencies in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and regions of England. These agencies, in turn, support art at the regional and the local levels. Local authorities also support art through local tax revenues. In Sweden and Norway, the state supports a number of projects and artists, but funds are increasingly transferred from the state to regions and municipalities for decentralized disbursement.

Sponsorship and material support may concern the provision, permanent or temporary, of a living for the artist, and may also involve access to materials for artistic production (which may or may not be separate from one’s income). Equally important, they may determine the potential of becoming recognized, becoming ‘known,’ and gaining an elevated reputation. Different kinds of sponsorship may or may not be consonant with the norms and values of various artistic communities. Thus art critics, museum directors, foundations, and various buyers may have strong or weak legitimacy in the eyes of artists and other members of the art world. The existence of competing opinions on aesthetic criteria, and appropriate judges of it, may lead to conflicts over
who should decide on works of art to be purchased or on the recipients of foundation or state grants.

Some artistic subcultures may be imbued with anti-commercial values. In his ethnography of artists in the SoHo area of Manhattan, Simpson (1981) found that many of the avant-garde artists working there held these values. Simpson argues that anti-commercial values arose with the rise of market distribution for art and that these values are a crucial source of emotional support for artists who are just starting out or who have been unsuccessful in the commercial system. The rewards of the market, in their financial, reputation-building, and esteem-generating aspects, are too scarce for the number of artists who hope to make a career of art. Anti-commercial values provide a legitimating ideology to artists who produce powerful, authentic works that nevertheless do not sell. Along these lines, Bourdieu argues that the ‘position of “pure” writer or artist, like that of intellectual, is an institution of freedom, constructed against the “bourgeoisie” (in the artists’ sense) and against institutions – in particular against the state bureaucracies, academies, salons, etc.’ (1993: 63, italics added). The consequences of such a stance may be quite different during certain historical periods and in different political systems. For instance, the anti-commercialism of some post-communist artistic groups focuses on the lack of purpose and meaning in market-oriented artistic production, a system that was thrust upon them with the fall of communism. In contrast, during the development of abstract art in Israel in the 1950s, anti-commercialism apparently sprung from a complete lack of opportunity to sell abstract works in the private art market, which was strongly focused on figurative styles favored by the public, coupled with positive encouragement of abstract styles by an avant-garde art world. The support of the Israeli avant-garde came from art critics and the Tel-Aviv Museum of Art, which provided opportunities for the exhibition of and critical attention to abstract art, but not sales (Greenfeld, 1985).

We expect, then, that anti-commercial values will be found in marketized systems as well as in states that are now increasingly incorporating free market ideology and commercial values. The role of the successful (commercially oriented) fine artist is balanced by the role of the anti-commercial artist, whether successful or not.

States may play a significant part in setting out roles that artists might play in the art world. Just as socialist states actively created the role of ‘state artist’, they inadvertently created the role of ‘dissident artist’. As the post-communist countries moved toward a market system, both roles (state artists and dissident ones) became weakened, with profound consequences for the artists who had filled them.
Important for the discussion of sponsorship are the dimensions of support, such as the number and variety of the sources of support and the conditions under which different kinds of support are available. The number of people and institutions deciding on the beneficiaries of support independently of each other, the importance of political orientation, or the concentration on artistic standards and norms may all affect the conditions under which artists work, how they pursue their work, and the possibility of their art being understood or even known beyond the circles of close colleagues and friends. Some of these conditions are difficult to ascertain even in the most stable and transparent societies, and are more unclear in societies in transition.

In addition to directly supporting artists through financial means or through the provision of materials or studio space, states support the arts in a variety of ways through institutions or laws which have been put in place without specific reference to artists. For instance, most artists are unable to make a living from their artworks. As a result, they must rely on alternative sources of income, often a wealthy or working spouse or a day job. Some artists, however, subsist on the welfare roles, or find productive periods supported by unemployment benefits. In countries such as the United Kingdom, artists can rely on the National Health Service for their medical needs. In the United States, many artists do without health insurance or pension plans, which they cannot afford (Jeffri et al., 1987; Jeffri and Greenblatt, 1989). So artists must fall back on state Medicaid programs if they sustain a serious illness or accident, and on Social Security payments to which they are eligible at age 65. Many artists are poor, but the literally ‘starving artist’ does not exist in most western countries, as modern welfare states protect artists, along with others, from abject poverty.

In societies where art is distributed through the market, norms and laws protecting private property may help (or hinder) artists in their moral and legal claim to ownership of the works they sell. Regulations regarding legal contracts affect artists’ relationships with their dealers. Artists can claim the same degree of protection through the courts with regard to contractual arrangements, human rights, and many other issues that other citizens are able to claim. How expensive ‘luxury’ items, which can include artworks, are taxed affects the art market. Most of these laws were put in place without specific regard for the artist. But others more directly affect artists. For instance, in European Union countries, artists have resale rights (called the droit de suite) which allow them or their estates to claim a portion of the proceeds from secondary sales of works at auction. Artists in the United States and the United
Kingdom do not have this right and can claim income only from the first sale made from the studio or art dealership. Artists, along with consumers, are protected from fakes and forgeries to the extent that states have laws forbidding such practices, and the specific legal distinction between illegal appropriation and fair use of ideas and images defines the degree to which artists can protect their own innovations.

Artists may also benefit from other types of legislation, for instance rent control, that were designed to help a broader class of citizens. The SoHo area of Manhattan, which contains a high proportion of artists’ studios and sales galleries, initially attracted artists due to its derelict buildings with large loft spaces (Zukin, 1982; Simpson, 1981). Landlords colluded with artists, allowing them to occupy, illegally, commercial property not zoned for residential use rather than let the buildings stand empty, and city inspectors turned a blind eye. Later on, city officials saw the benefits of allowing artists to gentrify the area and passed favorable legislation. The gentrification was successful, but had the effect of driving rents up to a point where many aspiring artists could no longer afford to live there (Bowler and McBurney, 1993).

In short, states support artists through a variety of methods, both financial and legal. States may also fail to offer financial support. They can do this in an equitable manner of benign neglect, or they can pattern their support and non-support in such a way as to encourage those artists it approves of and discourages others, in what Brustein (2000) calls, in a different context, ‘coercive philanthropy’. This brings up the specter of state censorship and control, a topic we turn to next.

Control

Repression of the arts by the state may take different forms. Using physical coercion to control artistic expression is an extreme form, and has been used infrequently, even in the former Soviet Union. Authoritarian regimes are likely to control artists in the first instance by supporting those who conform to the accepted styles and career pathways, although such regimes also tend to rely on explicit censorship and punishment as an adjunct to selective support (Golomshtok, 1985, 1990; Rueschemeyer, 1993 [1991]). But the line between repression and selective support can be a thin one: not receiving what is expected or ‘deserved’ is punishment as well, and such sanctions may have important consequences for the ability of an artist to continue in the same direction or even to work in the field at all.

The issue of selective support has become a hot one in the United States in recent decades. With freedom of speech protected by the
Introduction

The constitution, outright censorship of art is uncommon. However, some special interest groups have succeeded in changing the terms by which grants are given to artists, from artistic merit based on the judgments of experts in the field to a more general requirement that the art be somehow socially acceptable to a wider swathe of the population. A number of artists who were deprived of federal grants won compensation through the courts, but their victory was pyrrhic, not only due to the personal costs to the plaintiffs of the litigation process, but because the government subsequently eliminated nearly all federal grants to individual artists to protect itself from controversy, lawsuits, and art it deemed unacceptable. The United States shelters a diverse system of public and private support for the arts, however, and artists whose work might be considered too challenging or experimental for government support may be able to find alternative sources. These alternative outlets may or may not give the artists as much prestige, income, and exposure as more officially recognized channels. But it is a good bet that where money is short, both audience size and financial rewards will be on the small side. And importantly, though no strong form of censorship is regularly used by the United States government, and artists are not thrown in jail for critical or shocking works, many American artists feel that they are being censored (Dubin, 1992).

A work of art may contain explicit social criticism. But critique and social and ideological antagonisms may also be expressed through the formal aspects of the artwork, that is, through the art forms themselves. Seeking to ‘shock the bourgeoisie’ artistically is not the only example. The very use of abstract forms in contrast to ‘realistic’ art that a general audience could easily grasp was not only considered a political challenge in much of communist eastern Europe but also an affront to ‘normal’ people who deserved access to the work. This is not to say that all developments of artistic innovation spring from critiques of society, but rather that such innovations may indeed contain such elements.

In contrast, the subject matter and the formal characteristics of art may express explicit praise of the status quo, in political or in broader social terms. Comfortable symbolic creations may have a soothing effect on audience and sponsor alike. An interesting phenomenon is that the same formal or substantive qualities may have quite different meanings as historical situations change, as in Impressionism’s move from a scorned avant-garde to the favorite subject for an international blockbuster exhibition. Similarly, even abstract expressionism came to be considered by many as an expression of the inherent beauty and civilized environment of our lives. At the same time, there is the peculiar
excitement evoked by artistic creations that go against the grain of authoritarian, or even civic or bourgeois, impositions. This is in evidence in the subterranean popularity of some dissident artists who were working under socialist restrictions. It is also part of the attraction of art among some avant-garde circles in ‘free’ societies, where artists and their audiences expect art to challenge or question the status quo and to provoke viewers into thinking in new ways about their society.

**Audience development**

The state, as we have seen, plays an active role in bringing art to the people through its pattern of support for and control of artists. It also plays a greater role than is often recognized in bringing people to art. States may, of course, promote art appreciation either through their own programs or through funding education and outreach programs of art museums. The general economic climate, in part fostered by government policy, affects the ability of collectors to purchase artworks. Individuals new to collecting are more likely to start to buy art in periods of economic growth, when consumer confidence is high, than in those of recession. The most important way that states promote art appreciation, however, is through the general education system.

In most western societies, access to ‘high’ culture relates to the level of education and some familiarity with the art forms themselves. Parents may introduce their children to art, and children also learn about art at school. The existence and quality of some introduction to art in schools is strongly related to social class in many societies (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; DiMaggio, 1982c). The arts may not be represented at all in poorer schools, and this is especially notable in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, with relatively decentralized school administration and a strong tradition of private schools attended by children of the higher classes. Beyond accessibility in terms of education and past familiarity with art, there are different audiences’ predilections, norms, and expectations. In France, which has a centralized school curriculum, social class still strongly affects taste in art (Bourdieu, 1984). And the attraction to country music in the United States (Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996) or to traditional landscapes and other popular forms of the visual arts (Halle, 1993)9 is especially strong in groups that have little connection to the world of ‘high’ culture.

The association of the fine arts with the upper classes is well documented. Attendance at art museums, for instance, is strongly associated
with both higher socio-economic status and higher levels of education in the United States (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978a), France (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1991), and Germany (Kirchberg, 1996, 2001). This has to do with the historical association of the fine arts with princely collections, stately homes of the gentry, and wealthy patronage of religious art in Europe. Further as DiMaggio (1982a,b) and Levine (1988) show for America, the ‘high’ arts were enshrined as a separate, sacred sphere in the late nineteenth century by elites who wished to shore up fading political capital with culturally based capital. Nevertheless, the strong distinction between high and popular art began to blur and break down in the late twentieth century. This blurring is notable both in the works created by artists and in the tastes of audiences. Along these lines, American art museums, partly spurred by their government and corporate funders, rediscovered the educational missions that were present in their founding charters a century earlier (Alexander, 1996a). As a result, they have attempted to increase the appeal of the fine arts in their collections to all social classes.

States may play an important role in efforts to broaden the appeal of the fine arts to a wider segment of the middle classes and to reach out to the disadvantaged. Incentives for both of these are built into government funding of art museums, at least to some degree, in all the countries we discuss and result in complicated decisions about what kind of art is to be exhibited. In addition, the nature of the state itself might encourage public consumption of the fine arts. East German museums, for instance, enjoyed high attendance levels before the reunification with West Germany, though the more ‘esoteric’ works of art were less accessible to many of the viewers.

The accessibility of art to the public raises the complex questions associated with the distinction between high art and popular art – and for the twenty-first century, for different versions of both high and popular forms. As Gans (1974) noted 30 years ago, American society is divided up into different ‘taste cultures’ which prefer particular forms of high or popular art. While social class remains an important factor in consumption preferences, educational attainment is a stronger predictor of taste than is income, and patterns of consumption have become more complex than a simple correspondence of high art with upper classes and the popular arts with the masses. Instead, people from the more mobile and educated segments of society prefer a wider variety of cultural forms (DiMaggio, 1987; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996), and people may sort themselves as much with what they do not like as with what they do (Bryson, 1996). Such taste patterns may vary with the
complexity of the society, with more homogeneous societies displaying more one-dimensional distinctions as compared to the multiple dimensions of distinction in more mobile and heterogeneous societies like the United States.

Bourdieu (1993) suggests that art worlds, or ‘artistic fields’, are divided into different poles or sectors. The autonomous pole of artistic fields relies on the ‘pure gaze’ (disinterestedness in economic value). Autonomous sectors of the artistic field are rich in cultural capital, though not economic capital. Artists derive prestige from their art to the extent they are held in high esteem by the field’s members, and intellectuals may discuss their work and its significance. The payoff artists seek, then, is recognition. Autonomous artists do not sell works on a grand scale, however, and generally do not become rich through it. Autonomous artists produce art for audiences who share the same aesthetic goals, and they try to avoid outside interference. In contrast, the ‘heteronomous’, or commercial, pole is open to outside influence, especially that of audiences with different tastes. As a result, artists in the commercial fields are judged by how well they meet audience demands; that is, by how well they sell. Since commercial art sells well, it brings in substantial financial capital. However, commercial art is held in lower regard by members of society who derive their prestige through an association with and knowledge of high culture. Bourdieu subdivides heteronomous art into a higher status ‘bourgeois art’ which has some pretensions of art-ness and which is popular with the middle classes, and the lower status ‘industrial art’ which unabashedly panders to commercial requirements, either of companies (as in greeting card or advertising art) or of the vast low-brow, mass tastes (as in motel or tourist art).

These divisions within artistic fields bring up the fact that there are a variety of subcultures among artists and among viewers, buyers, and critics. As with tastes, aesthetic standards vary among different segments of the population. Which of these segments the state represents in its reflection of national preferences will shape the policies it takes toward the arts, as will the extent to which government bureaucrats share the tastes and standards of audiences rather than artists. Policies that reflect the interests of audiences in heteronomous sectors will tend to conflict with the interests of artists practicing in autonomous sectors. This is the case in the United States, where in recent decades, governmental agencies have shunned sponsorship of the ‘controversial’ or ‘challenging’ sectors of the avant-garde, in favor of more ‘mainstream’ or ‘decorative’ sectors of the fine arts.
Globalization

In many ways, the fine arts have been ‘globalized’ for hundreds of years. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, travelers on their grand tour visited the cultural treasures of Europe. Winners of the Prix de Rome in the Paris salons were sent for several years’ study in Italy. And at the same time, American collectors looked to the great masters of Europe, rather than homegrown talent, for inspiration and purchase. Tax laws favorable toward the importing of art objects were established in America in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the increased globalization of the world economy in the latter part of the twentieth century has changed the cultural landscape of many countries. State policies affect the international flow not only of art objects, but of people – tourists and immigrants, including immigrant artists.

A common maxim holds that ‘Great art knows no boundaries’. This may be true for the old masters, for whom a shared appreciation is widespread, and also true in the international avant-garde market, where a particular orientation toward the functions of art is shared by people from a variety of nations. Thus, in some cases, artistic taste may span international boundaries. Artworks may also cross international borders for exhibition or sale. States vary, however, in the laws that affect the import and export of artworks and the cost of sales within the country. Some countries take steps to protect their own heritage or patrimony by limiting the conditions under which masterpieces or artifacts can be exported. Certain artistic treasures in Great Britain, for instance, must be offered first to a museum in the country before a sale to a foreign purchaser can be approved.

Most artists create and sell works in the country in which they were born, and the international flow of object or foreign collectors does not affect their daily practice. The extent to which artists are shaped by their local art worlds or by more international ones depends not only on the artist’s own predilections, but also on the availability of information on foreign art styles and the freedom and financial ability of artists to travel as tourists to other countries. Artists in the former East Germany found it difficult to learn about western art, and were restricted in travel destinations until the 1980s. As a result, they were more influenced by references to earlier German art and by artistic developments in other Soviet Bloc countries than by recent artistic production in the west.

Some artists emigrate to foreign countries or to major cities in their own country. Sometimes this is a purely personal choice to move to a more vibrant world-class city, such as Paris, London, or New York,
where artists – and dealers and collectors – congregate. There, artists hope to absorb the excitement of the art world and to make it in a location where the arts seem to enjoy greater public appreciation. In other instances, artists have emigrated to escape a difficult political situation in their home countries. This is the case for artists from Soviet and post-communist societies who have emigrated to New York, and for artists from Tibet who escaped to India or London (Harris, 1999). These immigrants provide an important window into the ways that different state policies affect the work of artists, as they are able to make direct comparisons between the different situations in which they have worked.

The art of the newcomers may be strange and uninviting or, in some cases, especially appealing to those in their host society willing to test it out. Such art, however, may also be misinterpreted, at least according to those responsible for their creation. East European artists have complained that their work was not understood in the west; indeed that it was misunderstood. In turn, some of the immigrant artists to the United States found it difficult to understand much of American contemporary art. Along related lines, Price (1989) discussed the difficulties that arise when westerners, especially Americans, import ‘primitive’ art from developing countries. Westerners may believe that such work is an expression of the tribal group, rather than of the artist who made the work, leading them to devalue and forget the individual artist. Further, they may cast the work as something done by the ‘Other’; something which represents dark, sexual, and uncivilized urges. This can lead to amusing, or offensive, misunderstandings, as when crescent shapes in Maroon fabric work from Suriname are interpreted as phallic symbols instead of the merely decorative patterns that they suggest to the Maroons.

The case studies

As we have argued, state actions and policies shape the role of artists in society, define the public place of art, influence the development of audiences, interact with organizations and institutions that mediate between artists and the state, and support artistic work directly and indirectly. State policies may even affect the very nature of artistic developments.

We examine these issues comparatively, for it is only by comparing different political-cultural systems that one can study such large-scale subjects. By looking at a variety of political systems we can draw out the implications of contrasting relations between the political order and the world of the visual arts, ranging from different patterns of funding
through contrasting social environments in which artists work to the varying character and responses of audiences for art. These comparisons will show that the state has an important impact on what happens in the art world.

In the next five chapters, we examine different contexts of government involvement in the visual arts. Chapter 2 examines the United States, a society with extensive encouragement and incentives for private sponsorship for the arts, yet with far less direct public sponsorship than in western Europe. Chapter 3 focuses on Great Britain, which moved to more market-oriented funding of the arts during the Thatcher government but which continues, nevertheless, to offer modest public support for the arts. Chapter 4 discusses the social democratic welfare states of Scandinavia; it focuses on Norway, though it offers some comparative glimpses of Sweden; here access and involvement of many different segments of the population have been encouraged by generous public supports.

These three chapters of parallel case analyses are followed by two that trace transitions from one political system to another. Chapter 5 examines the art world of communist East Germany and the changes that took place after the fall of communism. Tracing the impact of this transition, which is complemented by comments on the communist and post-communist periods in the Czech Republic and Poland, highlights the character of art worlds both in the politically dominated past and in the new market-oriented situation. Chapter 6 looks at a similar contrast, but now focusing on the personal experiences and reflections of artists who moved from one political-cultural context to another – from the Soviet Union (and, more recently, from post-communist Russia) to the United States and to Israel. In addition to highlighting the contrast between systems, both chapters together offer an analysis of art in the authoritarian systems of east European state socialism.

These contrasting political contexts represent a range of government support from meager to munificent. They also represent differences along many other dimensions such as in audience development and issues of control and censorship. The United States, never generous with funding, has become more stingy in recent years in response to arts controversies over federal funding of ‘obscene’ art. At the same time, tax deductions underwrite extensive private sponsorship by wealthy individuals, corporations, and foundations. The United Kingdom has also reined in cultural spending, at least on the visual arts, though unlike the United States, the United Kingdom does not have a strong tradition, or state encouragement, of private philanthropy. The social democratic welfare states of Scandinavia have been more stable, although Norway and
Sweden have decentralized funding while maintaining strong support for the arts, in both popular and fine styles.

The state socialist systems of east European communism gave art both generous funding and a public mission, which included popular accessibility as well as the symbolization of socialist progress. They sought to direct the style as well as the content of art, yet succeeded only for a limited time in controlling artistic expression. The funding system encompassed centralized state support of artists, an active union of artists and state-sponsored sales galleries. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the eastern system integrated into the western, which was more decentralized. Public support in West Germany was channeled through the states and municipalities and was accompanied by a market system in which West Germany’s artists supported themselves, to a much greater extent than artists in the former East Germany, through sales. The integration of the two systems led to initial exuberance in the east, followed by a transformation complicated for most east German artists.

We close in Chapter 7 with a discussion of the issues brought out in the previous chapters. The chapter reviews key points and suggests some conclusions about ‘art and the state’. Our remarks focus on the complexities of cultural policy. States vary in their funding mechanisms, such as direct support from state budgets versus indirect support through tax relief, the use of governmental agencies, quangos, voluntary organizations, or business firms in disbursing funds, the involvement of artists, and the degree of representation of artists’ interests in policy or sponsorship decisions. These differences matter. We discuss state policies and the public place of art, the expression of ‘national culture’, control and censorship, the development of audiences for art, and the relationship between esoteric ‘high’ and popular art, and we consider the interrelationships among the state, the market, and the art world. Throughout the book, we will present empirical case studies and discuss their points of convergence and divergence, and thereby we hope to demonstrate the value of studying art and the state in comparative perspective.

Notes

1. For reviews on the sociology of art, in general, see Becker (1982), Zolberg (1990), Crane (1992), and Alexander (2003).

2. As Becker suggests, policies toward the arts reflect state interests, which do not necessarily coincide with the interests of artists. What the interests of the state are and how they are determined are debated issues in political sociology. It is not our purpose to add to this debate, but we recognize that states may reflect the interests of the dominant class, big business, ‘the people’, or state bureaucrats.
We also note that states are rarely unified actors. Programs, policies, and the individual predilections of state officials may vary among segments of the state. While we do not disentangle these various issues, we do look at the degree of centralization and consistency in state actions in the countries we study.

3. For discussions of unofficial art and dissident artists in the Soviet Union, see Baigell and Baigell (1995), Golomshtok and Glezer (1977), and Sjeklocha and Mead (1967).

4. For discussions of different models of state support of the arts, see Benedict (1991), Boorsma et al. (1998), Ca’Zorzi (1989), Cummings and Katz (1987), Cummings and Schuster (1989), and Schuster (1985). Interestingly, Heilbrun and Gray (1993: 266) point out that current models of state support for the arts tend to support the supply of art (for instance, grants to arts institutions). They propose that states might wish to support the demand for art (support audiences rather than artists or art institutions) for instance, through policies in which the government would provide the public with vouchers to spend on artistic or cultural consumption.

5. On the relationship between artists and patrons, also see Haskell (1963).

6. The art historian Hans Belting (1994, 2001), however, argues that ‘artworks’ created before the contemporary understanding of art was institutionalized were not art in today’s terms. For example, medieval Christian works, which were devotional objects, did not constitute ‘art’ for medieval viewers. To the extent that we look at these older works with a modern understanding of creativity and genius we misinterpret the objects to fit our own framework.

7. Brustein’s scathing comments refer to public and especially private sponsorship of nonprofit organizations which determine ‘funding by utilitarian rather than traditional aesthetic criteria’ (p. 220). He is particularly concerned with the attention philanthropists pay to the education and outreach components of symphony orchestras, museums, and other cultural organizations, and their requirements that both the works displayed or performed and the personnel in these organizations reflect the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of their local communities.


9. Halle shows that landscapes, especially ‘depopulated’ ones were commonly found in the houses of people from all social classes. Respondents from the upper-middle classes, however, were likely to know the name of the artist who painted the landscape and respondents from the working classes were unlikely to know, unless the landscape had been painted by a friend or relative. Abstract art and the so-called primitive works were displayed only in upper-middle class homes, whereas religious iconography (e.g. the sacred heart of Jesus Christ) only in the working-class homes.

10. Bourdieu suggests that the particular divisions of artistic fields in a society are conditioned by the nature of class relationships there.
The relationship between visual arts and the state apparatus of the United States is a difficult one. In recent decades, controversies over ‘obscene’, ‘indecent’, or ‘blasphemous’ art has led to a substantial reduction in federal aid to arts organizations and to the elimination of direct federal grants to artists in most disciplines. Even before these cuts, the government of the United States supported the arts at a much lower per capita level than other developed nations. The reasons for this situation are complex, but are related to Americans’ historical suspicion of large, powerful governments. Nevertheless, the United States boasts cutting-edge artists, lively markets for art sales, both in dealerships and auction houses, and vibrant art museums. This is due in no small part to a healthy involvement of private funds in art matters, but as we shall see, the American state has encouraged this private involvement through a variety of means, especially tax laws. Indeed, though US direct support of the arts is one of the lowest, its level of indirect support of the arts is higher than in much of the developed world. The American state also affects the arts through its legislation on non-art matters and through its Constitution, especially the First Amendment which guarantees the freedom of speech.

This chapter looks at the current funding arrangements for art museums and for visual artists, in terms of both direct and indirect funding mechanisms. It then turns to a brief history of arts funding by the American nation-state, including a look at recent arts controversies, and concludes with a discussion of artists and the privatization of culture.

State support for visual arts institutions

In this section, I give an overview of the system of government support for visual arts institutions, especially for art museums and contemporary
The American System of Support for the Arts

arts centers. This support, which works through both direct and indirect means, helps to bring both contemporary and historically consecrated art to the public. At the federal level, all three branches of the government, the executive, the legislative and the judicial, play a role in the arts.

Direct support

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), founded in 1965, offers grants to nonprofit arts organizations for programs and exhibitions. The NEA funds organizations under six areas: (1) Creativity, (2) Organizational Capacity, (3) Access, (4) Arts Learning, (5) Heritage/Preservation, and (6) Arts on Radio and Television. For art museums and the visual arts, such grants can include artists’ commissions; workshops; short-term residencies (but not fellowships or grants to artists); exhibitions of painting, sculpture, media art, or other fine or folk arts; education and outreach programs; and documentation and conservation of art objects. Organizations must match NEA grants on at least a one-to-one basis.

Proposals sent to the NEA are evaluated by an advisory panel (colloquially called peer review panels or peer panels) made up of arts professionals who are experts in the funding area or ‘discipline’ plus at least one layperson. The recommendations of the advisory panel are passed onto the National Council on the Arts, made up of 14 voting members (private citizens appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate) plus six ex officio, non-voting members of Congress. This committee approves, or rejects, the peer panel’s recommendations and sends the approved proposals onto the Chairperson of the NEA (also appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate), who also must approve grants before they can go forward. The NEA’s appropriation for Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 was $120,971,000 (NEA, 2004).3

The NEA also provides block grants to state-level arts councils, which in turn support art museums. Forty percent of the NEA’s budget is passed directly to state arts councils, and states must match these funds on at least a one-to-one basis. Each state has an arts council, and although subject to statutory conditions for the use of NEA funds, each arts council operates with different procedures, budgets, and priorities. There are also a large number of arts programs in local governments. The fragmentation of this system is notable.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) also supports museum exhibitions, although the NEH is less important than the NEA for art exhibitions (especially of avant-garde work). The NEH looks for strong educational and humanities components in exhibitions and encourages collaborations among organizations. The Art Institute of
Chicago, for instance, received $290,000 for a traveling exhibition, *Taoism and the Arts of China*. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalog and website, and included a program with the Adler Planetarium and the Field Museum on Chinese astronomy for teachers and the public (NEH, 1999).

The NEH offers other programs which might incidentally help art museums; for instance, programs for training conservators, developing preservation techniques, and for education projects. Along these lines, the Brooklyn Museum of Art received an NEH educational program grant of $91,000 to enhance its teaching website, to strengthen ties with schools, and to collaborate with the Brooklyn Children’s Museum and the Brooklyn Public Library (NEH, 1999).

Also at the federal level, the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities (FCAH) plays an important role in large, international exhibitions by underwriting the insurance for art objects that are loaned from abroad, objects from America that travel overseas, and objects from America that travel within the United States along with objects from other countries. Large traveling exhibitions of precious artworks would incur extremely expensive insurance costs if insurance had to be obtained privately; consequently, without government underwriting such exhibitions would be much less common. Undoubtedly, these shows add to the vibrancy of the American art scene, and may inspire living artists. The vast majority of exhibitions indemnified by the agency are of art from the past. The FCAH is administered by the NEA on behalf of the US Government, and since its creation in 1975 it has indemnified 630 exhibitions saving museums $134 million in insurance premiums (NEA, 2001).

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) also funds art museums. The agency was created in 1996 when the Institute of Museum Services (itself established in 1977) was combined with the federal programs in the Department of Education for libraries. In FY 2004, the museum portion of the IMLS’s appropriation was $21.4 million (IMLS, 2004). Funds are granted to museums of all kinds under five different programs (Museums for America, Museum Assessment Program, Conservation Project Support, Conservation Assessment Program, and National Leadership Grants for Museums). The mission of the IMLS’s museum section is to ‘help strengthen operations, improve care of collections, increase professional development and enhance community service’ (IMLS, 2001).

These four programs (NEA, NEH, FCAH, and IMLS) are the four agencies most important for the federal funding of arts organizations. There are
also a variety of programs and agencies that might fund arts organizations in incidental ways which are too complex and varied to be discussed here.6

Some museums, by charter, receive funds directly from public sources. The National Gallery of Art, as part of the Smithsonian Institution, receives part of its budget from the federal government, as do the Smithsonian museums. Many museums receive direct government support at the state or local level. Some art museums are public museums funded by the city or the state. The North Carolina Museum of Art, for instance, is a state museum and operates as an agency of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. Its collections belong to the State of North Carolina. The Detroit Institute of Arts, the sixth-largest fine-arts museum in the United States, is a municipal museum. Other museums are private, but receive direct public support. For instance, the Metropolitan Museum of Art owns its building and collections, but the City of New York owns the property on which the building is situated and provides funds for operations and maintenance.

The system of public funding for arts organizations is quite complex, and requires a great deal of proactivity from museums and contemporary arts institutions. They must develop programs and exhibitions that are fundable and then apply for grants. Full funding of projects must be cobbled together from a variety of different sources, including federal, state, and local government agencies, national corporations and local businesses, charitable foundations, and individual philanthropists. This has a strong impact on the exhibitions museums mount.

In theory, a diverse system of funding allows innovative programs to find a niche, and can reflect local differences thereby promoting diverse programs, as compared to a highly centralized system. In practice, the political pressures on arts councils may be relatively homogenous and, if so, the types of programs funded will also tend toward relative homogeneity (DiMaggio, 1991). My research (Alexander, 1996a,b) has shown that, from 1960, when art museums relied mostly on individual philanthropists to 1986, when they relied on a mix of institutional funders, museum exhibitions came to include a larger proportion of popular shows – large traveling blockbuster exhibitions and thematically organized shows. Moreover, the number of exhibitions at most museums expanded enormously, so that scholarly, art-historically organized shows greatly increased in number even though they declined as a proportion of the total. The change in funding sources also nudged museums into paying more attention to audiences, both in their sheer size and in their diversity. Museums have become more managerial and oriented toward fundraising,
which sometimes conflicts with scholarly and curatorial ideas of the museum.

The American system of direct state support of the arts is diverse; it is also accused of providing paltry levels of finance, as compared with other countries. Reliable cross-national figures on support of the arts are hard to come by (see Schuster, 1985). Nations divide arts budgets up differently, placing a different mix of disciplines under the banner of ‘art’. Some are federal systems (e.g. Germany and the United States), others are more centralized (e.g. Great Britain and, especially, France), and some degree of fragmentation of funding exists in all nation-states. The NEA reports that in 1995 the United States, including federal, state, and local government sources, spent $6 per capita on the arts and museums. In contrast, the United Kingdom spent $25 per capita; Canada, $46; France, $57; Sweden, $57; Germany, $85; and Finland, $91 (NEA, 1999). Though these figures are not completely comparable, they strongly demonstrate that the United States lags behind most developed nations in direct cultural spending.

**Indirect support**

While the United States is less generous in terms of supporting the arts with direct funds, it is much more generous in terms of indirect support (Feld *et al.*, 1983). Most important are a variety of tax laws. The US tax code allows deductions, to both individuals and corporations, for charitable giving. In this way, the federal government and those states which also allow similar deductions forego tax income and are thereby said to provide indirect support to charities in the amount of the foregone tax. Furthermore, the federal government allows tax benefits to nonprofit organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code. Most art museums and arts centers are constituted so that donations made to them are tax deductible. They also receive certain tax concessions, by both national and state governments. They are exempt from federal income tax, and in many states, they are exempt from property tax. Items purchased in their gift shops might not be subject to sales taxes, in effect, making their merchandise cheaper than that of for-profit competitors and giving them a competitive edge. Feld *et al.* (1983) estimated that foregone tax income on arts-related deductions exceeded direct public expenditures by a factor of at least two to one. In the United States, then, it is important to consider the indirect support of cultural organizations on the part of the government as it represents a greater financial commitment than is given in direct support.
Schuster (1985: 43, 45) estimated that in FY 1984, the United States provided $3 per capita of direct support to the arts, but $10 in indirect support. Britain provided $9.60 of direct aid and $0.40 of indirect aid. Canada and France each provided $32 directly, but Canada’s indirect contribution was ‘small’ and France’s was ‘very small’. Sweden had the highest direct expense, of $35 per capita, but it offered no indirect support through tax incentives. Though these figures are old, they clearly show that when factoring in indirect support, the United States comes much closer to the level of cultural support in other Western nations, even though it is, with Great Britain, at the low end of the scale.

As Feld et al. (1983) argue, indirect support through the tax code represents the oldest, as well as the largest, element of government funding for the arts in the United States. A key piece of legislation is the Payne–Aldrich Tariff of 1909, which enacted a deduction to certain taxes on the basis of charitable giving, and which allowed original artworks that were more than 20 years old to be imported into the United States duty free (Meyer, 1979: 31–6). The law was amended to allow the duty-free import of all works of art, regardless of age, in 1913, the same year that federal income taxes were imposed. The laws have been amended in a variety of ways since then, but the basic provision allowing a tax deduction to be made for gifts of money to art museums stands, as does the duty-free status of imported works of art. From 1965 until 1980, the top marginal rate of tax for individuals was 70 percent, which meant that a donation to an art museum would cost the benefactor only 30 cents on the dollar (Heilbrun and Gray, 1993: 232–5). This clearly offered a strong incentive for those in the highest income brackets to donate to charity. The top rates have been brought down since then, first to 50 percent and more recently, in the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001, to the top rate of 35 percent by 2006, lessening, but not eliminating, the tax incentives to donors. Corporations are also able to deduct charitable gifts from federal income tax. They are allowed to deduct up to 10 percent of their pretax income, although most corporations do not come close to that level of charitable giving.

Bequests to charities are given favorable tax treatment, as are ‘in-kind’ gifts, which for art museums often means artworks. Until 1986, deductions for artworks were made for the current market value of a piece. This created strong incentives for collectors to give or bequeath works of art. The deductible amount might be much higher than the original price of the work, and allowed donors to avoid capital gains and inheritance taxes. An important exception to the market value deduction was created
by the Tax Reform Act of 1969, which eliminated the ability of artists to claim the market value of their own works given to charity. Instead, artists were allowed to deduct only the cost of materials used to create the piece. This change in incentives dramatically reduced the number of gifts to museums of artworks by the donating artist. Similarly, the Tax Reform Act of 1986 changed the in-kind deduction rules for all individuals, eliminating the loophole that allowed donors to avoid capital gains taxes. Not surprisingly, this change slowed down the gifts of artworks to museums. In recent decades, estate taxes and capital gains taxes have also been reduced. Although indirect support of arts organizations is still important, these changes in the Tax Code and reductions in the levels of taxation have reduced the incentives to donors and the amount of foregone tax for the government as compared to the early 1980s.

Government also encourages donations to arts organizations (and other nonprofit organizations) through at least two other means. First, laws for charitable foundations (there are several legal types) often require that a certain proportion of their income or endowments be given away each year. The J. Paul Getty Trust, for instance, is legally bound to give away millions of dollars each year. Second, grants offered on a matching basis encourage museums to solicit funds from other sources (Schuster, 1989). In addition, NEA grants to state arts agencies must also be matched by state monies. Such matching requirements effectively leverage funds for the arts from state governments and private sources.

Art institutions and artists

Art institutions play a crucial role in the art world. Clearly, art museums play a role in the remembrance of art and artists through the ages. More than other institutions, art museums bring historical art to audiences – for the most part, a well-educated, middle to upper class audience, but through education and outreach programs, their work touches broader audiences. Art museums play an important role in the world of contemporary art as well. Exhibitions are obviously a crucial factor in an artist’s success. Finding a dealer and being seen in his or her showroom is a first, and difficult, step. Having a show at a museum (and having museums collect the artist’s work) is a second key area for an artist’s visibility and success.

Crane’s (1987) study of the New York art world from 1940 to 1985 suggests that the avant-garde art styles produced during this time were exhibited (and acquired) by museums at different rates. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), for instance, was influential in the Abstract Expressionist, Pop, and Minimalism movements, showing many artists
in these styles and buying their work. MoMA was much less active, however, in showing artists from three later styles, Figurative Painting, Photorealism, and Pattern Painting. (Regional art museums and corporate collectors took up some of the slack left by New York museums in collecting and exhibiting these newer styles.) It is worth noting that Crane identifies many more artists successfully practicing in the three newer styles than in the three older ones (248 artists versus 129 artists).^{10}

Crane (1987: 126–8) suggests three reasons why MoMA might have been less active in the more recent styles: (1) A commitment to the modernist paradigm that blinkered curators. They might have been unable, or unwilling, to see developments that concerned popular culture or that seemed to step back from purely formal extensions of the modernist thrust by reintroducing elements of realism in painting. (2) MoMA had grown significantly during this time. Bureaucratization might have made it less flexible and able to respond to a changing environment. Accompanying this was a shift from a more professional (curatorial) model of management to a more financial and administrative one. Moreover, MoMA faced a number of financial pressures due to its quick growth that, regardless of any accompanying bureaucratization, might have affected acquisitions. (3) Museums at that time were revising their conceptions of the museum’s role:

the groups toward which these museums oriented their activities changed…from the informal network of collectors, patrons, critics, scholars, artists, and dealers to, on the one hand, an interorganizational network involving government agencies and corporations (Allen, 1974), which were increasingly involved in funding exhibitions and administrative needs, and to the general public on the other (Hightower, 1970). A number of the exhibitions which were arranged by these museums in the seventies had little to do with avant-garde art per se but attempted in various ways to respond to social changes and social problems. (p. 128)

Both the growth in museums and their changing roles are due, in part, to increased availability of funding and changes in the source of financial support (Alexander, 1996a,b). Government sources of funds were important in both their direct and indirect generation of potential money, which spurred the growth of established museums and the establishment of new museums. Further, government agencies, with their public outreach goals, helped shift museums toward more inclusive exhibitions,
and steered museums toward corporate sponsorship, which also stressed populism and popularity as goals for exhibitions.

Museums did not entirely forget the avant-garde, but the showcasing of such work fell more to contemporary arts centers, along with the artists’ own dealers. But it was precisely these large, well-established art museums, such as the MoMA, that had the edge in garnering government funds.

**State support for visual artists**

**Direct support**

Direct support of artists by the federal government is quite limited. The National Endowment of the Arts supports a small number of individual artists in only three programs: Literature Fellowships, the Honorary American Jazz Masters Fellowships, and National Heritage Awards in the Folk and Traditional Arts. Individual visual artists (who are not folk artists) are no longer supported by the federal government. Programs, such as the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which directly aided individual artists have been eliminated. Direct grants and fellowships to visual artists were curtailed in recent years as a direct result of arts controversies.

State arts councils are prevented by statute from using any monies devolved from the NEA to support artists directly through grants or fellowships. Nevertheless, a variety of arrangements for supporting artists exist at the state and local level; for instance, some local school districts still make it a practice to bring a ‘visiting artist’ into the classroom. Art students attending accredited university programs for degrees in fine arts (BFA or MFA) might receive federally underwritten loans or other forms of financial aid.

It perhaps goes without saying that there is no government program to purchase contemporary works of art (or any works) for the nation. The federal government may contribute to the acquisition of artworks in one way or another, but these efforts are channeled through collecting institutions such as art museums. For instance, the NEA does provide occasional support to arts organizations to commission new works. But while such grants help museums acquire artworks, and provide a public benefit, the creations are not strictly ‘for the nation’ and do not belong to the US Government. Certainly, official portraits are made of each US President and of other VIPs, and various government agencies acquire works of art through their redecoration budgets and other means, but these expenditures reflect no coherent government stance.
Indirect support

State governments may subsidize artists through the welfare roles, although recent welfare-to-work laws make this a short-term solution for unemployed artists. More sustained indirect support of artists from the federal and state governments comes through the support of contemporary arts institutions which, in turn, support contemporary artists. Artists are also supported, though not in the financial sense, through laws such as those on copyright and intellectual property, and through concepts, such as private property and freedom of expression, supported by the courts and enshrined in the Constitution.

An important, but often overlooked, role of the state is that it enforces the concept of private and intellectual property (see Becker, 1982: Chapter 6). The free market system, in which paintings are sold, would not be possible, at least on a large scale, without the implicit support by the state of ideas of private property. While there are many functions of art, the visual arts in western societies are viewed (at least, in part) as objects exchanged in an art market. Artworks have been so considered since the dealer-critic system emerged at the time of the Impressionists (see White and White, 1965 [1993]). The fact that contemporary art is distributed via market systems has important consequences for the kinds of aesthetic innovation likely to be successful and the mix of styles available for purchase (Becker, 1982; Crane, 1992).

The importance of this can be seen by comparing the United States to countries without market systems such as the former Soviet societies (Rueschemeyer et al., 1985; Rueschemeyer, 1991), or to societies where laws exist to protect artists above and beyond those implemented in the United States. For instance, many European countries have droit de suite laws which allow artists or their estates to benefit from the resale of their works. Artists are allowed a percentage of the resale price. This increases the cost of selling works at auction and may have effects on the actions of collectors (perhaps by encouraging them to hold onto paintings for longer), but it clearly benefits artists whose work has appreciated in value at the time it is sold. Under droit de suite, art objects are seen as analogous to some forms of intellectual property (e.g. books or musical pieces), where the creator retains an interest in the work even after selling initial rights to someone else. In contrast, US law rests on the assumption that a work of art is like physical property, say, a car and that once it is sold, the original owner (the artist) has no further financial or moral rights.

The pressures of the market system are brought into keen focus in the case of East Germany, which was transformed from a state-supported
system to a free market one with the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Rueschemeyer (1991) shows, while the German Democratic Republic (GDR) encouraged the ‘heroic and sentimental’ socialist realist style, it also provided secure employment and patronage for artists. It existed somewhere in between two extremes. The ‘Stalinist impositions and total state control of art patronage’ is one extreme. The ‘opposite is the model of the alienated artist without any formal patron or audience, producing for a market that neither directly sponsors nor values the creations’ (Rueschemeyer, 1993 [1991]: 209).

The market appears to be more gentle to expression than systems where the state controls content, but it has a brutal side. Artists may express what they want, but the market encourages some types of content (popular or critically acceptable) over others (those that do not sell well to either the mass or the elite). Artists who do not express what the market will buy are left to struggle with little support.

Along with the free market ideology and laws supporting it, the First Amendment to the Constitution, which protects free speech, is of crucial importance to the contemporary art scene in America. As we shall explore in more detail below, the US Government has played a role in the so-called censorship of art and artistic expression. Censorship of controversial art may be popular with the American electorate but is, at the same time, morally suspect. American censorship exists on a different – and much lower – level than the active censorship of artists who worked in repressive regimes, such the USSR (Golomshtok, 1985) or fascist Italy (Berezin, 1991).

Laws affect art by providing incentives (or disincentives) for certain behaviors, or by requiring or prohibiting certain actions. As we have seen, the Internal Revenue Code provides incentives that have strongly affected the arts, especially art museums, which have received innumerable financial and in-kind gifts from corporations and individuals as a result. The United States in general takes a laissez-faire approach to the arts, but there are also examples of laws that affect the arts through requirements or prohibitions. Laws regarding nuisance, of various kinds, can be used against artists. Anti-pornography laws, for instance, have been used against arts organizations. Biesel (1993) describes a case in which the New York City Police vice squad arrested an art dealer for selling photographic reproductions of nude paintings in 1887. Anti-pornography laws have been used against more recent artists, as discussed below. Forgery, which is defined as copying a work with the intent to defraud is, of course, prohibited by law. Owners of art objects hold the copyright to the object and also have legal rights with regard to the reproduction of its image. It is
not possible, however, to copyright the ideas behind a visual image, only the physical object. Laws that encourage behavior that benefits artists and the arts include municipal stipulations (as in Manhattan) that 1 percent of a building’s cost be used for art, culture, and public access.

The courts, as an arm of the state, also can affect art and artists. Art comes to trial when a charge is brought against artists who are believed to have violated existing statutes. It also occurs when legal disputes erupt within the art world (see Adams, 1976). For instance, Richard Serra filed suit over the removal of his *Tilted Arc* from a public plaza in New York in the mid-1980s. His massive, rusted-steel sculpture (120 feet long and 15 feet high) was commissioned by the US General Services Administration (GSA) and installed in the Federal Plaza. Serra contended that the GSA had no right to dismantle the piece, despite public support for its removal. He lost the case and the work was not re-installed.

The state indirectly affects artists in other ways. The expansion of the art world, in general, has helped artists. One factor in this has been increased levels of education since World War II, largely a state supported achievement, through mass education at both the primary and secondary levels, supported by state and local taxes. The expansion of higher education, with a large private component, was underwritten, in part, by state and federal government programs. A more educated populace increases the audience for fine arts. It is well known, for instance, that art museums disproportionately attract the more highly educated members of the public (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978b; DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1990). In fact, in predicting preferences for fine arts, the key variable is educational attainment, not social class or income.

The expansion of education at all levels and fields of study has been accompanied by a growth in higher education programs for artists. Awards of MFAs increased from 525 in 1950 to 8708 in 1980 (United States Bureau of the Census, 1951, 1982–83). The expansion of higher education not only trained more artists, it also provided employment – a day job – for many of them. In a study by Long (1981), 63 percent of the artists in her sample worked full-time or part-time in universities or colleges. Moreover, art students and people trained in the arts tend to be avid consumers of art, as well as creators. Thus, an increase in the number of people with formal training or degrees in art is likely to swell audience numbers.

**History of state support for the arts in the United States**

Although examples of state funding of the arts can be found throughout the history of the United States, government has not been particularly
active in mounting coherent programs to fund the visual arts. Indeed, Larson (1983) has called the US Government ‘the reluctant patron’.

The Smithsonian Institution and the National Gallery
The Smithsonian Institution, the closest the United States gets to a set of national museums funded by the federal budget, had an uncertain beginning. Ironically, it was spurred into existence by an Englishman, James Smithson, who had never been to America. Smithson left his fortune to his nephew, stipulating that should the nephew die without having produced an heir, the fortune would be sent ‘to the United States of America to found at Washington, under the name to [sic] the Smithsonian Institution, an Establishment for the increase & diffusion of knowledge among men’ (Conaway, 1995: 23). Smithson died in 1829 and his nephew, childless, in 1835. The sum of £508,318.46 was then sent to the United States (it arrived in 11 wooden boxes in the form of gold bullion), where Congress did not know what to do with it. It was not until 1846 that Congress, somewhat reluctantly, actually established the Smithsonian Institution (see Conaway, 1995; Meyer, 1979).

The Smithsonian became enormously prestigious. Originally dedicated to science, it now includes eight museums and one research center that focus on the visual arts. The Smithsonian Institute is funded by the American government; however, it does not, in a strict sense, constitute a ‘national’ museum. It is, instead, a public institution that receives line-item government funding. It has operational independence and its own endowment. The National Gallery of Art, whose collections span the medieval period to the present, is an independent bureau under the Smithsonian umbrella. Its annual appropriations cover maintenance and the operation of the gallery. Works of art, however, are bequeathed, given, or purchased with private funds. The government does not pay for acquisitions, nor does it fund exhibitions or programs.

It is telling how the United States got its National Gallery. In simple terms, Andrew Mellon conceived of the idea in the 1930s, amassed a collection, hired an architect to design a building for the Mall and then offered the art and the building (to be constructed at his own expense) to Congress. Congress accepted the gift and enacted the National Gallery in 1937. It was opened to the public in 1941. (The museum’s East Wing, designed by I.M. Pei, was opened in 1978.)

Two programs for employing artists
The federal government has created (and eliminated) exactly two programs that directly employed artists. Notably, both programs were
established to offer relief to the unemployed and both came to include artists only as an afterthought. The first was the Works Progress Administration (WPA). It was set up during the Great Depression of the 1930s to give public-service work to the unemployed. The artistic programs of the WPA came under fire for creating works that seemed to be too left wing or to promote communist imagery. There were four arts projects as part of the WPA, the Federal Arts Project (for visual arts), the Federal Theater Project, the Federal Music Project, and the Federal Writer’s Project. Political control and censorship of the artistic output of WPA artists is famous. According to Dubin (1987), however, the Writer’s Project afforded its artists the least amount of freedom, but it still ran into the most serious trouble of the arts programs and was the only one explicitly dismantled by Congress. Artists in the visual arts program had the most freedom. Easel painters were rarely censured – 75 percent were not asked to revise finished products and 79 percent never had a work rejected (Dubin, 1987: 161). Their main guideline was simply to remember ‘no nudes is good nudes’ (p. 163). Due to the public nature of their work, mural artists were more closely supervised. Congress ended the Federal Arts Project, along with the WPA, in 1943, making no provisions to maintain, catalog, or store the artworks created under its auspices.

The second large-scale federal program to employ artists was the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). It was created by Congress in 1973, and administered by the Department of Labor. The program was initially designed to provide training and job opportunities for the structurally unemployed, and was later expanded to include the creation of temporary jobs for workers who had lost their jobs due to an economic downturn. CETA was important for the arts in two ways. First, after 1975, it provided funds for the direct employment of artists, as in the Chicago Artists-in-Residence (AIR) Program studied by Dubin (1987). Artists were viewed, it seems, as an archetypical example of the structurally unemployed! Second, CETA provided funds to nonprofit organizations to employ workers in a variety of administrative and support roles. In this way, CETA underwrote a good deal of employment in museums, symphonies, and other arts organizations. Indeed, by 1979, CETA was the largest funder of arts organizations in the United States, with a level of support that exceeded that of the NEA, approximately $200 million for some 600 projects (A.L. Nellum and Associates, 1979, quoted in Dubin, 1987: 17–18).

Dubin (1987) notes that the managers of CETA’s arts projects tried to control the content of the work it funded in order to avoid the kind of criticism the WPA’s arts projects had received. They did not resort to explicit censorship, as the WPA had done on occasion, but instead
relied on a series of bureaucratic controls. For instance, the Chicago AIR program, funded by CETA, required artists to negotiate explicitly with sponsors about the content of their work. Artists who failed to negotiate were not renewed for subsequent employment in the program. Visual artists were also required to work in a public library, rather than their own studios, which allowed the program to document the hours the artists spent on AIR activities. Interestingly, most artists made the distinction between their ‘own work’ and the work that they completed for the AIR project, viewing the latter as more mundane and routine. In effect, AIR employment was a ‘day job’ analogous to a teaching post or restaurant work, though one that did engage their artistic skills.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, conservatives launched attacks against the arts projects funded by CETA. The entire CETA program was ended by President Reagan in 1981, who also proposed to eliminate the NEA and the NEH at the same time. CETA was ended largely because of justified concerns over ‘substitution’ (that federal monies were used to pay for jobs that would have been paid for by the private sector anyway). The attacks on the output of the arts projects, though foreshadowing criticisms that would be brought against the NEA, were a footnote to CETA’s demise.

The National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities

The arts were an important symbol for President John F. Kennedy. He and Mrs. Kennedy invited 155 important artists and scientists to the inauguration in 1961, including Alexander Calder, Stuart Davis, and Edward Hopper. The invitations, sent by telegram, said, ‘During our forthcoming Administration, we hope to seek a productive relationship with our artists, composers, philosophers, scientists and heads of cultural institutions’ (quoted in Larson, 1983: 151). At that time, the fine arts brought prestige and, along with big science, demonstrated to observers both at home and abroad the great spirit of America and its pursuit of national excellence.

Before his assassination, Kennedy had taken a number of steps in developing a national arts policy, including the appointment of August Heckscher, director of the Twentieth Century Fund, to the White House staff as an arts advisor. It was President Johnson, however, who nurtured the Kennedy vision into fruition. In 1964 he established the National Council on the Arts as an unfunded advisory body made up of 26 private citizens appointed by the President. In 1965, Congress passed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, which created
the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

A crucial aspect of this legislation was that it established important principles of state arts sponsorship. The ‘arms length principle’, used by the New York State Arts Council (which was established in 1960) and also by the British and Canadian arts councils, set the decision-making process at a distance from government apparatus (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey, 1989). The Endowments adopted this principle. They were to be funded by Congress, and the President would appoint their Chairmen, but decisions on what to fund would be made independently from the executive and legislative branches of the government. Private citizens on the National Council would advise the NEA’s Chairman on submitted projects. Peer review panels were added as preliminary assessors of grant proposals in 1966 when the National Council found itself unable to cope with the large number of proposals submitted for review. Peer review panels were insulated from Congress first by the Endowment (panel members were appointed by the NEA’s chairperson), and second by the National Council. In addition, the Endowments’ initial matching requirements – no projects may be funded at more than 50 percent of their costs – further separates funded projects from potential Congressional control.

The growth and decline of the NEA

The first decade of the NEA’s existence was characterized by expansion and growth. Table 2.1 shows the history of NEA’s budgets. The initial pattern of appropriations, from 1966 to 1980, shows a strong upward pattern. A dip in the NEA’s appropriations, in 1982 and 1983, is due to cuts initiated by Reagan and his Republican Congress. Reagan wished to eliminate the NEA altogether, and though he was unsuccessful, his case was subsequently bolstered by arts controversies sparked by controversial artworks and fanned by conservative religious groups and politicians. Though the NEA’s budget recovered somewhat in 1984, and peaked in 1992 at $176 million, as DiMaggio (1986) points out, the NEA’s budget had been decreasing in real terms since 1979. In recent years, the NEA has received significant increases in its appropriations, but it is notable that the increase was earmarked for the Challenge America initiative, new in 2001, which provides funds for underserved populations and communities in the United States.

The NEA institutionalized a number of contradictions – between its autonomy and the arms-length principle on one hand and its democratic accountability and the political imperative to maintain Congressional
Table 2.1  National Endowment for the Arts appropriations history

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Appropriation ($)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
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<td>1967</td>
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<td>1975</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>120,971,000</td>
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</tbody>
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<sup>a</sup> In 1976, the Federal government changed the beginning of the fiscal year from 1 July to 1 October, hence the 1976 Transition (T) Quarter.
<sup>b</sup> In FY 1999, a $34,000 rescission was enacted by Congress.
<sup>c</sup> In FY 2000, a 0.38% rescission was enacted by Congress.
<sup>d</sup> In FY 2001, a 0.22% rescission was enacted by Congress.
<sup>e</sup> In FY 2003, a 0.65% rescission was enacted by Congress.
<sup>f</sup> In FY 2004, rescissions of $791,221 and an additional 0.59% were enacted by Congress.

funding on the other; between the judgment of artistic excellence by art world insiders and the need for public education and outreach; and between elitism and populism (Alexander, 1996a,b; DiMaggio and Useem, 1978b; Dubin, 1992: Chapter 11). Peer panels, especially, represent this conflict, as their members are ‘expected to maintain a commitment to the ideals of…neutrality and specialized expertise that distinguish them as representatives of their profession [while] at the same time they are entrusted with the power to make funding recommendations as public servants, responsible to the electorate’ (Galligan, 1993: 255). The tension wrought by these contradictions, inherent in the NEA from its inception, became increasingly problematic in the 1980s, and came to haunt, and almost destroy, the NEA in the 1990s.

The watchwords for the NEA from 1989, when President Bush took office, and into the new millennium have been budget cuts, privatization, and the politicization of the arts. The arts lobby, hoping to stem public and especially Congressional sentiment against the Endowments, argued that the NEA was a ‘good buy’ that cost each American only 64 cents per year (Newsweek, 1989). A decade later, the NEA was even more of a bargain, at less than 37 cents per capita per year (NEA, 2000).

In addition to cutting appropriations, Congress passed legislation in the 1990s that reduced the control the NEA had over its grantmaking. The initial legislation for the NEA provided for block grants to state arts councils. Most state arts councils were established to take advantage of the federal money (a few, such as the New York State Arts Council pre-dated the NEA). States were required to match federal funding, and during the initial years of the NEA, about one-third of its grantmaking funds went to state arts councils (DiMaggio, 1991: 217). In 1973, Congress required that 20 percent of the NEA’s program funds should go to the states. This level was maintained until 1990, when Congressional appropriation bills gradually required the NEA to devolve a greater percentage of its grantmaking funds to state arts agencies. By 1998, the figure had been raised to its current level of 40 percent.

In 1990, Congress stipulated that decisions by the National Council on the Arts to reject proposals recommended by peer panels would be binding on, rather than advisory to, the NEA Chair. In other words, the NEA Chair can still reject proposals accepted by the Council, but can no longer accept ones the Council has rejected. The composition of the National Council was also changed. Six members of Congress (three senators and three representatives) were added to the National Council pursuant to new regulations included in the NEA’s 1997 appropriations bill (for FY 1998). These regulations also reduced the National Council’s members from 26 to 20, including the Congressional appointees. Further,
they required the Senate to confirm Presidential appointments to the National Council and to the chairmanship of the NEA.

Also in 1990, peer review panels came under Congressional scrutiny (Galligan, 1993). An independent commission investigated the peer review system and concluded that peer review was preferable to other review procedures (such as pre-established evaluation formulas), but it recommended that a layperson should serve on each panel to modify any real or perceived conflicts of interest, cronyism, or elitism. The Commission rejected the term ‘peer panel’ in favor of ‘grants advisory panels’. It also argued that the standards for publicly funded art were different from those for privately funded art, in that advisory panel approval would serve to legitimate successful projects not only on artistic merit but also as ‘public culture’.

Congress accepted the Commission’s recommendations on advisory panels, and legislated that each panel should include at least one lay member, described as an individual with an interest in the arts who is not an arts professional. Congress had passed the ‘Helms Amendment’ in 1989 which required that recipients of NEA grants sign a pledge that they would not produce obscene art. This provision was amended in 1990, stipulating that the NEA take into account general standards of public decency in awarding grants.

Some arts advocates argue that these changes have eviscerated the NEA. This is not the case. The NEA remains an effective, if somewhat beleaguered, organization that accomplishes much good in the arts. It is, however, a different organization than it was 20 years ago. It is now focused to a much greater extent on funding established arts organizations and public arts education for children and adults, and has been forced away (but not entirely) from funding avant-garde work, especially in the visual arts. In addition, if the arms-length principle suggests that the NEA should work at some distance and several steps removed from the national government, the changes enacted by Congress in the 1990s served to reduce significantly that distance and to bring the NEA several steps closer to Congressional control.

Plus ça change

Legislation put forward during the Kennedy administration to establish an arts advisory group and an arts foundation (which would eventually become the National Council on the Arts and the NEA) failed to pass Congress, largely due to the opposition of conservative Republicans. At that time it was Senator Strom Thurmond (Republican, South Carolina) who voiced the strongest objections to the still-to-be-formed arts endowment.
In preparation for a Congressional vote on a bill to establish an arts foundation and an arts advisory board in July 1963, the House Committee on Education and Labor rejected a proposal for an arts foundation. It recommended that only Title I of the act, to establish an advisory council, be put forward. Nevertheless, five Republican representatives thought that this went too far and appended a minority statement to the report issued by the Committee. They wrote:

Inevitably, if not immediately, we can fully expect this Council to come forward with a recommended Federal arts program which will far exceed anything which has thus far been proposed. We can fully expect, if this bill is sanctioned, that the Federal government, in the name of art and culture, will soon be called upon to subsidize everything from belly-dancing to the ballet; from Handel to the Hootenanny; from Brahms to the Beatles; from symphonies to the striptease. (quoted in Larson, 1983: 187)

Objections to national funding of the arts continued to echo in Washington for 30 years, finding renewed expression by Senator Jesse Helms (Republican, North Carolina) and Representative Newt Gingrich (Republican, Georgia) and his conservative colleagues in the House.

The state and arts controversies

The public funding (whether through direct or indirect means) of artists in the United States has recently been inseparable from controversy. Of course, for more than a century the avant-garde has been no stranger to controversy. The infamous 1913 Armory show, for instance, attracted thousands of visitors who came in order to be shocked by Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase*. The difference today is that controversial artists or shows come to the public attention because they have received some sort of public funds. The result of the ongoing arts controversies since the mid-1980s is a serious reduction of funds available for art galleries and museums, and the virtual elimination of federal grants made directly to artists. I will discuss two controversies, both of which erupted 1989, as emblematic of the issues surrounding public funding of the arts that continue to the present day.

Two controversies

In 1988, The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art organized an exhibition that included a work titled *Piss Christ* by artist Andres
Serrano. The large photograph (5 feet by 3.3 feet) shows a plastic crucifix submerged in urine. The show, an exhibition of work by artists who had won fellowships from the Center that year, was based on pieces previously created by the artists (Serrano’s controversial piece was created in 1987 and was one of eight pieces by him exhibited in the show). In 1988, the fellowships and exhibition received joint funding from NEA, a corporation – The Equitable Life Insurance Company (through The Equitable Foundation) – and the Rockefeller Foundation. A public outcry ensued, eventually led by North Carolina Republican Senator Jesse Helms, with the claim that government money was being used to fund blasphemy.

Serrano’s work involves bringing together objects from different realms, normally kept separate, such as religious iconography (sacred) and urine (profane). He had also become interested in using body fluids in his work. Such interests are not particularly unusual in the avant-garde, but are certainly considered strange (or worse) in the wider society. The photo itself is actually rather beautiful, a white Jesus on the Cross is set against a background suffused with an ethereal orange glow. (On reading about the photograph, I had imagined an ugly snapshot of a hospital bedpan with the plastic Christ floating in it.) The piece could be mistaken for an object of worship, except for its title which gives away the unseemly process of its creation. Serrano received $15,000 for the eight pieces of work in the show, which was mounted in Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Richmond, Virginia. The show ran into trouble at its final venue, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. It took some months for the American Family Association, led by Reverend Donald Wildmon, to gear up, so much of their action took place well after the show had closed in the spring of 1989. Nevertheless, their action gave support to Jesse Helms to take a campaign against the NEA to the US Congress.

The immediate outcomes of this campaign were that The Equitable apologized to Rev. Wildmon, and The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art was threatened with defunding. (The Senate passed a bill that banned funding to the Center for five years, though this bill did not pass the House.) The Center did receive further federal grants, but found it difficult to raise subsequent donations from corporations (Dubin, 1992: 332). The controversy also has had long-term ramifications.

Shortly after Serrano’s work came under scrutiny, another controversial exhibition gained national media attention. The retrospective The Perfect Moment showcased the work of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. It was organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia with the support of a $30,000 NEA grant. The controversial pictures in the show
were a series of photographs that recorded some sadomasochistic, homosexual practices and images of sexuality in black men, and two photographs that showed the genitals of children. (Other images in the exhibition included those of flowers, and of nudes, especially males, often presented as smooth and cold as marble statues.) This controversy flared up in the summer of 1989 when the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC canceled its showing of *The Perfect Moment* because it feared controversy, arguing that a second negative spotlight on the NEA, following so close to the Serrano controversy, might threaten the NEA’s very existence.

No controversy over the exhibit had occurred before its cancelation in Washington, despite its having been shown in two other cities, Philadelphia and Chicago. (Mapplethorpe died, of AIDS, while his retrospective was shown in Chicago.) While the Corcoran may very well have been right to suppose that mounting the show in Washington would have caused controversy (we will never know), its cancelation of the show because of a potential for controversy seemed to many observers to be censorship, pure and simple. Ironically, the response of the avant-garde art world and its public condemnation of the Corcoran called the nation’s attention to Mapplethorpe’s exhibition more effectively than could any direct mail campaign by the American Family Association. The Corcoran certainly suffered as a result. When several artists refused to allow their work to be shown in the gallery, two shows (a solo retrospective and a group show) had to be canceled and work on a third project, an international exhibition on both American and Soviet art, had to be postponed. (Artists objected to a show celebrating a thaw in Soviet control of the arts being shown in a museum that appeared to advocate a freeze in domestic freedom of expression.)

After Washington, the show moved to Hartford, Connecticut (where it received a reasonably peaceful reception) and then to Cincinnati, Ohio at the Contemporary Art Center (CAC) in April 1990. The CAC had been careful to distance itself from the public funding debate. *The Perfect Moment* was funded by a grant from a local business and a higher-than-normal admission fee to the exhibition. It also restricted entry to adults only. Nevertheless, the controversy re-erupted in Cincinnati, as a grand jury attended the opening day of the show and indicted the Center and its director Dennis Barrie for illegally using children in nude photos and for pandering obscenity (both misdemeanors). Later in the day, the police, armed with a search warrant, cleared the gallery and videotaped the exhibition. The exhibition moved on through other venues (garnering record attendance in each, due to its notoriety) and closed in Boston as the Cincinnati case came to trial.
In the end, the CAC and its director were found innocent of the charges. The defense spent a good deal of effort focusing on the formal characteristics of Mapplethorpe’s photos (e.g. they are about ‘light and shadow’, not about ‘sado-masochism’), whereas the prosecution let the evidence ‘speak for itself’. In effect, the jurors were given an aesthetics lesson. The defense also argued that the photos mentioned in the charge failed to meet all three criteria of ‘obscenity’ according to the Miller standard (from a 1973 Supreme Court decision), on which anti-pornography legislation is based. Dubin (1992: 189) argues that the case could have come out the other way had the prosecution put more effort into building a case that answered the types of issues the defense put forward. And indeed, the verdict was a surprise to many, both those for and against the CAC.

In 1989, Congress voted to reduce the NEA’s budget by $45,000. This amounted to the NEA’s expenditures in the previous year on Mapplethorpe’s exhibition and Serrano’s fellowship. The ‘Helms Amendment’ passed Congress in the same bill. This amendment forbade federal spending on art that was ‘obscene’ or that lacked ‘serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value’ (cited in Dubin, 1992: 100, see also p. 181). This single bill both punished the NEA for ‘errors’ and sought to control the NEA’s future actions. Though the NEA functions at an arm’s length, it was clear the arm had gotten shorter.

Artists, at least those lucky enough to receive NEA grants, faced a difficult choice in light of the NEA’s obscenity clause. To accept funds seemed to some to be tantamount to endorsing the NEA’s restrictions (and grant recipients were required to sign an oath agreeing not to produce obscene work), but to decline meant forgoing income. Dubin (1992: 264–6) lists three strategies taken by artists and arts organizations during this time: (1) Sign the anti-obscenity pledge without altering any artistic plans. This put the onus on the NEA to police the pledge after the fact. (2) Reject proffered NEA grants. More than 30 groups and individuals chose this option, and by refusing to sign the anti-obscenity pledge, turned back $750,000 in grants. (3) Challenge the anti-obscenity pledge in court. A few large organizations with the financial wherewithal to launch a legal challenge chose this option. One suit, by choreographer Bella Lewisky, was successful, and the anti-obscenity pledge, technically lapsed, was not resurrected. The NEA was reauthorized, in 1990 for FY 1991, to promote ‘artistic excellence and artistic merit’ while considering ‘general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public’ (cited in Dubin, 1992: 266). One chapter in the history of the NEA was closed, though it continues to face difficulty
in maintaining its federal allocation and even its very existence. The ‘decency provision’, after being struck down by two lower courts, was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1998.\textsuperscript{30} Subsequent procedural changes, for instance requirements that applicants provide more details about their projects, moved in the direction of greater control of the artistic output of funded applicants.

Artist Leon Golub spoke prophetically when he stated, ‘The NEA has received blows from which it will probably never recover, and it will end up either as a tame organization giving out tame grants to artists, or stop giving grants to artists altogether and simply give them to the Metropolitan Opera and places like that’ (quoted in Dubin, 1992: 293). This statement is a fairly accurate portrait of the NEA a decade on from these controversies. It currently gives grants to visual artists working in folk traditions (probably certifiably tame), and to well-established cultural institutions with broad audiences, like art museums and their blockbuster exhibitions. The NEA has also assumed a more populist role, and is visibly focused on educational outreach programs to a greater extent than in the past.

The state and social control
The controversies surrounding Serrano and Mapplethorpe were neither the beginning nor the end of the debate over federal funding of the arts. But their cases are instructive. Together, the work of these two artists brought out two big weapons of the state: its power of legislation and funding and its power of the police and prosecution. Some artists thought that the government actions amounted to censorship, but this overstates the case. The cutbacks at the NEA, and even the anti-obscenity pledge, did not seek to limit free expression, merely the public funding of it. As Senator Dick Armery (Republican, Texas) put it on CNN’s \textit{Crossfire}, ‘If you want to show [art] in such a tasteless way, do it on your own dime and your own time’ (quoted in Dubin, 1992: 241). Certainly, though, fewer people will see works that cannot get funding than those that do.

Christina Orr-Cahall, Director of the Corcoran when the Mapplethorpe exhibition was canceled, did not see this cancelation as ‘censorship’. She pointed out that the exhibition had appeared in other cities and that the catalog of the exhibition was published. (And, in fact, the exhibition was seen twice in Washington, DC; once projected by activists on an exterior wall of the Corcoran, and again at a small, alternative space that offered to take up the exhibition.) She argued that it would have been worse had the Corcoran edited the exhibition and mounted it without its few controversial pieces (Dubin, 1992: 177–8).
The trial in Cincinnati did attempt censorship, but it is important to remember that due process was followed at all times and that (a) the court agreed that the show could continue until such time as the trial was resolved, and (b) the outcome of the trial was to declare the museum innocent of all charges. In Cincinnati’s case, the museum recouped its legal expenses within a year, thanks to supportive donations (Dubin, 1992: 189), but not all organizations, let alone artists, have been so lucky. While it is true that the fear of controversy, of losing income (from controversy-shy government or corporate agencies), or of litigation expenses may induce caution in arts organizations (the so-called chilling effect), the actions of the US Government are mild indeed compared to repressive regimes such as the former Soviet Union or various dictatorships around the world (or during the McCarthy era in the United States, when blacklisted artists were unable to ply their trade and were often driven from the country). This may be cold comfort to American artists who find their work unsupported, but it is crucial to remember that there are degrees of ‘censorship’ and that the United States is, for the most part, liberal with respect to freedom of expression. In a sociology of art and the state, it is important to recognize that the state can encourage, restrict, or remain neutral to artistic expression, and that outright censorship is only one of a number of strategies it can employ.

Nevertheless, some restrictions did occur, and the specter of censorship hung over the debates on government funding of the arts. The arts community, outraged by the government’s actions, often used the term ‘censorship’ as their rallying cry. Dubin (1992: 296) makes a distinction between overt censorship and covert controls. He argues that states resort to overt censorship only when covert controls, which are pervasive, fail. Americans, in general, deplore overt censorship, but they fail to recognize social control in more subtle forms: ‘It is easier to mobilize against egregious or unanticipated sanctions than it is to sustain a thorough investigation of everyday practices which habitually exert more control.’ Along these lines, it is helpful to distinguish between support and repression by the state. As Becker (1982) suggests, states may support the arts (financially or otherwise), which also implies that states may fail to support the arts. States may repress (or censor) the arts or they may not. Each of these contributes to the pattern of enabling or constraining factors present in all art worlds that make some forms of art easier to produce than others. The particular availability of support from the state does affect the arts, but ‘manipulation of support is… the least coercive method of government control of the arts and, consequently, the least effective’ (Becker, 1982: 185).
The roots of controversy
Many factors are at play in the development of an arts controversy. Dubin (1992: 2) calls artists ‘significant symbolic deviants in our society’. He argues, drawing on Douglas’ (1966) ideas of purity and danger, that art objects that provoke negative reactions are usually those that violate symbolic boundaries by mixing what is usually separate or by challenging what seem to be ‘natural categories’. He goes on to suggest that ‘a combination of two critical elements is required for art controversies to erupt: there must be a sense that values have been threatened, and power must be mobilized in response to do something about it’ (Dubin, 1992: 6). The state, in one guise or another, is often the ‘power’ that acts. He shows

when public art controversies are likely to occur – at times when there is a high degree of communal fragmentation and polarization, and widespread civic malaise and low communal morale. What becomes controversial are generally those works which address volatile, unsettled issues. And where this takes place is most typically at strategic public locations. While any of these conditions is likely to spark trouble, their combination virtually assures conflagration. (Dubin, 1992: 38)

The art market encourages controversial art. Becker (1982) and White (1993) argue that in the contemporary art world, reputation is more important than sheer talent in allowing artists success in the marketplace. Further, the art market creates a ‘winner-take-most’ system, in which only a few artists become successful ‘superstars’ (Rosen, 1981). The rest remain mostly unsuccessful, undifferentiated, and powerless throughout their careers. The dynamics of the art market are helped along by an avant-garde aesthetic that values conspicuous innovation. As critic Clement Greenberg wrote in 1968,

until the middle of the last century innovation in Western art had not had to be startling or upsetting; since then… it has to be that. And now… it is as though everybody had finally… caught on not only to the necessity of innovation, but also to the necessity – or seeming necessity – of advertising innovation by making it startling and spectacular. (Greenberg, 1993: 300)

In a crowded market, with many artists vying for attention, controversy may sometimes give (or appears to give) the artist an edge in building
a reputation. This is illustrated by a sardonic award given by a trendy New York newspaper in the category ‘Best Blatant Bid for Jesse Helms’ Attention’ (Dubin, 1992: 272). On a more serious note, many scholars decry

the allure of fashion, glamour, big money, and bright lights [that become] the measure of value and help define art as a commodity. . . . It is in this sense that we may speak of a degraded simulacrum of the avant-garde, cynically manipulated for its presumed legitimacy in the eyes of the market. The avant-garde and its so-called ‘spirit of revolt’ has itself become a commodity for consumption in the constant search for the ever-new and latest thing. (Bowler and McBurney, 1993: 176)

The media also fuel art controversies. In a study of the portrayal of artists and art on network television, Ryan and Sim (1990) show that the network newscasts used art in particular ways, often as a ‘peg’ to hang other issues (such as politics, as when a presidential candidate visits an art museum). Moreover, when art is presented for its own sake, the newscasts tended to focus on arts controversies and ‘framed’ their reports to pose the question, ‘Is it art?’ (the implied answer, though left to the audience, is ‘no’). Not surprisingly, newscasts presented art as light-hearted entertainment near the end of the broadcast, and featured a different set of visual artists than were highlighted by art publications. But as Ryan and Sim (1990, p. 877) point out, ‘the less the audience know about art, and the less they know about television, the more likely they are to see such stories as representative of what is happening in the art world. . . . When art and artists are represented as ridiculous or absurd, an entire area of social and cultural life is devalued’. Two other factors, involving conflict between social groups, also play an important role in arts controversies.

Moral panics and culture wars: The controversies show many characteristics of a ‘moral panic’ (Cohen, 1972 [1980]). This occurs when one social group worries about the behavior or existence of another, and uses their cultural products as a proxy for them in attacks. Art has long been used as a symbol in class conflict (see DiMaggio, 1982a,b; Biesel, 1993, 1990 for disputes in the nineteenth century in which the arts played a role), and has come up in social conflicts over immigrants, ethnic minorities, disaffected youth, feminists, and homosexuals, to name a few. Ross (1989), for instance, argues that attacks on popular culture and multiculturalism are fomented by intellectuals who have
lost power in American society and see popular culture as the cause. More recent ‘culture wars’ over the fine arts have a similar feel. They are led by the religious right which has lost influence over a large segment of the American populace, and are directed at people who are secular and who support the rights of certain oppressed groups.

The simultaneous appearance of the first arts controversies, which had crucial importance to America’s public arts funding, and the end of the Soviet Empire (symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989) may be more than mere coincidence. Guilbaut (1983) suggests that Cold War competition with the Soviet bloc spurred the rise of the New York art world following World War II. Prior to this time, the United States was peripheral to Europe in the arts, especially the avant-garde. But in backing modernism – Abstract Expressionism, in particular – the United States could signal artistic leadership and also showcase the freedom of expression allowed to its citizens. In contrast, communist states forbade abstract work and forced artists to work within the socialist realist convention. With the decline of the Soviet threat, however, the American right wing found a new enemy within – the degenerate artist funded by American taxpayers.

**Models of art and aesthetics:** Notoriety opens up an artist’s work to a wider audience, but an audience that may not share the conventions of the artist’s milieu, and is thus more likely to misunderstand the work. This is a crucial point. As Becker (1982) shows, art is produced in art worlds. Knowledge of the conventions used in the art world helps to make the viewer’s aesthetic experience richer and deeper.

Knowing the conventions of the form, serious audience members can collaborate more fully with artists in the joint effort which produces the work each time it is experienced…. What serious audience members know about an art often conflicts, because of innovative changes, with what well-socialized members of the society know. (Becker, 1982: 48–9)

Many of the conventions of the avant-garde art world are unfamiliar to the wider society. Moreover, a key idea of what art is – especially, that art should question the status quo and challenge the complaisant, and that art can be discomforting – is not shared by the general public. The average person believes in a model of art that values creative expression that is beautiful, inspirational, or decorative. Both models of art, the aesthetics of soothing beauty and the aesthetics of disquieting stimulation, are valid ways of looking at artworks. But they rest on fundamentally
different premises. The conflicting aesthetics of the avant-garde art world and the much larger art world inhabited by most Americans is a central component in the arts controversies. The controversies reflect larger issues and represent struggles that go beyond art, but they are also about the fundamental nature of art.\textsuperscript{34}

The reaction of some artists to the controversies did nothing to bridge the gap between the avant-garde art world and the general public. Dubin (1992: 254) mentions a display of artworks that were actually illegal (not just provocative) that was mounted in 1990 in protest against Congressionally imposed sanctions against the NEA. Artists create with an audience in mind. For avant-garde artists, art is aimed at a small art world of peers, critics, curators, collectors, and well-socialized audience members who judge their artistic reputation. They do not aim their work at a wider public, at least in the hopes of charming that public (though they may specifically wish to disrupt or challenge a public that does not wish to be disrupted or challenged).\textsuperscript{35} One newspaper columnist wrote, ‘the artistic community has its own 11th commandment: \textit{Thou shalt grant federal funds to art that’s too intellectual for you to understand, you rube}’ (quoted in Dubin, 1992: 24). In this conflict over aesthetics, the general public has the greater numbers, and in a democracy, sad to say for artists who disagree, the general public will win out at least in terms of government funding.

\textbf{Practicing art}

The artists at the center of arts controversies experienced costs to both their personal and creative lives. Karen Finley, a performance artist whose grant was rescinded, has said that the controversy over her work and the lawsuit she filed against the NEA caused great financial and emotional strain and led to the failure of her marriage. Other artists note the fatigue involved in defending themselves against people who do not wish to understand their work or to view it sympathetically. On the professional side, some artists did experience a boost to their sales price during a controversy, although the long-term effect of controversy might not be positive: ‘Nothing is as stale as the person behind yesterday’s disreputable headline’ (Dubin, 1992: 272).

Dubin (1992: 273) argues that the arts controversies of the late 1980s and the early 1990s have had ‘Negative consequences [that extend] far beyond people who were direct targets of critical attacks. Caution and self-censorship enveloped many parts of the art world’ like a ‘wet blanket’. But as Dubin aptly demonstrates (see especially his Chapter 10), there have also been flagrant refusals of self-censorship, if the self-conscious
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attempts to shock the general public specifically made to protest against ‘art attacks’ are anything to judge by.

As Dubin (1992) suggests, high-profile arts controversies involve a small number of artists. Many successful artists are not controversial, while the majority of artists, regardless of their potential for controversy, work quietly out of the limelight. Many artists, especially those from disadvantaged social groups, found it difficult to sympathize fully with artists like the ‘NEA Four’ whose grants were rejected by the NEA Chair after approval by peer panels:

an enormous clamor was being raised over the predicament of a few artists, whereas the habitual circumstances of others continued to be largely disregarded. The nascent, relative deprivation of certain individuals hardly seemed to measure up to the more absolute levels of adversity others routinely experience. (Dubin, 1992: 275)

Most artists can only dream of being part of a controversy. They do not support themselves on their art and do not (or not as yet, they hope) have the professional or critical success to apply for a fellowship or grant, even if one were available. In 1988, for instance, more than half of respondents to a survey reported earning less than $3000 from their art, and only 4 percent reported earning $40,000 or more (Columbia University Research Center for Arts and Culture, cited in Robinson, 1990: 35). It is often noted that art is a risky career, with low odds of success. Artists suffer from a high unemployment rate as compared with professionals with equivalent training, and artists also have the highest rate of second-job holding (often teaching posts) of any professionals (Menger, 1999).

Most artists work within more or less conventional frameworks, even many of those working in contemporary styles (Becker, 1982). Crane (1987: 20) suggests that

many, perhaps most, artists do not participate in the kinds of social groups that generate stylistic innovations. These artists are primarily concerned with the production of works that will sell rather than with the solution of aesthetic problems or the discovery of new techniques or subject matter. Their works are original in the sense that they are unique objects, but they are not innovative in the sense that they represent a redefinition of aesthetic problems or a new technique.36

Crane (1987) argues that most artists working outside contemporary avant-garde styles rely on formulas. These ‘involve a great deal of
standardization, which makes possible rapid and effective production of new works (Cawelti, 1976)’ (Crane, p. 20). Further,

about half the galleries in the SoHo section of Manhattan in the late seventies were showing paintings that could be described as ‘naive Impressionism’ – pleasant, charming paintings produced by artists who had no concern for aesthetic issues or aesthetic innovation…There was also no element of social commentary in these works. As Beardsall (1978) says, speaking of an artist who paints New York's tourist sites: ‘The pictures represent an optimistic, idyllic, vision of a sunny, street-clean, lobotomized Manhattan. . . . [T]hey are happy paintings.’ (Crane, 1987: 20)

On the other hand, there are artists, just as conventional and uninnovative as the ‘naive Impressionists’, who belong to a different camp. These are the mediocre (or untalented) artists who compete, whether deliberately or not, for the Jesse Helms award. They work to the formula that ‘paint + shock to the public = art’. This attitude displays a fundamental error of logic: Some (indeed, much) great art might have been shocking when it was first made, but the converse is not the case – just because it is shocking does not necessarily mean it is great.

Conclusion

An important theme in the arts in America since World War II has been the general expansion in all areas. Currently, there are more artists, more art museums, more art dealerships, more corporate collections, and more awards of degrees in fine arts than there were half a century ago (Crane, 1987: Chapter 1; Heilbrun and Gray, 1993: Chapter 1). The post-War growth in the arts has been attributed to a number of factors, including increased educational levels, an expanding educational sector, greater affluence, more leisure, and higher levels of international travel. Travel was important both in exposing Americans to European (and later, to Asian, African, and Latin American) art, and in increasing museum attendance by domestic and foreign tourists (Urry, 1990; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998).

Early growth in the sector after World War II was followed, in the 1960s, by the availability of funds from corporations, foundations, and government agencies. During the late 1960s and the 1970s funding from these sources increased still further, contributing to an upward spiral of growth in the visual arts. These trends also encouraged the
primary art market, as individuals, corporations, and newly established museums started collections. And they fueled the secondary (auction) market in contemporary art and helped elevate the auction prices of old masters. There was a slowdown in the arts market during the 1990s, but growth renewed in 1990s with the booming economy. As the federal government became involved in arts funding, the arts gained a political constituency, and the arts became politicized through the arts controversies, as part of wider ‘culture wars’.

At the same time as there have been wider social changes, the role of the artist has transformed. In Crane’s (1987) words, avant-garde artists working after World War II focused on abstract styles ‘to explore issues related to visual perception but presented them using personal iconographies that often reflected attitudes of passivity and withdrawal into private concerns rather than alienation or rebellion’ (p. 140).

The aesthetic tradition of modernism left an enduring imprint on the roles that American artists assumed in the postwar period, leading to the exclusion from their work of humanistic values and sociopolitical commentary. These tendencies were supported by the increasing integration of the artist into the middle-class and particularly academic roles during this period…. [They existed] in a symbiotic relationship with the middle class, which is alternatively stimulated and entertained but not threatened by his aesthetic provocations. (p. 44–5)

Today’s cutting-edge artists are much more politically involved and their work reflects political, social, and sexual changes. As Dubin (1992: 294) puts it, ‘If the notion of Zeitgeist retains any utility or plausibility, at minimum, it would need to encompass the following themes as the 1980s slipped into the 1990s: multiculturalism, tribalism, special interest pressure groups and identity politics, and skirmishes over the freedom of expression.’ These themes turn up in the work of many contemporary artists.

The US system of arts funding has been described as a ‘privatized’ one (Zolberg, 2000) due to its low levels of direct public expenditure and the use of tax incentives and matching requirements in grants to encourage private support. This system has the effect of giving de facto influence on public arts policy to the privileged strata of Americans (corporate or individual) who are able to take advantage of tax deductions for charitable giving to the arts. All taxpayers underwrite these deductions, indirectly, through their own taxes, but it is the wealthy who determine where these contributions go. Moreover, in sponsoring museum exhibitions,
corporations are primarily interested in popular exhibitions that will bring them advertising benefits, and they tend to fund the larger and more prestigious organizations (Useem, 1987; Galaskiewicz and Rauschenbach, 1988). The range of motives for individual philanthropists is somewhat greater (Ostrower, 1995), but their interests do not necessarily match those of artists, museum curators, politicians, or the general public.38

At the close of the twentieth century, the US art scene was more reliant on private support than it had been in 35 years. Will the restructuring of the NEA and withdrawal of its funds from individual visual artists reduce innovation? Quite possibly, although capture of the NEA by a peer system that favored certain styles or privileged organizations might have limited some types of innovation anyway.

Crane (1987: 110) notes, ‘Art styles develop within reward systems’.39 Her in-depth study of six avant-garde styles in New York suggests that the variety of support mechanisms available helped support the development of a variety of styles:

Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism drew their support from academic critics and the curators of New York museums who were committed to the modernist aesthetic tradition, while Pop, Photorealism, and Neo-Expressionism drew theirs from dealers and investor-collectors. The Figurative and Pattern painters appeared to lack a major constituency in the New York art world; their supporters were to be found in regional museums and corporate collections. The Pattern painters were primarily favored by corporate collections. Consequently, the styles in my study had varying degrees of success in the New York art market, as indicated by the extent to which they had access to the auction market and to the collections of the major New York museums. (p. 41)

Importantly, Crane notes that the established New York art world (large dealerships and museums) missed out various important art movements such as ‘the women’s movement in art, black art, and community-based murals’ (pp. 39–40). Artists in these movements were left to form their own cooperative galleries in order to find an outlet for their work.

Dubin (1992: 288) sees cause for great concern: ‘Not only do individual artists and small arts organizations (as well as any cutting-edge artistic endeavor) suffer under adverse economic conditions, but they have fewer resources than elite cultural institutions do to mobilize on their own behalf to protect what they have managed to create.’ These organizations
while never attracting a large share of the NEA’s resources are excluded to a greater extent today than they were 20 years ago. They are also likely to find the marketplace difficult. Despite their role as incubators to the art world as a whole, these organizations attract only a small audience, so their potential for earned income is necessarily small. Nevertheless, some patrons may find these organizations valuable, and the very diversity of the American system of arts funding, which encourages and relies upon a variety of private organizations, institutions, and individuals, should give them a reason for hope.

Menger (1999: 570) suggests that ‘it is in the interests of society at large to nurture an oversupply of artists so as to have the best possible choice of talented’ ones. It is clear that the current arrangement of direct public funding in the United States does not accomplish this. Cutbacks in indirect support, through income tax reductions and the shrinking welfare roles, also limit government support of artists. On the other hand, since a relatively large proportion of artists pay for their artistic work through employment as teachers (Menger, 1999: 564), state expansion in the education field may help to support, indirectly, experimentation and innovation in artistic creation.

The American situation brings up the issue of symbolic support – that is, the belief that art, and contemporary artistic expression, makes an important contribution to society, and should thus be honored by it. It is possible that neither the monetary value of arts support nor the structure of the bureaucracy that provides it captures the full impact of government funding on the arts. Currently, many American artists feel beleaguered, regardless of their particular critical or market success. The same can be said of curators in arts organizations, despite the level of fundraising they achieve. This is because the current political climate seems to devalue contemporary artists and their art. The recent policies of the American government withdrawing grants to individual artists and restricting funds to cultural organizations, already operating in the most privatized system in the western world, have not contributed to a supportive symbolic environment for the arts.

Notes

1. In the United States, the term ‘art museum’ implies a public or nonprofit organization that collects and displays art. The term ‘art gallery’ often implies a sales gallery or dealership where art is displayed, partly for the benefit of art critics and to give an aesthetics lesson to the interested public, but mainly as a place to sell objects. Sometimes art museums have ‘gallery’ in their title, as in the
National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. In the United Kingdom, however, the term ‘art museum’ is rarely used, and ‘art gallery’ means an art museum in the American sense. In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to collecting and displaying organizations as ‘art museums’ in chapters on both the American and the British situations, and sales organizations as ‘dealerships’. I will leave aside the ambiguous term ‘art gallery’. (I ignore a further distinction that is sometimes made between ‘museums’ as displaying organizations that have a permanent collection and ‘galleries’ as displaying organizations without a permanent collection.)

2. The NEA offers several ‘categories’ of grants. These are Grants to Organizations (with the six areas just described), Grants to Individuals, State and Regional Partnerships, Leadership Initiatives, and Challenge America (a new program for FY 2001 which focuses on arts education, especially at the primary and secondary levels, and arts outreach). The newest categories include Save America’s Treasures and Policy Research and Analysis.

3. Government agencies’ budgets run for an FY, from 1 October to 30 September. Grantmaking funds, which cover the full range of art disciplines, make up only part of the appropriation.

4. For instance, in July 1999, the NEH funded 32 projects under its program of grants to museums. Eleven of these were to art museums or for consultations relating to visual arts projects, totaling over $1.2 million (NEH, 1999).

5. The FCAH does not have any grantmaking budget, as it does not pay out unless an insured item is lost or damaged (in which case, the claim is paid by the US Government).

6. For instance, in FY 2001, the NEA was involved in more than 25 ‘collaborative partnerships’ with other federal agencies including the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Justice, State, Transportation and the GSA. (For a highly critical, and now outdated, review of the interconnected arts support to be found at the federal level, see Mooney 1980.)

7. These figures are for different years, the earliest was for 1993 and the latest was for 1995–96.

8. It is important to note that since these figures were estimated, the United States cut both direct expenditures to the arts and reduced the tax incentives that lead to indirect support. At the same time, European countries have moved in the direction of ‘privatized’ funding of the arts, by reducing direct support and attempting to encourage more reliance on private sources of funds (Boorsma et al., 1998). In addition, the figures reflect only tax-based indirect expenditures.

9. The Getty Trust is an ‘operating foundation’, which is allowed to organize and administer its own nonprofit programs. In contrast are ‘grantmaking’ foundations which fund programs run by other nonprofit organizations.

10. As Crane (1987: 16) notes:

Expansion in the numbers of artists and the resources for artistic activities has strained existing facilities for the evaluation and dissemination of art, so that these organizations may be as likely to resist as to facilitate innovation (see White and White, 1965, for an analysis of an analogous situation in the nineteenth century) . . . [T]hese institutions may simply
ignore the more radical reinterpretations proposed by marginal artistic
groups. The fact that these organizations now rely on government and cor-
porate grants for support has changed their orientation toward the public,
leading them to seek a larger audience in order to justify, to their new
patrons, their use of funds. It also provides an incentive to artists to
produce works that will be meaningful to a larger segment of the public.

11. The NEA had a purchase grant program for museums to buy contemporary
art, which has now been discontinued. This was also the fate of NEA’s
Presenting and Commissioning (formerly Inter-Arts) program which was set
up to support organizations that present performances from chamber music
to dance and those that commission new works of all kinds by contemporary
artists.

12. The NEA does, however, maintain a partnership with GSA ‘to promote the
installation of art in federal buildings’.

13. This idea has been challenged in a number of ways, for instance, by conceptual
artists. However, even conceptual pieces have turned up in museum collections,
and the buying and selling of contemporary artworks continues apace.

14. Although most owners of artworks do not share capital gains with the artists
who created those works, most would obviously not wish to alter the work
(though this is within their legal rights). It is unclear how the lack of such
a resale law in the United States affects the price of artworks sold in dealerships
or artists’ studios. With a droit de suite law, auction prices would be higher,
since buyers would need to make good that portion of the sales price
returned to artists or their estates. Certainly, superstar artists with high auction
prices would benefit from such a law, but it is unclear how much it would
help ‘ordinary’ artists.

15. And both Golomshtok (1985) and Berezin (1991) show that even with strong
controls on artists and explicit censorship, states find it difficult to completely
quash artistic dissent or to create a national aesthetic.

16. There is a legal gray area around the issue of copying images. It is not illegal to
copy a work of art for one’s own pleasure. Indeed, making a copy ‘after’ a great
artist’s work is a standard training technique in the visual arts. It is only illegal if
you then try to sell your painting as the work of famous artist (see WGBH, 1991).
Since it is not possible to copyright the concepts embodied in a visual image, just
the actual physical object, it is possible, and quite legal, for someone to ‘steal’ (or
‘draw inspiration from’) the idea of a painting and re-create it almost exactly in
another physical form without obtaining permission or paying royalties.

17. For instance, the US Government has since its inception supported military
bands. Indeed, the Pentagon’s budget for marching bands is said to be much
higher than the appropriations to the NEA and the NEH combined.

18. The museums include, in Washington, DC: the Freer Gallery of Art, the
National Portrait Gallery, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
the National Museum of African Art, The Smithsonian American Art Museum
and its Renwick Gallery, and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; and in New York:
the Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, and the National
Museum of the American Indian with the George Gustav Heye Center. The
research center, the Archives of American Art, has three sites: New York,
Washington, DC, and San Marino, California.
19. Of course, the federal government has always directly employed artists, from designers of stamps to architects of federal buildings, though not within a coherent program particularly designed in aid of artists.


21. For instance, in 1983, the Republican-controlled Congress ended the NEA’s fellowships for art critics due to the perception that the critics were all too far to the left (Dubin, 1992: 245).

22. Congressional members are appointed by the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the House (2 each), and the Minority Leader of the Senate and the House (1 each).

23. Artists reacted negatively to the addition of this single layperson per review panel (Dubin, 1992: 289). They claimed that the peer review system had been gutted because artists are not talking to lay audiences with their work, but rather to the integrated members of their own art world who had previously made up the peer panels.

24. For instance, Dubin (1992: 283) writes,

   Representative Paul Henry of Michigan declared in 1990 ‘I believe in the NEA, but I think in order to save it we are going to have to reform it.’ His statement reverberated with a viewpoint expressed by some US strategists during the Vietnam War that a village might have to be destroyed to ‘save’ it from Communist rule. In each case those in control felt drastic action was called for, and demolition might be preferable to what they saw as sorry (and dangerous) states of affairs. Without doubt, neither setting was the same after the smoke cleared.

25. On controversial artworks and artists, see Dubin (1992); on controversial museum exhibitions, see Dubin (1999), Halle et al. (2001), and Zolberg (2000).

26. A Heritage Foundation Report noted only five controversies over NEA-funded artwork from 1965 to 1983, but listed 27 from 1984 to 1991. All of these focused on artwork relating to race, sex, religion, or patriotism (Knight, 1991, cited in Dubin, 1992: 47).

27. Dubin’s (1992) work is an invaluable summary of these controversies.

28. The fact that the pieces were already in existence, rather than commissioned by the Center, suggests that while government money was being used to support artists who had made ‘objectionable’ art, it had not actually been a part of creating such art. This distinction falls apart when we consider the controversies over performance art. The infamous ‘NEA Four’ – Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, and John Fleck – were ‘defunded’ by the NEA. They had been recommended for individual grants, a total of $20,000 for all four artists, by the NEA peer-review panels, but the recommendation was overruled by the NEA chairman John Frohnmayer. Fleck’s work, ‘Blessed Are All the Little Fishes’ is a performance where he turns an on-stage toilet into an altar where he urinates, he mimes vomiting into it, and also hauls out a live goldfish... In his 1991 NEA grant application, he wrote ‘behind splattering tuna
and bread crumbs, the yards of unraveling tissue paper, the piercing operatic arias of unrequited love to a goldfish, there is a serious mind at work here.’ While Fleck addresses sexual matters, comedy reigns. (Dubin, 1992: 155)

An exchange between Frohnmayer and a member of the peer panel that approved the grant applications of the NEA Four illustrates the issue of artistic elitism on these panels.

[Frohnmayer] ‘Let me ask the very crass and difficult political question: what am I going to say when one of our critics comes in, gets the file, sees the site report and says, “Geez, they funded a guy who whizzes on the stage?”’ [Panelist] ‘…who knows? who cares? They’re good’. (Dubin, 1992: 150)

29. This recalls Zola’s defense of Manet’s _Déjeuner sur l’Herbe_. Zola focused on the formal qualities of the work, rather than its content (see Alexander, 2003).

30. The lower courts ruled (in 1992 and 1994) that the decency clause violated the First and Fifth Amendment because the stipulation restricted the free expression of artists and its vagueness could lead to arbitrary decisions on the part of the NEA. The Supreme Court, however, reversed the lower courts in 1998. It ruled that it is constitutional for the NEA to consider ‘general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public’ in deciding to award grants. However, the NEA could not apply these general standards in a way that systematically discriminated against certain ideas and viewpoints. The Court wrote that the diversity on the NEA’s review panels mitigates against the suppression of disfavored viewpoints, and that the case did not bring up concerns about this issue.

The lawsuit was first filed by the ‘NEA Four’ in 1990. When the NEA’s appropriation bill, passed shortly thereafter, added the decency clause, the lawsuit was amended to challenge this requirement and the National Association of Artists’ Organizations, which represented over one-hundred arts organizations, joined as an additional plaintiff. The four individual artists received an out-of-court settlement in 1993, which returned their grants ($5000 each), awarded financial damages for invasion of privacy and compensated them for legal expenses. The case went on to appeal only the new decency clause.

31. For instance, state and local ordinances against desecration of the American flag were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, as they infringed on freedom of speech. In an earlier decision to strike down a Chicago flag-desecration law, the Judge wrote: ‘For every artist who paints our flag into a corner there are others who can paint it flying high’ (Dubin, 1992: 115–16).

32. He calls overt censorship ‘regulative (or _de jure_) censorship’ and covert controls ‘constituent (or _de facto_) censorship’. While Dubin’s general point is well taken, I think it is problematic to apply the term ‘censorship’ (even modified as _de facto_) to all actions by the state. Systematically discriminating against certain groups or ideas in funding – Dubin suggests that this occurs on the basis of race, class, sex, sexual orientation, and ‘aesthetic creed’ – is a form of social control, and is generally reprehensible. But it operates by
a different mechanism than censorship and the two should be distinguished analytically.

33. The importance of reputation is widely recognized, though some observers believe that reputation serves as a marker of talent, rather than acting independently of it.

34. I discuss these issues in Alexander (1995, 1996c).

35. In-fighting in the art world has also been rife. For instance, Jane Alexander, director of the NEA from 1993 to 1997, said in *The Washington Post*:

    If I ever felt hurt by any criticism, it came from the artist community, of which I am a part. A lot of artists wondered why I didn’t resign, throw up my hands, throw down the gauntlet as a gesture. I thought it was naive of them. (quoted in National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, 1997)

An example of such criticism comes from the executive director of the National Association of Artists’ Organizations Roberto Bedoya who said,

    They [Congress] really want to control content. And Jane was basically saying, ‘Okay, I accept that.’ I wish she could have drawn the line. If we are going to have culture wars, let’s really go to the mat to figure out if this nation can support artists. Does this nation stand behind creativity? (quoted in National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, 1997)

I think the answer to Bedoya’s question is a clear NO. (At least, not the kind of free, and freely funded, creative expression that artists value.)

36. Of course, some artists that fit this description might not like it at all. It could be seen to demean their work.

37. On corporate collections, see Martorella (1990).

38. For an extended discussion of the interests of different types of museum funders, see Alexander (1996a: Chapter II).

39. This point has been made by a number of authors, including Becker (1982), Crane (1976), Moulin (1987), and White and White (1965 [1993]).
3
Enterprise Culture in British Arts Policy

Victoria D. Alexander

Introduction

State support for the arts in the United Kingdom has a remarkable history. This chapter first sketches the trajectory of these developments, then turns to contemporary support for both artists and art museums, focusing on privatization and its consequences. Privatization refers to the growing need for arts organizations to rely on private sources of funds (chiefly, individual philanthropy and corporate sponsorship), a need that arises as a direct result of cutbacks in public funding of the arts. In the United Kingdom, privatization is accompanied by the pervading influence of enterprise culture – the privileging of business-world norms and rhetoric championed by both Conservatives and New Labour. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the continuing debate about state funding of the arts in the United Kingdom.

History of state support for the arts in the United Kingdom

An early start

Great Britain established the first national museum in the world, the British Museum, in 1753. The museum was founded when, after some debate, Parliament voted to accept a collection that had been bequeathed to the nation by Sir Hans Sloane some five months earlier, and to acquire a building to house it. Sloan’s collection included Egyptian and Roman antiquities, coins, drawings, and ethnographic ‘curiosities’. Together with two collections of books and manuscripts, Sloan’s objects formed the core of the museum’s holdings. When it opened in 1759, the museum saw itself to be the repository of all human knowledge, and built the collections under this assumption.
The British Museum was the first truly public museum. It was ‘British’ in the sense that it belonged to the nation – the collections were comprised mostly of foreign objects which were ‘kept for the use and benefit of the publick, who may have free access to view and peruse the same’ (Burnett and Reeve, 2001: 7). Visitors were admitted by ticket only (though these did not cost money) and given tours in small groups (Burnett and Reeve, 2001: 8). The British Museum was distinct from other kingly collections of the same period in that it was open to the public. It embodied many of the conceptions of museums that we have today, including direct government funding of national museums for the public good and for the greater glory of the nation. It also established the precedence of museum governance by an independent board of trustees.

The initial levels of funding by Parliament, however, were not generous. Grants for general maintenance were not offered until 1762, and the collection grew in a patchwork fashion, mostly through bequests. The state became somewhat more involved in acquisitions, however, in the early nineteenth century: ‘[T]he Government decided to collect works of ancient art just when Napoleon [was] defeated and the monarchies of Europe restored. . . . [A] kind of international competition had developed in which Britain did not want to come last’ (Minihan, 1977: 13–14). There was a strong sense at the time that support of the arts should be left to private benefactors, yet the fact that Britain lagged behind other nations in the ‘civilized arts’, especially in comparison with France, was a cause for concern. The Louvre, established in 1793, was ‘bursting with the treasures which Napoleon brought back from his conquests’. In this way, Britain, ‘the victor on the battlefield was threatened with dishonour in the art gallery’ (p. 14). Parliament purchased the Elgin Marbles ‘for the nation’ at this time; and the debate about public versus private funding of the arts continued.

**Significant developments**

In 1768, The Royal Academy of Arts was established through an Instrument of Foundation granted by King George III (Minihan, 1977; Pearson, 1982). The King gave the Academy its first rooms and made financial contributions from the Privy Purse. By 1780, as planned, the Royal Academy was self-supporting through proceeds from exhibitions. Unlike the British Museum, which retained a link to the state through continuing, if paltry, financial support from Parliament, the Royal Academy became, essentially, a private organization. Its early days provoked rivalry and debate, as it institutionalized a particular conception of the arts that
empowered certain artists over others (Fyfe, 2000), and by the nineteenth century it had become a powerful force in the visual arts. Today, the Academy retains its royal designation, as per its charter, and while important in the art world, it is no longer the powerful arbitrator of standards that it once was. It still receives no government funding.6

The National Gallery was established in 1824, when the House of Commons voted funds ‘to defray the charge of purchasing, and the expenses incidental to the preservation and public exhibition of the Collection of Pictures which belonged to the late John Julius Angerstein, Esq.’ (Minihan, 1977: 23). Models for displaying collections of art had been provided in England by such organizations as the Dulwich Gallery (1814) and the Fitzwilliam Museum (1816), both founded through private initiative. As with the British Museum, the National Gallery was governed by a Board of Trustees (first appointed in 1827 when the British Museum relinquished its claims on the museum). Once the National Gallery was established, however, ‘the House proceeded to treat it like an unwanted stepchild’ (p. 23). Funds for its upkeep were in short supply, and the building to house the collection was not ready until 1838.

Parliament’s ambivalence toward the National Gallery came from conflicting views of the place of art in the public sphere. MPs, on the one hand, ‘sincerely subscribed to the ancient, and neo-classical, view of art as a moral influence on society…In an age that relished cock fighting, bear baiting, and public executions, the arts stood for manners, grace, refinement, and humaneness – in short, for civilization’. But on the other hand, ‘art by no means met with universal approval. Much of the middle class expressed an explicit hostility towards the arts that had roots in both religious attitudes and in a preoccupation with industrial enterprise’ (p. 26, 28). In addition, ‘prevailing theories of state intervention and the very structure of the British Government at the time placed implicit restrictions on official subsidies to art’ (p. 26). The state apparatus was small, with few bureaucrats, and saw its role as limited to administering justice through the courts, collecting taxes for the Treasury, and supporting any necessary defense of the nation by the military.

Prince Albert took a leading role in the Great Exhibition of 1851, which eventually led to the creation of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) (Pearson, 1982: 30). Prince Albert’s significant involvement in the arts began in 1841 when he took on the chairmanship of the Royal Commission on the Fine Arts. He subsequently was elected President of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce in 1843. The Society for the Arts, as it was colloquially called, launched a series of industrial exhibitions, which drew large crowds and
culminated in ‘The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations’, which took place in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. The Society of Arts had asked the government to appoint a Royal Commission to organize and manage the Great Exhibition. The Commission, headed by Prince Albert, was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1850. The exhibition drew on voluntary contributions from across the country and was not backed financially by the state. Six million visitors attended the exhibition, which ran for six months, and produced a profit of £186,000.

The Royal Commission determined to spend £150,000 of the surplus from the Great Exhibition to purchase land ‘for the development of great national objects’ (Minihan, 1977: 123), and with matching state funds, acquired a 150-acre site in South Kensington. A number of cultural attractions came to be located there.7

A museum also grew out of the Great Exhibition. In 1851, Parliament voted to provide £5000 to purchase objects illustrating good design, which were housed in the new museum. First called the Museum of Manufacturers, the name later changed to the Museum of Ornamental Art, and then, upon moving to the South Kensington site in 1857, to the South Kensington Museum, and finally in 1909, to the V&A, by which it is known today. Under the leadership of Henry Cole, its first director, its aims included access for working people, and it offered evening hours and free admission on two days per week. In the model of a ‘Working Men’s Club’, it also sold alcoholic beverages on the premises (Pearson, 1982: 36). And, in 1854, it established a ‘circulating museum’ through which objects could travel to provincial cities and towns across the country.

Unlike the British Museum and the National Gallery, which were trustee museums,8 the South Kensington Museum was directly managed by the government. It was established under the auspices of the Department of Practical Art in 1852 (Pearson, 1982: 34). The Department, which was expanded and renamed the Department of Science and Art in the following year, was ‘established both to administer and develop the existing art schools, and to establish “museums by which all classes might be induced to investigate those common principles of taste which may be traced in the works of excellence of all ages”’ (Pearson, 1982: 33–4). The V&A was managed under direct government control (latterly, under the Department of Education and Science) until it was made a national trustee museum by the National Heritage Act of 1983. It still offers a traveling exhibition service for local museums, local art schools, and other venues.
The Tate Gallery, first named the National Gallery of British and Modern Foreign Art, was established as an offshoot of the National Gallery in 1896. Henry Tate offered his collection of British paintings to the nation in 1890, but after two years of negotiation, no agreement had been made as to where or how to house the collection, despite Tate’s offer of £80,000 to fund the building of a museum. Tate withdrew his offer, but a new government offered the site of Jeremy Bentham’s model penitentiary at Millbank. The museum was built on this location and opened in 1897. The Gallery of Modern British Art, as it had been renamed, was separated from the National Gallery in 1917. Tate himself, and subsequently other benefactors, provided the lion’s share of funding. The Tate Gallery did not receive regular income from the Treasury until 1946 (Minihan, 1977: 181).

Meanwhile, local authorities also established museums in the mid-nineteenth century. Through the Museums Act of 1845, Parliament permitted local authorities in towns with more than ten thousand people to open museums for art and science. A justification for the Act was ‘the usefulness of museums in improving industrial design’ (Pearson, 1982: 29), and in general, the improvement of the population for the betterment of society and of commerce. In a speech to Parliament in 1839, William Ewart, who had just stepped down from the chairmanship of the Select Committee on Arts and Manufacturers, stated:

> The public libraries, the public galleries of art and science, and other public institutions for promoting knowledge, should be thrown open for the purpose of inducing men merely by the use of their outward senses to refine their habits and elevate their minds. (quoted in Pearson, 1982: 29)

The law was ‘enabling’ rather than compulsory, so local authorities could choose whether or not to establish museums, and if so, how to establish them. They were allowed to levy taxes of up to a halfpenny per pound, and could charge an admission fee of up to one penny. Gradually, a number of towns established public museums and art galleries.9

The nineteenth century also saw the beginnings of specialized art training as well as general education.10 The School of Design was set up in London in 1837, under the auspices of the Board of Trade, with the explicit purpose of training craftsmen for industry (Pearson, 1982: Chapter 3). It taught the applied arts, in contrast to the fine arts which were under the remit of the Royal Academy. Branch schools in England
and Scotland, located in industrial cities, were established during the 1840s, and were funded by Parliament with amounts matching local contributions.

An important rationale for establishing the schools was to elevate the levels of public taste, especially among the working classes, a concern that became widespread in Victorian society. This was highlighted in an 1868 publication, *Handbook of Practical Art*:

All success must be won by hard and systematic exertion, which will save him from lower desires….Nobody expects that the whole of the working classes will at once take to drawing and entirely renounce strong liquor – but many may be secured from temptation to excess….Teaching children good drawing is practically teaching them to be good children. (quoted in Pearson, 1982: 18)

Provincial schools of design (later upgraded to schools of art) existed at the secondary level. They were linked, in a subordinate manner, to the London school, and they received both state and local support. The locality was required to maintain the buildings that housed the design schools, while the Department would provide other resources such as plaster casts and models on a matching basis. After this initial provision, the schools were to become self-supporting on the basis of student fees, but this rarely occurred and partial state funding remained. (The National Art Training School finally received a Royal Charter in 1967, and became the Royal College of Art.)

**Common themes**

Two features in particular characterize these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century developments. First, each instance of state involvement in the arts, as described above, followed actions by private individuals whose initiatives subsequently came to attract the financial support of Parliament or the King. None originated entirely with the government or the monarchy. Second, each step was accomplished only after considerable debate about state involvement in the arts. These debates echoed themes that were central to the British intellectual and political thought of the time:

Libertarian and individualist traditions have stood for ideas of liberty, freedom, value and individuality in opposition to both the power of Government and the formality of bureaucracy….As [an example] we have quoted Beresford Hope, a mid-nineteenth century MP, talking
of it being ‘fatal’ if ‘whatever Government attempts on behalf of art...were to lead to free opinion and free work being subordinated to bureaucratic authority.’ (Pearson, 1982: 71–2)

Beresford Hope, however, was not opposed to all forms of government support of the arts. In 1863, he called for the establishment of a Department of Arts and Works, headed by a Minister of Arts. This department would be kept in check by a ‘body that should be elected by the artists and lovers of art, and which should be independent of the changes of administration and political under-currents’ (quoted in Pearson, 1982: 12). It took nearly a century for his proposals to be realized. While no independent, professional body was ever elected to keep government in check, 80 years on, a quasi-autonomous body, the Arts Council of Great Britain, was put in place and the first arts minister was named two decades after that.

Before we turn to these developments, a number of other pieces of legislation that affected the arts are worth a brief mention. The first copyright protections, for commercial interests, were instituted around 1840. Copyright is often overlooked in issues of art and the state, but it provides important protections (and some limitations) to artists in controlling their work. A key piece of legislation was the amendment to the Finance Act of 1921, which exempted objects of art sold to public museums from death duties. This legislation encouraged some estates to donate works to the nation rather than sell them abroad, but it obviously could not stop the flow of art from private British collections to foreign individuals and institutions (Minihan, 1977: 160). Moreover, welfare laws were implemented, and notable among them was the National Insurance Act of 1911, which expanded the role of the state into areas previously neglected.

With the exception of the establishment of the Tate Gallery 1896, there were few developments in state support of the visual arts between about 1880 and World War II. The need to protect ‘open spaces’ and access to the countryside became a public concern and this lead to the foundation, in 1895, of the privately run and financed National Trust which preserved heritage sites (Hewison, 1987; Cintron, 2000). A move to establish a national theater foundered in 1913, after critics raised what had become ‘familiar objections’ – objections which would be raised again at the close of the century with respect to the Arts Council and government funding of museums. As Minihan (1977: 148) reports, one MP said that such a venture would ‘Prussianise our institutions’ and another ‘resented money allotted to “pamper the intellectuals”, while
pressing problems of social reform demanded public funds’. During this
time, government monies for the arts were in fairly short supply, and
other issues such as woman’s suffrage, strikes, Ireland, and World War II
drew more attention. Government action on the arts was minimal during
the Depression. As Minihan puts it: ‘Throughout the 1930s, successive
Governments pursued the traditional approach to art in Great Britain:
sympathetic statements, occasional ad hoc legislation and isolated
Treasury grants, but no coherent or systematic plan of encouragement’
(p. 173). But this was soon to change, with the advent of the War.

Nationalization

Extensive public support of the arts in the United Kingdom came about
as part of the movement to nationalize industries and services after
World War II (Minihan, 1977). In particular, the Arts Council of Great
Britain received its Charter from the Crown in 1946.16

The Arts Council grew out of a wartime cultural enrichment program.
During the War, government set up the Council for the Encouragement
of Music and the Arts (CEMA) to keep up spirits on the home front, and
to bring art to all areas of the country. Interestingly, it was established
in 1939 through a grant of £25,000 from the American-based Pilgrim
Trust. This private grant was soon matched by £50,000 from the
(British) Board of Education. CEMA’s slogan was ‘The Best for the
Most’, but it focused, initially, on reaching audiences in village halls,
churches, and army camps. Its visual-arts initiative ‘Art for the People’
attracted a half-a-million visitors in the first two years, and included
works that it purchased ‘not to show supreme examples of art, but
rather to give illustrations of pleasing and competent contemporary
work which might be bought by ordinary people and lived with in
ordinary houses’ (CEMA, n.d., quoted in Wu, 2002: 34). Also in a popular
vein, its 1942 program, ‘Art for British Restaurants’ provided visual
works for canteens. CEMA organized traveling exhibitions of visual art,
commissioned a number of murals, and hired works from contemporary
artists for traveling exhibitions from which the works might be sold.

In 1942, the economist John Maynard Keynes took over the chair-
manship of CEMA. Under his influence, CEMA shifted away from
a popular focus and toward the interests of the art establishment and
the social elite. In the words of Sir Kenneth Clark, Lord Keynes was ‘not
a man for wandering minstrels and amateur theatricals. He believed in
excellence’ (quoted in Wu, 2002: 34). The Arts Council of Great Britain
was established in 1945 and subsumed the wartime agency. Responsibility
for the Council was transferred from the Department of Education (which oversaw CEMA) to the Treasury.17

Keynes played a key role in transforming CEMA into its peacetime successor. Under his chairmanship, the Arts Council continued to move away from the democratic aims of CEMA to a more elitist agenda. In his address to the nation, broadcast on the BBC Home Service upon the founding of the Arts Council, Keynes said in an often-quoted remark:

I do not believe it is yet realized what an important thing has happened. State patronage of the arts has crept in. It has happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way – half baked if you like. A semi-independent body is provided with modest funds to stimulate, comfort and support any societies or bodies brought together on private or local initiative which are striving with serious purpose and a reasonable prospect of success to present for public enjoyment the arts of drama, music, and painting. (Keynes, [1945] 1991: 106)18

Keynes’s speech embodies the lofty purpose of state funding often mentioned in debates about state funding (and in laments about the lack of it):

The task of an official body is not to teach or censor, but to give courage, confidence and opportunity. Artists depend on the world they live in and the spirit of the age. There is no reason to suppose that less native genius is born into the world in the ages empty of achievement than in those brief periods when nearly all we most value has been brought to birth. New work will spring up more abundantly in unexpected quarters and unforeseen shapes when there is a universal opportunity for contact with traditional and contemporary arts in their noblest forms. ([1945] 1991: 106)

In what he says next, however, Keynes (inadvertently) points out a crucial dilemma in state funding for the arts: ‘But do not think of the Arts Council as a schoolmaster. Your enjoyment will be our first aim.’ As Pick (1991) notes, state funding contains an inherent contradiction between ‘excellence’ (often defined by elites or by the art world), on the one hand, and popularity and access, on the other.

A key aspect of the Arts Council was its status as an ‘arms-length agency’. As Keynes put it, ‘we are to be a permanent body, independent in constitution, free from red tape, but financed by the Treasury and ultimately responsible to Parliament’ (p. 105). It is staffed by civil servants, but is an independent, chartered body. The arms-length principle is seen
as a cornerstone in British support of the arts, and is mentioned in every list of the virtues of the Arts Council. The Arts Council’s embodiment of it provided models for state support of the arts in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It has received theoretical attention as well (e.g. Williams, 1979; Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey, 1989).

The Arts Council appoints panels and committees to advise it. These panels or committees must be headed by a member of the Council, but otherwise, the membership is determined by the Arts Council and can include individuals with various specialties in the arts. Positions on the advisory panels are unpaid, although expenses are reimbursed, and the length of the terms of service is limited. (Professional staff are salaried.) Incumbents of all positions are bound by rules of confidentiality about issues discussed at meetings.

The panels and committees serve in an advisory role to the Arts Council, and act as ‘more of a sounding board for officers than a body with a grip on actual decisions, policies and procedures’ (Pearson, 1982: 76). Members of panels and committees serve ‘specifically and only as individuals. This position is made clear in the letter inviting individuals to be members of committees or panels; in no sense is an individual to be seen as representing or speaking for any organization or group’ (Pearson, 1982: 75). But, as Pearson (1982: 75) points out,

This individualization of panel and committee members is, of course, in conflict with the actual practice of appointment, for it is common to find on the art panels and committees of the arts councils senior members of major institutions, well-known critics and art educators. Individuals are very specifically chosen for their public position and standing.

The Arts Council inherited its initial panels, for music, drama, and art, from CEMA. Even today, the Arts Council focuses more on the performing arts, and pays less attention to the visual arts or literature. In its early days, the Arts Council focused on ‘flagship companies’ – performing arts organizations in London and a few other large cities, including the Royal Opera House, the National Theatre, the English National Opera Company, and the Royal Shakespeare Company. The Poetry Department was added in 1949 and the Literature Department in 1966.

The Arts Council, in a legacy from CEMA, related to the visual arts in a somewhat different way than to the performing arts. The Visual Arts Department supported painting through the Arts Council Collection, which is made up of contemporary works, for which it continues to make
purchases. It also directly managed two galleries, the Hayward Gallery and the Serpentine Gallery. Unlike the other departments of the Arts Council, it originated programs of its own, such as touring exhibitions drawn from the Arts Council Collection. In the early 1980s, about half of its budget was spent on activities it organized itself (Pearson, 1982: 65). It also played a role in the funding of a small number of art museums that lack permanent collections, such as Modern Art Oxford (formerly, the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford).

As we have seen, the national museums, at this point, already received direct support from the government, and many local museums received local authority funds. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Arts Council marked a new era in government support of the arts in the United Kingdom. As Minihan (1977: 214) puts it:

In a single decade, during and after the Second World War, the British Government did more to commit itself to supporting the arts than it had in the previous century and a half. . . . The state’s responsibility to foster national culture was no longer subject to dispute. While opinions varied over the methods, distribution, and machinery of support, surprisingly few protests were raised as the Treasury allocated increasing amounts of public money to the arts . . . . The advent of the welfare state and the numerous examples of nationalized industries and services had helped to make larger Exchequer expenditures for art, and extensive state involvement in cultural affairs, acceptable to the nation at large.

Early on, the Arts Council decided its role was to ‘“respond” to the initiatives of others, rather than promote or organize the arts directly on its own initiatives’ (Pearson, 1982: 56). In essence, it provided grants to existing nonprofit organizations that might apply to the Arts Council, rather than act in any capacity that would design a coherent cultural policy for the nation. Though the Arts Council does provide some fellowships, bursaries, and prizes directly to individual artists, its focus on making grants to organizations means that most of its support of artists themselves is indirect and channeled through such organizations.

The Arts Council specifically disavowed central planning, as this raised fears of the loss of autonomy for the arts. As Pearson (1982: 59) puts it:

In 1953 the Council asserted that ‘Every organization it assists, large or small, has its own governing body and its self-determined policy.’ It added further that ‘This respect for self-government in the arts
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is the main bulwark against *L’Art Officiel.* ‘*L’Art Officiel*’ was the Council’s constant fear. . . . with the Arts Council in the 1950s and 1960s a recurrent theme in their reports was the danger of Government (or even Arts Council) control of art.

A tension existed in the Arts Council between what was called ‘raising’ (a focus on high standards of aesthetic excellence, which often implied London-based art, that would raise the level of public taste) and ‘spreading’ (increasing audiences for and access to the arts by, for instance, bringing art to the people of the nation, especially in locations outside London). In this, the early Arts Council focused more on raising than on spreading. Its approach can be summed up in its catch phrase ‘few, but roses’ (Pearson, 1982: 56). Its 1953 annual report stated that ‘Diffusion can reach the stage where it becomes dilution’ (Pearson, 1982: 57), and it closed its regional offices by 1956. As a response, various Regional Arts Associations (RAAs), non-statutory bodies registered as charities, grew up in England from 1956 (when the first RAA, the Southwestern Arts Association was founded) to 1973 (when the last, South East Arts, was established). These bodies received funding both from the localities they comprise and from the Arts Council.

A few years after the founding of the Arts Council, the Local Government Act of 1948 permitted local governments to spend money not just on museums, but on the arts and culture in general. The act empowered local authorities ‘to spend as much as the product of a 6d. [six pence in the pound] rate for an extensive array of entertainment services, including the provision of facilities for dramatic performances, concerts and dancing’ (Minihan, 1977: 241). As with the Museums Act of 1845 in the previous century, the law was enabling rather than compulsory, and so allowed local governments to choose whether or not they would exercise their privilege to build new arts centers or fund existing ones. Not surprisingly, local councils varied a great deal in their implementation, if any, of cultural policy under the act.

The system for funding the arts in the United Kingdom has undergone a number of reorganizations since 1945, which continue to the present day. In 1965, the Labour Government presented a White Paper on the arts to Parliament, which

noted that Government aid to the arts had grown up ‘in response to spasmodic pressures rather than as a result of a coherent plan’. At the local level there was ‘no common pattern among Local Authorities’ when it came to support for the arts. There was, the White Paper
noted, ‘ample evidence of the need for a more coherent, generous and imaginative approach to the whole problem’. (Pearson, 1982: 88)

As a result, the government transferred the Arts Council’s source of funds from the Treasury to the Department of Education and Science, and at the same time, appointed Jennie Lee as the first Arts Minister (albeit as a subordinate minister within the Department of Education and Science) to coordinate arts grants and also to oversee the public museums. Lee’s position was upgraded to Minister of State in 1967.

The role of the Arts Council was subtly changed in 1967. The original 1946 Charter of Incorporation issued by George VI stated that the Arts Council existed

> For the purpose of developing a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively, and in particular, to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm, to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts and to advise and co-operate with Our Government Departments, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned directly or indirectly with those objects. (quoted in Pearson, 1982: 53, emphasis added)

This Charter was replaced by a new one issued by Queen Elizabeth II in 1967, which redefined the functions of the Arts Council:

(a) to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts;
(b) to increase the accessibility of the arts to the public throughout Great Britain; and
(c) to advise and co-operate with Departments of our Government, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned whether directly or indirectly with the foregoing objects. (quoted in Pearson, 1982: 53)

It is notable that the phrase ‘the fine arts exclusively’ was replaced with ‘the arts’, and the notion of ‘improv[ing] the standard of execution of the fine arts’ was dropped altogether.

The 1967 Charter formally named the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils, and granted them a degree of autonomy from the Arts Council of Great Britain. Prior to this, they had existed as the Scottish and Welsh Committees, with the remit to advise and assist the Arts Council. There was no committee for England, however, which meant that after 1967, the Arts Council of Great Britain focused almost exclusively on England.
Writing in 1977, in a spirit of optimism that was soon to be shattered, Minihan wrote that with the founding of the Arts Council ‘The state’s responsibility to foster national culture was no longer subject to dispute’ (p. 215). She continues, ‘State support for art was no longer a controversial question . . . The Arts Council was a permanent body which, as its programmes expanded, could not fail to acquire ever increasing funds from the National Exchequer’ (p. 228). And yet, she points to themes that would soon be reasserted in the national discourse on art. She states that public funding of the arts in Great Britain is always tempered by practical considerations of the many urgent demands on the budget. With no national tradition of official patronage, Government subsidies to art have had to proceed with great deliberation, subject to intense public scrutiny.

The abiding fear of official art has provided yet a further reason for caution. Centuries of governmental indifference to the problems of art support and maintenance have nurtured a feeling that art must be financially independent of the state in order to be entirely free of official regulations and control. Making a virtue of necessity, many Englishmen have come to assume that total absence of state aid is the requisite safeguard of full artistic freedom of expression. The status of artists under totalitarian regimes further confirmed the belief, and as late as 1959, during a debate on arts funding, one M.P. warned the House of Commons against exposing Great Britain ‘to the risk of control of the arts, which has been such a terrible feature of the first part of the twentieth century. We saw it horribly exemplified in Germany and Italy before the war, and we have seen it in Russia for thirty years past.’ (p. 244)

Shortly after Minihan wrote, the trend toward increasing nationalization of the arts and culture suddenly stopped and reversed, as Margaret Thatcher formed a Conservative government in 1979. The actions of her government were to change the relationship between the British state and the arts in the 1980s and on into the next millennium.

Privatization

In the 1980s, the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher saw private enterprise as the savior of sluggish national enterprises. Thatcher set about to privatize many nationalized industries in the United
Kingdom, and to invest a spirit of enterprise culture into others. The arts were no exception to this. Thatcher reduced funding for the arts, changed the governance structure of museums, and put in place incentives for private (especially corporate) funding of the arts. Thatcher’s government sold many nationalized industries to the private sector, but Thatcher did not literally privatize the arts. Far from it. But she instituted a move toward privatization in the arts and reversed a trend toward increased state involvement that had been built over the previous 200 years.

In the first year of the Thatcher government, 1979–80, expenditures for the arts were cut by about £5 million, about 8 percent of the budget of £63 million (Wu, 2002: 54). In 1980, the total arts budget for fiscal year 1981–82 was reduced by £10 million (Hewison, 1987: 112). These actions were consistent with Thatcher’s policy of ‘rolling back the frontiers of the state’. Thatcher’s first Art Minister, Norman St John-Stevas, reinforced this message by warning arts organizations to seek alternative sources of funds:

> The arts world must come to terms with the situation and accept the fact that Government policy in general has decisively tilted away from the expansion of the public to the enlargement of the private sector. The Government fully intends to honour its pledge to maintain public support for the arts as a major feature of policy, but we look to the private sphere to meet any shortfall and to provide immediate means of increase. (quoted in Hewison, 1987: 112)

In December 1980, as a result of funding cuts, the Arts Council dropped 41 arts organizations from its client list, refusing them further funding.

Thatcher’s government cut the budgets of arts organizations in order to provide incentives for them to seek private finance. It also took steps to encourage private, especially corporate, donations through incentive schemes, changes in tax laws, and new requirements, such as strategic planning, for arts institutions.

The notion of ‘enterprise culture’ is built on a number of principles (see Heelas and Morris, 1992). A crucial one is ‘value for money’, which suggests that all government funds should be spent in the most economically efficient way possible. This means that the arts, along with other public services, must be accountable for their use of ‘the taxpayers’ money’, an aim that was achieved through measurable outputs (‘performance indicators’) that were assessed in monetary terms against inputs (i.e. funding levels). In museums, the number of visitors, or ‘customers’, was one such indicator. Moreover, enterprise culture invariably employs
the language of business, especially that of marketing, and an assumption that commercial organizations, subject as they are to the pressures of the marketplace, necessarily provide value for money. Managers of public services, therefore, were required to take up commercial attitudes and practices. Revenue enhancement is a crucial aspect of the enterprise culture in the public sector. In the arts, this can be achieved through private sponsorship or patronage and through earned income such as admission charges or revenue from sales in gift shops and cafes.

The notion that any shortfall in arts funding, and any expansion in the arts, would be underwritten by the private, especially the corporate, sector continued through the decade. Richard Luce, who was appointed as the Arts Minister in 1985 said in 1987, ‘there are still too many in the arts world yet to be weaned from the welfare state mentality – the attitude that the taxpayer owes them a living. Many have not yet accepted the challenge of developing plural sources of funding’ (quoted in Beck, 1989: 367–8). Luce launched a challenge funding scheme, in which one ‘Enterprise pound’ (from a £5 million Arts Council pot) would match every two pounds from private sources. This was to encourage arts organizations to become more aware of alternate funding sources, and the marketplace more generally (Wu, 2002: 56). Subsequently, Peter (now Lord) Palumbo, who was appointed as chairman of the Arts Council in 1989, stated: ‘I am convinced that the way forward for the arts in this country must be by means of a partnership between public and private sector funding’ (quoted in Wu, p. 67). He moved this idea forward through several partnerships such as the ‘Arts Council/Midland Bank Artscard’ (in 1989), the ‘Arts Council Award presented in association with Prudential Arts Awards’ (1989), and the ‘Arts Council/British Gas Awards – Working for Cities’ (1991).

Wu (2002) views these schemes as profoundly pernicious, writing:

A closer look at the specific role that the Arts Council played in this so-called ‘partnership’ is relevant here. For instance, when every Midland Artscard holder used the card for the first time, the bank contributed £5 to the arts. After that, every time a cardholder spent £100 with the card, the bank donated 25 pence to the arts. For all its talk of supporting the arts in the press, the Artscard was just an ingenious marketing strategy designed to enable the bank to break into the oversaturated credit card market by attracting an arts audience, which happened, by and large, to be the affluent upper-middle class, the most welcome customers of any financial institution. To quote its spokeswoman: ‘At the time we were looking for a new product to
While Wu is unhappy with the commercial taint of such schemes, as were many observers, it is interesting to note that proponents of enterprise culture would look at Wu’s statement on the Artscard as an endorsement – as an example of a ‘win-win’ strategy in which the arts gained and so too did the corporation.

The arts funding system and the Arts Council

Thatcher’s first Minister for the Arts, Norman St John-Stevas, established the Office of Arts and Libraries (OAL) as separate from the Department of Education and Science, which had held responsibility for the arts up to that time. Stevas also took up a post in Thatcher’s cabinet, and thus at the very moment when the arts were suffering severe financial cuts, the arts were also represented at the highest levels of government (Hewison, 1987: 111). However, Stevas was replaced in 1981 ‘despite his loyalty to government policy’ (he was seen as too flamboyant and had dissented too often and too publicly), and the OAL was subsumed by the Department of Education (Hewison, 1987: 112). But in 1983, with the appointment of Lord Gowry as Arts Minister, the OAL once again became independent. At the same time, £1 million was rescinded from the Arts Council’s then current grant, which forced it, for the first time in its history, to cut funds that had already been committed to client organizations.

In 1983, after winning a Conservative majority in the House of Commons, Thatcher pushed through a number of changes that profoundly affected the arts. The 1983 National Audit Act, for instance, empowered the Auditor General to assess the value for money produced by government departments and public agencies in terms of ‘economy, efficiency and effectiveness’ (Hewison, 1995: 256). Arts organizations, along with other public services, were thereby required to produce and meet performance indicators that measured such outcomes as attendance and access, and they were required to engage in forward planning which set targets against which future performance would be measured.22

In 1983, Thatcher also proposed to abolish the Greater London Council (and six other metropolitan councils). She did so because these councils, argued to be inefficient, were Labour Party strongholds. They also, incidentally, supported the arts in significant amounts – by approximately £46 million in 1984–85 (Hewison, 1987: 115). In response to public outcry, replacement funds were offered through the Arts Council, in the amount
of £25 million in 1986 when the metropolitan councils ended, though these funds tapered off and were scheduled to end in 1990 (Hewison, 1987: 117). Throughout the 1980s, the amount of government funding of the arts remained stingy. The Conservatives argued that funds grew in real terms; however, this assertion rests on calculations that included the ‘replacement’ funds that supposedly made up for the abolition of the metropolitan councils. Further, whether or not funds appear to grow in real terms depends on the type of index used to calculate inflation; the Tory government used a particular deflator which painted a rosier picture than other deflators provided. A comparison of the annual grant to the OAL from 1979–80 to 1985–86 with the increase of the nonfood retail price index, for instance, showed that the grants were less than the rate of inflation (Beck, 1989: 366). ‘These macroeconomic calculations were the subject of claim and counterclaim: the reality was that while the demand for the arts increased during the 1980s, arts organisations had a harder and harder struggle to meet it’ (Hewison, 1995: 247).

The Museums and Galleries Commission (1988: 12) discusses the pressure on museums resulting from funding shortages:

This funding gap is serious, and has had adverse consequences in all the national museums, which have had to leave unfilled varying numbers of posts in their complements (though these were determined after Government staff inspections). The effects are lamentably to be seen in terms of closed galleries, reduced security, curtailed opening hours or days…, backlogs of work (e.g. on conservation and the production of catalogues and other scholarly publications), less ability to help schools…, inefficient use of staff time (word processors can hardly be afforded), and less good service to the public…. Most serious is the danger of a cumulative, long-term decline in curatorial standards, as reduced staff are increasingly stretched and often unable to maintain contact with other international scholars, find time to attend international gatherings, take necessary study leave or publish accumulated experience.

Funding pressures were exacerbated when the responsibility for the maintenance of national museum buildings was transferred from the Property Services Agency to museums themselves in 1989.

In 1988, the Arts Council published its first three-year plan: ‘Its introduction is in entirely Thatcherite prose, specifically linking the plan to financial development of the arts by business planning, better marketing, increasing sales and enhanced private financial support’
At this time, the Arts Council required all its client organizations to follow best practice in arts management; consequently, they had to prepare three-year business plans and submit to management reviews. Museums also were required to prepare forward planning documents and to be audited for efficiency and effectiveness in meeting targets. These five-year corporate plans, which set out their strategy, were ‘presented to government as part of museums’ bids for funding (which was no longer to be assumed) and were revised each year’ (Macdonald, 2002: 33). No national museum received all of its operating costs through its grant in aid; therefore, national museums needed to make up the shortfall through sponsorship or through earned income that would be generated through better management.

These requirements brought with them a set of consequences, including the use of consultants. As Pick (1991: 84) satirically comments, the emphasis on enterprise culture did make one group of people very happy. It gave a lot of work to the fast-growing breed of ‘Arts Consultants’. They were now employed to advise arts organizations on how to dress up their applications for state aid in the new jargon. (Arts Council officers advised their clients on which consultants they should spend their subsidy on employing.) The game was to release the old state arts subsidy under one of its exciting new names: ‘development’ money or ‘challenge grants’, or ‘matching grant’ allocations. Organizations were encouraged now to go for ‘plural funding’ (another gutsy new term for the centuries-old practice of getting money from a number of sources) but were encouraged to consult about which consultants could best advise them about applications to each of the various schemes. This meant that not only were there additional full-time bureaucrats in the funding bodies and in each client organization, but a swarm of consultants turgidly droning around the subsidized ‘arts world’ writing reports about applications and rewriting applications and writing responses to applications – all in longwinded mimicry of the ‘real’ boardroom world.

In the same spirit, each of the national museums in South Kensington engaged management consultancies for ‘identity makeovers’ which gave them new corporate logos and new advertising campaigns (Macdonald, 2002: 34).

Most departments of the Arts Council have always operated on a grantmaking basis. The Visual Arts Department was different. As discussed
above, it was funded to expand and to display the Arts Council Collection, and to run two exhibition spaces in central London, the Serpentine Gallery and the Hayward Gallery. In the late 1980s, this changed as the South Bank Centre took over the Hayward Gallery, along with the Arts Council Collection and the National Touring Exhibitions. The Serpentine Gallery became independent in 1987 (Wu, 2002, pp. 68–9). Wu (2002) argues that, in essence, the Arts Council had shed its role as provider of the arts, privatizing those functions in favor of serving solely as a grantmaking organization. However, it is worth noting that the Hayward Gallery administers the National Touring Exhibitions on behalf of the Arts Council, and that acquisitions to the Arts Council Collection continue. Contemporary art is acquired under the care of a Purchase Committee comprised of the Art Council’s Visual Arts Department’s director, the Collection curator at the Hayward, along with a small group that can consist of an artist, an art critic or journalist, and a museum curator.

In 1990, the Minister for the Arts, Richard Luce, proposed that ten Regional Arts Boards (RABs) be established to take the place of the twelve RAAs. This was done ‘to further the causes of decentralisation and accountability’ (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1993: 1). The RABs came into existence in 1991, and the role of the Arts Council in making direct grants was scaled back. Many of the Arts Council’s clients were delegated to the RABs. The Arts Council devolved part of its budget to the RABs which, in turn, funded these clients and other initiatives. The RABs, in exchange for the increased funding, were brought more fully under ministerial control than the RAAs had been. This change set the stage for wider changes to the Arts Council that would take effect after the election of John Major as prime minister.

**Tax incentives**

Thatcher’s government also changed the tax laws to make covenanted payments easier to set up and to allow tax relief on gift aid. A deed of covenant, as established by the 1922 Finance Act, binds the covenanter to make specified donations over seven years to a designated charity. Through a covenant, the Treasury increases the value of the gift by returning the tax paid on it to the charity. The original idea behind deeds of covenant was to encourage a long-term commitment (rather than a one-off donation) on the part of the covenanter, a commitment that would give charities a better ability to budget over a longer term.

The Finance Act of 1980 shortened the minimum covenant period from seven to three years, and also re-introduced tax relief for donations by taxpayers in higher tax brackets (relief was limited to the basic rate
of tax in 1946). This same act also allowed corporations to deduct charitable contributions up to 3 percent of dividends paid. The Gift Aid Scheme of 1990 extended the limits of charitable gifts by allowing tax relief on one-off gifts of a minimum of £600 up to a ceiling of £5 million. This upper limit was removed by the 1991 Finance Act (Wu, 2002: 62).

In the United Kingdom, ‘patronage’ and ‘sponsorship’ are differentiated for tax purposes. Funds given on a patronage basis are given tax relief through covenanted payments and grant aid, where tax is claimed back by charities. Patronage is available both to private individuals and to business corporations. Sponsorship, however, implies payment for services; it is ‘a business deal’ (Fishel, 1993: 21). Consequently, gifts given to charities on a sponsorship basis are tax deductible for corporations as a business expense. For instance, a business that sponsors an art exhibition can write off the costs under the assumption that the exhibition provides advertisement for the company.25

Corporate sponsorship

Wu (2002) has taken a close look at corporate intervention in the arts since the 1980s. While her main focus is on corporate actions and government policy, not artists or arts institutions, the former clearly affect the latter. Encouraging corporate sponsorship of the arts was a key policy objective of the Thatcher regime. As Wu (2002: 3) reports, ‘in 1991, the director of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), Colin Tweedy, went as far as to suggest that arts sponsorship was one of the cornerstones of Thatcherism’.

Wu’s book provides a scathing critique of the privatization of the arts, and especially of corporate involvement in the arts in the United Kingdom and the United States. She writes, ‘the most insidious and threatening aspect of the whole Thatcher project has been not only the blurring of the boundaries between public and private, and the reframing of the discourse of the debate, but the fact that the Tory government effectively used public money to enhance the prerogative of private capital’ (p. 6). In 1980, for instance, it granted £25,000 to the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), a private organization, to help the ABSA’s efforts to encourage corporate largesse. Observers pointed out the irony: the ABSA, a private if charitable association of businesspeople, received government funds for the purpose of extracting arts funding from non-governmental sources just when the arts themselves were receiving less financial support from the state (Wu, 2002: 55). In 1984, the government established the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme (BSIS) which used financial incentives to encourage corporate
sponsors. The Scheme was administered by the ABSA on behalf of the Office for Arts and Libraries (and, later, the Department of National Heritage (DNH)), and matched private funds up to the sum of £35,000. The matching ratios varied – £1 to £1 for first-time sponsors, but £1 of incentive funds for each £3 of funding provided by established sponsors. As Wu (2002: 63) points out:

one of the criteria for assessing applications was that the BSIS award should be of some significance in attracting sponsors, since the scheme was intended not as a reward for arts groups, but rather to provide greater value for corporate money. The proposed use of the award money should therefore provide ‘greater benefits for the sponsor’. The benefits in question included such things as an extra event, extra advertising of the sponsored event, or the extension of a tour to further venues to ‘ensure that businesses receive a better value sponsorship’….Unlike the American matching grant model, on which it was patterned, and in which public sources lead, the scheme virtually entrusted business with the power of using taxpayers’ money. In other words, the government was putting public money into the corporate purse…

The BSIS scheme is also a clear example of privatization, in that government sought an existing, independent (of government) charity to administer the grants scheme, rather than using a new or existing government agency to do so.

Also in the spirit of enterprise culture, the Arts Council set up a Department of Marketing and Resources in 1987. The department developed fundraising skills, especially with respect to corporate sponsors, both for the Arts Council itself and for the organizations it supports. According to Wu (2002: 66), the Arts council encouraged commercial sponsorship, first by ‘publicising and openly endorsing the practice, and secondly by collaborating closely with business itself. In its 1987/88 annual report the Arts Council addressed itself directly to business people for the first time in its more than forty-year history.’ Subsequently, business leaders contributed statements to the annual report. Wu reports that

[w]ithin the first two years of the existence of the Marketing Department, the Arts Council had successfully attracted sponsorship for its own programmes from a broad spectrum of the business world, including companies such as Coopers and Lybrand, the National Westminster Bank and ICI. That it was able to do so is, of course, not
surprising as the Arts Council is one of the principle state institutions of contemporary culture in Britain. (p. 67)

Here, Wu refers to the ability of the Arts Council to garner corporate funding as not surprising. That a government agency might seek corporate funding, of course, was surprising to many observers.

Hewison points out a further consequence of corporate sponsorship, one that is intensified by government emphasis on enterprise culture:

Business sponsorship has already changed the language of the arts. [The director of the ABSA Colin] Tweedy remarks that ‘arts organizations often fail to understand that they are selling a product to a potential customer and have to deliver benefits accordingly’. The Minister for the Arts speaks of ‘the delivery of the art product’ to ‘consumers of art’. This language has been enthusiastically embraced by the Arts Council…which presented its bid for increased government funding in 1986/98 in terms of a business prospectus: ‘the money spent from the public purse on the arts is a first-rate investment…’

**Politics**

The Arts Council, as is often noted, functions at an arms length from the government. There is a bit of fiction in the arms-length principle, however, as the chairperson of the Arts Council is a political appointee. Thatcher reoriented the Arts Council, for instance, by seeing that its chairperson strongly supported her economic programs. The Arts Minister, Paul Channon, appointed Sir (now Lord) William Rees-Mogg as the Arts Council chairman in 1982. Rees-Mogg replaced Sir Roy Shaw, who had been appointed under the previous government. As Hewison (1987: 113) notes, Rees-Mogg was a ‘convinced supporter of the government’s monetarist economics’. Hewison continues, Channon defended his choice of Rees-Mogg, saying that ‘it “was hardly surprising” to appoint “somebody you respect and get on with and whose views on the arts you’re more likely to be more in agreement with than not”’, and Hewison concludes, ironically, that this statement ‘confirm[s] the political objectivity of the appointment’.

Demonstrating his support of Thatcher’s philosophy, Rees-Mogg appointed Luke Rittner as secretary-general of the Arts Council in 1983. Rittner was the founding director of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (which was set up in 1976). Under the leadership of these men, and subsequent appointees with similar political views, the Arts Council came increasingly to embody the principles of enterprise
culture. After retiring, Shaw (1987: 48) wrote, ‘There has been a decline in the power and influence of Council members themselves, which has meant an increase in the power not (as some journalists have suggested) of officers, but of the chairmen.’

Critics have argued that such political appointments wither the arms-length principle of the Arts Council – in Hewison’s (1987: 118) words, ‘the arm’s length principle has been shortened to the length of a wrist’. Moreover, the arms-length principle was designed to protect the Arts Council, not to mention arts organizations and artists, from political interference not only from above, but also from below. Artists were to be protected from party politics in matters that were of artistic, rather than political, importance. But the tighter control of government, in party political terms, reduced this buffer. In addition, accountability to government, especially in terms of visitor numbers, increased the pressure from below by people who wished the arts to entertain or soothe them, rather than challenge them – to provide them with answers rather than provoke them with questions. If the Arts Council had been formed, in part, to insulate artistic excellence from philistine pressures for relevance, then this function was decreased (Hewison, 1987: 110).

The Thatcher government changed the terms of appointment of museum trustees through the National Heritage Act of 1983. Museums such as the V&A, which had been managed within government, became ‘independent public bodies’ governed by trustees. Museums such as the Tate Gallery, which was already governed by a board of trustees, were also affected. As reported by Wu (2002: 101), a Treasury Minute of 1955 had established that the Tate would have ten trustees, four of which would be artists. Subsequently, a Treasury Minute of 1987 reduced the number of artist trustees to three and increased the total number of trustees to eleven. In Wu’s words:

Ten of these [eleven trustees] were to be appointed by the Prime Minister and one by the trustees of the National Gallery from amongst their own board members (who, of course, were appointed by Mrs Thatcher as well). The term of trusteeship was also reduced from seven to five years, and, again according to the Minute, the five year term might be extended for a further five years or more, which in fact resulted in certain trustees remaining on the board for more than a decade, a phenomenon unheard of in the previous two decades. This significant change not only weakened the representation of artists in the running of the gallery, but also, by making the terms of
appointment more elastic, permitted the government, or to be more precise, the Prime Minister, to take even tighter personal control of board appointments. (p. 101)

Thatcher played an active role in the appointment of Dennis (now Lord) Stevenson to the chairmanship of the Tate in 1988. As a businessman, Stevenson worked to inculcate the entrepreneurial spirit of enterprise culture in the museum. Indeed, the Tate Gallery now claims that it is sensible to elect businesspeople as trustees because ‘the Tate Gallery now runs and administers shops, restaurants, and is in itself a business’ (quoted in Wu, 2002: 111). What is notable in this is not only the business-world logic that has pervaded the Tate, as it has museums worldwide, but that in the United Kingdom, this shift was facilitated by the state.

Prior to the change, museum trustees had not been deeply involved in management issues, which had been left to directors. However, trustees ‘who had formerly been there to protect the public interest in the preservation and use of the collections came to assume corporate responsibility for their museums and for shaping policy – becoming more like boards of directors of public limited companies’ (Hebditch, 1992). Hewison (1995: 231) comments on the increasing intervention of trustees, ‘while cultural institutions retained their notional distance from government, a new breed of nabob – entrepreneurs, public-relations experts, newspaper executives – with a different concept of public responsibilities took control…[and did] not hesitate to impose their views on the organizations’ in their care.

National museums

One of the key effects on museums of Thatcher’s policies was an emphasis on income generation. Museums began fundraising in earnest, seeking corporate sponsorship, especially for special exhibitions. Some implemented admission charges. Hewison (1987: 129) comments,

A change in cultural perception has taken place which narrows the imagination and cramps the spirit. In the nineteenth century museums were seen as sources of education and improvement, and were therefore free. Now they are treated as financial institutions that must pay their way, and therefore charge entrance fees.

Museum personnel felt beleaguered by constant changes and the constant struggle to make ends meet. The director of the National Gallery, Michael
Levy, vented his anger at what he saw as the philistines in Thatcher’s government in an interview with *The Times* upon his retirement in 1986:

> They don’t understand what art is about. Very few have the courage to say ‘I am illiterate’. Very few have the courage to say ‘Every time I see a book, I throw it on the fire’. They’re precious near to that in the visual arts, whose neglect has shown their basic lack of imagination. (quoted in Hewison, 1987: 119)

The emphasis on fundraising has changed the character of British museums. For instance, Nicholas Serota, director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, said in 1980, ‘the amount of my time spent on fundraising certainly affects the quality of our exhibitions, because I can spend far less time on the actual show, on ideas, on artists. One works very hard for peanuts…’ (quoted in Wu, 2002: 137). During his tenure there, from 1976 to 1988, he had raised ‘substantial sums’ from over 80 corporations (Wu, 2002: 137). He subsequently became the director of the Tate Gallery in 1988. There, he established a Development Office (in 1990) with a staff of six. This office grew to a staff of 50 during the fundraising for the new Tate Modern (Wu, 2002: 138).

Under Serota’s directorship, the Tate mounted a number of blockbuster exhibitions on Constable, Picasso, and Cézanne, among others. These exhibitions generated significant revenue from sponsorship and admissions, and as Wu points out, from merchandizing. The *Cézanne* exhibition in 1996 attracted 408,688 visitors (at £8.60 per ticket), and was sponsored by Ernst and Young, who donated £500,000.27 The exhibition was accompanied by Cézanne vases, tea towels, scarves, postcards, books, and ‘the “Cézannewich” offered at the London branches of Prêt à Manger and a specially bottled “Cuvée Cézanne at the Tate” wine’ (Wu, 2002: 138).

The emphasis on blockbuster exhibitions has occurred as a direct result of the need for fundraising in museums.

> As Waldemar Januszczak has pointed out: ‘In the long term the art world must surely learn to cut its coat to suit the available cloth. The rise in sponsorship has been paralleled by the rise in blockbuster exhibition. These huge, expensive displays of artistic wealth do indeed cost a fortune to mount and advertise.’ (Hewison, 1987: 127)

More important, they attract corporate largesse in a way that small, esoteric exhibitions (or operating costs) do not. They also draw in crowds,
and this adds up the visitor count and helps museums meet their targets on attendance.

As many observers point out, the ideals of fundraising and development do not sit well with the image of art and art museums. A Corporate Membership Programme brochure from the Tate Gallery states:

The Tate Gallery’s central location, on the Thames close to Westminster, makes it especially attractive to businesses located in London, or seeking a central London venue in which to entertain... The Tate Gallery’s fine buildings offer a range of unique settings in which to entertain clients, shareholders and other business guests. These facilities are available exclusively to corporate members and current sponsors; the Tate Gallery does not hire its buildings to other commercial organizations. (quoted in Wu, 2002: 141)

Wu argues that language such as this expresses ‘the mercenary transformation of the Tate, and art museums in general’. She continues, ‘How, then, is the Tate to prove that it is still a public gallery, belonging to the whole nation, and not simply an agent for big business bent on advancing its capital interests?’ (p. 142). Wu is hard on museums, however. The need to market the museum and to transform the buildings from a cost to a revenue stream (e.g. by hosting cocktail parties there) is evidence of a profound shift. However, I see it also as evidence that museums face a no-win situation, and certainly not as evidence that they have sold out.

Nevertheless, museums have not only focused on fundraising and blockbuster exhibitions. They have also become more marketized and commercialized. Serota said in 1989, ‘I don’t want the Tate to be a shopping mall, but if people want to buy something, they should be able to’ (quoted in Wu, 2002: 138). The V&A has been at the forefront of this move to a more commercialized space. It was the first national art museum to implement admission charges, in 1985. These charges were ‘voluntary’, but were strongly encouraged by museum guards who gave gorgon-like stares to visitors who refused to pay. The V&A director, Roy Strong, held a press conference in 1995 and announced ‘a more consumer-oriented V&A’, explaining, ‘We have to face the reality of a fundamental shift and like any well-run organisation in the private sector, learn how to capitalise on what is a market-oriented society’ (Hewison, 1995: 269). The V&A emphasized the purchase opportunities available in the museum through a notorious advertising campaign which featured a poster with the slogan, ‘V&A: An ace caff with quite a nice museum attached’. Their shop and mail order catalogs sell textiles, fabrics, furnishings, tile, and
crystal that feature designs and images from their collection. Early on, they recognized the economic value that was to be extracted from their collections by providing licenses, each to last for three years, to companies who wanted to produce goods with museum images on them. Indeed, Strong suggested that through commercial enterprise ‘the V&A could be the Laura Ashley of the 1990s’ (Hewison, 1995: 269). The symbolism of such strategies in transforming art into popular culture can be seen in the license for William Morris silk items (neckties, waistcoats, and the like) which was granted to Frank Theak and Roskilly; which also contracts with Warner Brothers to produce neckties with cartoon characters such as Sylvester the Cat and Tweety Bird.

In 1989, the director of the V&A, Elizabeth Esteve-Coll, proposed a change in the management structure of the museum designed to separate the scholarly museum curators from the exhibition designers. In this, Esteve-Coll wanted to create more ‘visitor-friendly’ exhibitions and she regarded this as only achievable if the input of scholars was curbed. As she explained, ‘We must make our collections more accessible to people who have not had a higher education or and [sic] who do not have much knowledge of the classics or the Bible… We know from research that most people can take in two or three ideas so rather than have a mass of objects we will concentrate on a few major themes’. (Macdonald, 2002: 35)

The reorganization included a ‘voluntary’ redundancy of nine senior curators and provoked fierce controversy.

**The Department of National Heritage and the National Lottery**

In 1992, after the election of John Major, the Conservative government created a new department of state, called the Department of National Heritage (DNH). This department, which was led by a minister in the Cabinet, took over from the OAL in overseeing the arts, museums, and galleries, and it also took over English Heritage (previously the responsibility of the Department of the Environment), sport (from the Department of Education), film (from Trade and Industry), and tourism (from Employment). Hewison (1995: 297) argues that the creation of this department marked one of the differences between Major and Thatcher: ‘It was here, with the creation of a new department, that Major signaled most clearly his concern for the quality of life, and a break with the attitudes of his predecessor’. However, this did not signal a change in the ‘policy of requiring the arts to earn their keep through contributions
to the tourist industry and broadcasting’, and it was the view of the Heritage Minister, Stephen Dorrell (appointed in 1994), that ‘the purpose of arts subsidy, and the role of the Department of National Heritage in general, was that it should act as a catalyst to generate other forms of funding, from business sponsorship, local authorities, and improved earnings through the box office’ (Hewison, 1995: 299–300).

In 1993, the DNH announced that the Arts Council of Great Britain would cease to exist. It would become, instead, the Arts Council of England (ACE). At the same time, the Arts Councils of Wales and of Scotland, which were still technically subcommittees of the Arts Council of Great Britain, would become formally independent, and funded through the Welsh and Scottish Offices.

The United Kingdom brought in a National Lottery in 1994 under Major’s government. The promise was that Lottery funds would be used ‘in addition to’ public spending, and not as a substitute for public spending. In the cultural arena, Lottery money was used to fund capital expenditures, notably new construction and expansion of museums. Though the Lottery could pay for new buildings, on a matching basis, it could not offer support for operations. (Operating expenses were seen as a government responsibility already covered under public expenditures.) However, in the context of stagnant – or, in real terms, declining – government funding, many observers pointed out the irony that the Lottery encouraged spending on buildings that then were not adequately funded for maintenance or for day-to-day operations.

The Lottery has brought up popular debates on how money raised should be spent. The Lottery is a regressive funding mechanism, in the sense that those on lower incomes spend more on it than those on higher ones. This has caused some observers to suggest that a greater proportion of Lottery funds should be used to benefit the causes of interest to those who fund it, such as education, health, or sport, and that projects of interest to more elite groups, such as the visual arts or opera, should receive less (or none).

**New Labour**

Many in the art world were hopeful when Tony Blair’s New Labour government came into power in 1997. Funding was increased for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport – a new name. These increases, about 13 percent, from £917 million in 1998–99 to £1,038 million in 2001–2002 (Wu, 2002: 276) were a welcome relief from previous cuts, but did not bring arts funding back up to pre-Thatcher levels.
Under New Labour, the trends toward privatization in the arts sector continued. Blair’s government has not been inclined to re-nationalize any of the privatized industries, and similarly did not wish to draw the arts more securely into the arms of the state. For instance, the government has encouraged Private–Public Partnerships (PPPs) in which private corporations provide financing for a project, and then receive the profits from the venture. This is often used for building hospitals or schools, and has also been used for a new study center at the British Museum. And a report published by the Public Accounts Committee in July 2004 suggested that government should appoint more entrepreneurs to museum boards in order to encourage museums to become more businesslike in fundraising and to tap their ‘unrealised potential’ for generating income (Alberge, 2004).

The Blair government’s rhetoric on the arts has tended toward populism. Significantly, New Labour changed the name of the culture department from the Department of National Heritage to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Chris Smith, the first culture secretary under Blair, said of this change: ‘we wanted something more forward looking, a name that captured more accurately the new spirit of modern Britain, that signaled the involvement of all’ (Smith, 1998: 2). Along with the new title, New Labour set out four key themes for the Department: access, excellence, education, and economic value. Smith writes, ‘All of these themes are interlinked around the focal point of the individual citizen, no matter how high or low their station, having the chance to share cultural experience….This is a profoundly democratic agenda, seeing cultural access as one of the egalitarian building blocks of society’ (1998: 2–3). Indeed, New Labour has charged the arts, and culture more generally, with responsibility to increase social inclusion and ‘to assist in the regeneration of areas of deprivation’ (Smith, 1998: 19). But alongside this populist vein is a strong emphasis on the economic value of the arts – in terms of tourism, jobs, and wealth creation. Statistics are trotted out to show how much the ‘creative industries’ (which includes the arts) contribute to the national economy. And New Labour has not forgotten Thatcher’s emphasis on managerialism. As Chris Smith (1998: 21) says, ‘I am very anxious indeed to ensure that efficient administration becomes as valued an aspect of artistic organization as creative and aesthetic power’.

Critics have seen the DCMS as orientated more toward popular culture and the entertainment media than the traditional arts (e.g. Fisher, 2000). While New Labour’s emphasis on ‘Cool Britannia’ does not explicitly exclude the fine arts, the DCMS considers not only the music
and film industries, including video rentals, as within its purview, but also such matters as computer games and design in industrial corporations. Indeed, after the General Election of June 2001, new responsibilities for the DCMS included gambling, liquor, horse racing, censorship and video classification, and the Golden Jubilee (celebrating the 50 years of Queen Elizabeth’s reign), all quite far from traditional notions of the arts and culture.

In 2002, the DCMS targeted funding to ‘centres of excellence’ and to ‘access’. Under the latter heading, the DCMS funds circuses, festivals, and ‘street art’. The Blair government also required all publicly funded museums to offer free admission to everyone. This was widely seen as a positive step, allowing families and those on lower incomes the possibility of attending museums or of attending them more often. Approval was not universal, however. A policy of free admission does not just benefit those who were not going to museums because they could not afford to, or those who had refused to go because of ideological opposition to admission charges. It also allows foreign tourists and wealthy Britons to attend for free, groups who, some argue, should pay. The irony is, of course, that for museums that had instituted an admission charge (many had not), the government directive deprived them of an important revenue stream. The government did offer compensation, in the form of a one-off payment for museums that eliminated their admission charges. But this did not make up for the revenue lost, and created other difficulties. For instance, the British Museum, which had always remained free, did not receive any compensation despite the fact that it had suffered financially by not charging admissions during the time that other museums did. Many people in the museum felt that they had been punished for doing the right thing in eschewing charges. When free admission was instituted, the British Museum had recently opened its Great Court, in the center of the museum, which was supported by Lottery grants of £45.75 million, and matched by £51.25 million in private donations (Wu, 2002: 294). But the museum faced a substantial operating loss.

The popular support for free admission to museums highlights public attitudes which suggest that museums are seen as public sector organizations that should be ‘free at the point of delivery’ (as are services provided by the National Health Service). It is important to recognize that significant public funds still flow to museums in the United Kingdom. However, as this chapter has detailed, public provision has been increasingly accompanied on the one hand by private, especially corporate, funding (and, no doubt, corporate influences) and on the other
by government ideals of both enterprise culture and populism. The former measures the arts by economic and marketing criteria, the latter by the number of visitors. Neither of these benchmarks encourage art to be valued for its own sake. As Hewison (1987: 129) puts it, ‘The arts are no longer appreciated as a source of inspiration, of ideas, images or values, they are part of the “leisure business”. We are no longer lovers of art, but customers for a product’.

Furthermore, Wu (2002) is concerned with the role of the state in reinforcing social privilege and social stratification through its policies on the arts. While British government explicitly avows democracy in cultural matters (and whether this is possible or desirable are separate debates), government policies allow corporations and the corporate elite to further the interests of capitalism and extend their own social privilege. In contrast, other critics (e.g. Noble, 2000) are concerned about Labour’s policy of accessibility and the fact that it justifies arts spending in terms of its policies on social equality. Such critics suggest that requiring the arts to play a role in ‘social inclusion’ means that arts organizations are inappropriately required to play the social worker to ‘socially excluded’ individuals and groups (i.e. those who used to be called ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘disenfranchised’ or, sometimes, the ‘lower class’).

Continuing debates

When the Arts Council was first established, and indeed even earlier, many of the terms of current debates were already established. At the time, ‘There was a real dread of any attempt by the state to control the content of art, as well as much uncertainty whether the Government’s function was to guide public taste or merely to react to its demands’ (Minihan, 1977: xii). This remains the case. Measuring consumer demand for culture, not to mention determining the cultural ‘needs’ of the population, is fraught with complexity (Mennell, 1979). Disagreement still exists over whether cultural policy should ‘raise’ or ‘spread’. While access (spreading) has taken on increasing relevance, the Arts Council has been perennially criticized for focusing too much on the metropolis (London). The national museums are disproportionately located in the capital, as well. This conflict between London and elsewhere is exacerbated by the need for arts organizations to raise revenue, as those organizations located in London are more able to attract corporate sponsorship and to raise commercial revenue through sales of food and souvenirs to tourists than those located in other parts of the country. The conflict between elite arts and popular arts, which is also related to the debate over whether
cultural policy should favor excellence or access, has increased, as the populist policies of New Labour appear to favor access. Another question is whether arts policy should exist to encourage artists or to support and develop audiences. In this last debate, both Conservative and Labour governments have paid lip service to the importance of artists, but they have emphasized audiences in almost every aspect of policy.

Critics of state arts support, and especially critics of the Arts Council, come in two flavors: those that are completely against state support (this includes many conservatives and some economists), and those who are for it, but do not like the way it is done (including on the one side, populists, and on the other, elitists).\textsuperscript{30} Pick (1991: 66) faults the Arts Council for its ‘capitulation to the twin gods of Management and Mammon’, and would like to see it abolished. Sawers (1993) argues that economic evidence suggests that the arts will flourish without state aid; consequently, the ‘case for public subsidies is not sustainable’ (p. 36). Other authors argue that cultural support is important and is a symbol of a civilized nation, but suggest that the current arrangements are not satisfactory. Osborne (1986), for instance, thinks that the Arts Council has lost its way and is undercutting artistic excellence in a search for popularity and relevance. Hewison (1987, 1995) suggests that the funding system encourages a bland nostalgia for the art of the past, and ignores contemporary artists. In contrast, Mulgan and Worpole (1986) have called for a cultural policy that goes beyond the inclusive policies of New Labour, one that embodies a major conceptual shift that may be difficult for those for whom art is still exclusively about the theatre rather than television, easel paintings rather than design, live opera rather than recorded music. It will require a shift toward understanding how the modern popular arts as commodities are produced, marketed and distributed by industries dependent on skills, investment and training, and a development away from older pre-industrial ideologies of art that emphasized personal development and the sacrosanct value of individual self-expression (but for only a few).

Less criticism is brought to bear on the public funding of art museums. Indeed Pearson (1982: 106–7) states,

\begin{quote}
Museums of art… have been a feature of the art scene in this country for over 150 years. That is long enough for them to have become an accepted and ‘natural’ part of our visual culture. We cannot imagine
\end{quote}
an ‘advanced’ or civilized society which does not recognize the importance and value of the visual arts through constructing temples to their past and present . . . [;] rarely are the full implications of having such public museums and public collections at all held up for examination.

While this may be true, the assumptions that underpin public museums, and the terms of their funding have changed. As Saumarez-Smith (2000: 92) puts it, ‘In the past two decades, the two original purposes of museums – as collections of artifacts and as research institutions – have either been at war with, or been replaced by, two new purposes . . . the museum as educational resource [and] the museum as leisure attraction’. As a result, museums have had to become more managerialist and more populist. Recently, for instance, the V&A hired the consultancy Interbrand to help it overcome financial difficulties. The consultancy’s report ‘attributed the museum’s difficulties to poor marketing and an excessively highbrow image’ (Cozens, 2001). Local museums face even more difficulties, as hard-pressed local authorities reduce culture budgets before those of education, welfare, and health. Further, funding for local museums from central government fell by 15 percent in real terms from 1997 to 2000. ‘It’s death by a thousand cuts’, said David Barrie, who is the director of Art Fund, an independent charity (Guardian Unlimited, 29 August, 2000).

Arts controversies

Arts controversies have not become public issues in the United Kingdom to the extent that they have in the United States. For the most part, British people ignore art that they do not like, and art has not become tied up with issues such as religion or political conservatism as they have in the United States. Nevertheless, the familiar debates are rehearsed each year as the Tate Gallery honors four young British artists with a show from which the best artist is chosen to receive the Turner Prize. Past finalists have included artists such as Rachel Whiteread, Damien Hirst, and Tracy Emin. Though the Turner Prize is indirectly supported by government (through the Tate Gallery’s yearly grant), the prize money comes from a private corporation, the television company Channel 4. Nevertheless, the public discourse about the show revolves around the question of ‘Is it art?’ (and not around who has funded it). In 1993, Rachel Whiteread was awarded the £20,000 Turner Prize, distinguishing her as the best young British artist that year. In the same year, she also received £40,000 from the K Foundation for the ‘worst
body of art produced in the previous year’, including her work *House* (Marontate, 2001; see also Marontate, 1999).\(^{31}\)

Usually government ministers (and the royal family)\(^{32}\) remain silent on these shows. In 2002, however, the Culture Minister commented on the Turner Prize finalists, by pinning a handwritten note on the wall in the exhibition’s room for visitors’ reactions. His note read, ‘If this is the best British artists can produce then British art is lost. It is cold, mechanical, conceptual bullshit’ (quoted in Watt, 2002). The Culture Minister’s comments elicited a predictable outcry from the art establishment, who pointed to the comments to show the lack of support government seems to have for the arts – as opposed to media and sport, which are politically more popular.

Many commentators suggest that the arts should be seen as valuable in their own right, not just as part of the tourist economy. Hewison (1987) argues that focusing only on tourism will lead to a heritage view of the arts that will harm living artists. He believes that we must allow artists to be free

to return to [their] true function, which is to find expressions for the images, ideas and values by which the rest of us live...[and we must] accept that their imaginations must be free to look at the present rather than the past. In reality, the present is a more exciting and risky place than the comforting simulacrum of a triumphant, undivided nation that the heritage industry tries to carry forward from the past to the present. If we abandon ourselves to the rapt contemplation of the past, the demoralisation of artists who necessarily can work only in the present, will be complete. (p. 144)

The same might be said of the effects of abandoning ourselves to the spectacles offered by the commercial media.

**Conclusion**

Government policies toward supporting the arts have undergone tremendous change over the past two decades or so, with profound effects on arts institutions and, by extension, on artists. Currently, the greater part of state funding for the arts in the United Kingdom is distributed through the DCMS.\(^{33}\) The DCMS receives annual funds from the Treasury, and, in turn, devolves funds to a number of different agencies, including the Arts Councils of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (each of these is a separate council), Resource: The
Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, several Regional Arts Boards, and other agencies. These agencies provide funding, through various schemes, for the visual arts and artists, as well as for arts institutions and museums. The Arts Council of England (ACE), for instance, supports a number of initiatives in the visual arts, including acquisitions of contemporary art and a program of traveling exhibitions. ACE also distributes National Lottery funds designated for the arts. Resource directly funds the twelve national museums – among them the premiere art museums, namely, the Tate Gallery and its branches, the National Gallery (London), the National Galleries of Scotland, and the V&A, as well as the British Museum – and five non-national museums. It also supports about 60 ‘Designated Collections’, which are deemed to be preeminent. Many local authorities also support museums and arts centers, and may contribute to the Regional Arts Boards.

Pearson (1982: 96) suggests that in Great Britain,

[c]ontemporary State intervention in the visual arts can be understood as operating on three fronts: the first is the provision of museums of art dealing with the art of the past; the second is the broad involvement in contemporary visual culture via exhibitions, grants, awards, commissions, subsidy and purchases, as practiced by arts councils, regional arts associations, and museums collecting art by living artists or mounting temporary exhibitions of the work of living artists; the third is the provision of education and training in art through both general education and specialist art schools.

This chapter has concentrated mainly on the first front and, to a degree, on the second. The British state is still substantially involved in the arts, with a greater degree of munificence than exists in the United States, but with less than in France, Germany, or the Scandinavian countries. The United Kingdom provides direct support for artists through fellowships and university grants – and even through the dole. The state also provides indirect support through tax laws and through laws not discussed here (resale rights for artists, copyright and intellectual property, tort law, and laws concerning private property).

A crucial set of changes, both in policy and in the justification of policy, were put in place by the Conservative government in the 1980s. The managerial culture that has been present in the arts since that time has led museums, and the Arts Councils, to become more professional organizations. As Beck (1989: 370) put it,
The policy of weaning the arts world away from ‘the welfare state mentality’ is at one with the general cultural strategy of ‘the Thatcher revolution’ which sets up business as the ideal-type of all social activity – understanding ‘business’ as a mythical representation of early capitalism, entrepreneurial, buccaneering, progressive. The cultural transformation of the management of the arts institutions to make them bold, inventive and energised is a central element of [Thatcher’s] policy for the arts.

However, this ‘professionalism’ has come at a cost to traditional ideas both about the arts and about the functions of museums.

These changes, which were maintained by the New Labour government, encouraged not only managerialism in the arts, but also significant corporate sponsorship. The importance of corporate funding brings up issues of access to the arts outside London, as well as of support for esoteric or challenging art and artists. As Hewison (1987: 126) comments on private funding:

The main point at which interference occurs...is the sponsor’s choice of what, and what not, to sponsor. Inevitably new work, experimental work and any kind of art which challenges the cultural and economic status quo finds it almost impossible to secure sponsorship. The arts which do attract sponsorship are those which are the most prestigious, the most conventional and the most secure: the heritage arts. Any effort by the Arts Council to improve the imbalance in the provision between London and the regions is countered by the weight of sponsorship in London.

Writing in 1977, Minihan notes:

The development of governmental support for the arts in Great Britain is but one aspect of the growth of the British Government. A traditional and firmly ingrained dislike of powerful central authority, of meddlesome bureaucracy, had to be overcome before culture could be considered a legitimate concern of the state. Gradually, beginning early in the nineteenth century and extending through the Second World War, public attitudes concerning the role of the state have altered. Once loathed chiefly as the tax collector...it is now accepted by millions of people as the source of their education, health care, housing, and social security. Over the decades, as the state extended its supervision into areas once sacred to private initiative, managing
industries and providing public services, national subsidies for the arts also grew in quantity and scope. In fact, encouragement of culture represented one aspect of the official response to increasingly complex social problems. (p. x)

Minihan would be disheartened by the fact that as conservative officials created and drew upon a public discourse of smaller government and the privatization of national industries, arts support shrank along with other government provision. She would also be saddened that New Labour drew upon a philosophy not altogether different from the Tories (though tempered by a populism absent from the Thatcher and Major governments) with respect to reduced funding for the arts and an emphasis on private finance and commercial values. Nevertheless, her main point remains well-taken: public provision of the arts in the United Kingdom is shaped by the relationship of the state not only to the arts but to all types of public service.

The desire of the right to satisfy consumer demand has merged with the desire of the left to empower the populace, and this attention to audiences has promoted a sea change in the provision of the arts. The Tory efforts to reduce the dependence of the public sector on public funds have been continued in the arts, as in other areas of public life, under New Labour. However, to measure the arts by economic yardsticks, whether these are the number of visitors, the level of business sponsorship, or the degree of commercialization and earned income generated by museums, is to devalue the arts themselves. The arts cannot compete on economic terms with media and sport in the commercial sector.

Hewison (1995: 313) calls for a new consensus on the national identity of Great Britain:

cultural policy will play an ever greater part in the national debate, for it must be understood that culture is the national narrative, the ground of identity and the support of society. Such a narrative cannot be sieved through the narrow accountancy of a sterile search for value for money. What we must argue for, is money for values.

Notes

1. For a thorough and detailed history of state support for the arts in Great Britain, see Minihan (1977). Fyfe (2000) and Pearson (1982) also discuss the development of British arts institutions from about the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Prior (2002) discusses the origins of the National
Gallery in London and the National Gallery of Scotland, with respect to the rise of modernity, and compares these with national galleries in Continental Europe. Hooper-Greenhill (1992) discusses, in an international context, the changing assumptions about the functions of museums over the past 600 years.

2. Here I use the American term ‘art museum’ to refer to what are known in the United Kingdom as ‘art galleries’; see Chapter 2, note 1.

3. Interestingly, the funds for these purposes were raised through a public lottery authorized by Parliament (Minihan, 1977: 11).

4. The collections were eventually divided into several museums. The natural history collection was moved to the South Kensington Museum in the nineteenth century, and is now housed in the Natural History Museum; the Science collection also moved to the South Kensington Museum. A separate Science Museum was constituted in 1909. The British Library was formally separated from the British Museum in 1973, and the collections moved to the new British Library building at St Pancras in 1998. The British Museum still houses an extensive collection of arts from antiquity and holds the largest print collection in the United Kingdom.

5. See Minihan (1977) for a discussion of ‘the arts as instruments of national glory and honour’ (p. ix), themes which she shows continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In a related argument, Duncan and Wallach (1980) trace the origin of the ‘universal survey museum’ to princely art galleries, and relate the public museum to state power:

   [The universal survey museum] displays spiritual wealth that is publicly owned through the medium of the state. . . . Art can be used to realize the transcendent values the state claims to embody. It can make good the state’s claim to be the guardian of civilization. It lends credibility to the belief that the state exists at the summit of mankind’s highest attainments. In the museum, the visitor is not called upon to identify with the state per se but with its highest values. (p. 457)

6. However, the Royal Academy was granted land in London for its buildings in 1969, on which it holds a 999-year lease with a nominal rent.

7. These include: the V&A, the Royal Albert Hall, the Royal Horticultural Society gardens, and the Natural History Museum.

8. Government directly funds these National Museums, but does not run them. Instead, they are managed by independent Boards of Trustees, appointed with the approval of the Government.

9. The Museums Act of 1845 passed through Parliament with relative ease. It was superseded by an 1850 Act, which covered libraries as well as museums. The latter law, while successfully passed, was debated fiercely in Parliament, as many MPs saw ‘libraries as simply charity institutions for the poor, and it was not so generally agreed that the State was in business for providing charity for the poor’ (Pearson, 1982: 29).

10. The Education Act of 1870, which instituted universal schooling, was passed after decades of debate on the usefulness of education in industrial society and what role the state should play. On the development of state-sponsored education, see Green (1990).
11. It is interesting to note the difference in state involvement between the Royal Academy and the School of Design. The Royal Academy was independent and sought income from fee-paying students and through sales of works of art in its exhibitions. As Pearson (1982: 21–2) points out, a sharp distinction was drawn in practice between the idea of fine art as practised by members of the Royal Academy and taught in the Academy schools, and ideas of ornamental design and technical skill, which were the province of the Government system. . . . In the 1860s it was not generally accepted that the Government had any role to play in providing a free or subsidized education in art for artists. It had a role to play in matters of public taste, and in relation to training designers for industry.

12. In 1993, funding for the college was moved from the Department of Education to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which provides funding for universities and other institutions of higher learning.

13. The Design Registry Office was established in 1839, and a Select Committee on Copyright of Designs was constituted in 1840 (Minihan, 1977: 42).

14. Minihan (1977: 160–7) suggests that the development of the avant-garde in art might have played a role in the slowing of the development of national cultural policies:

For decades, statesmen had been persuaded to subsidize cultural undertakings because of their conviction that art was not only an instrument of national glory and honour, but an effective means of humanizing and civilizing the ‘industrious’ classes. Now, in reply to the claims of the cognoscenti, the nation’s legislators could well have asked: if art serves no purpose beyond itself, if it neither refines nor educates the people, promoting neither morality nor religion, why devote public money to its aid? (p. 166)

15. The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty, its full name, subsequently came to conserve the built environment (especially country homes, for which it is most known). Its first role, however, was the preservation of the natural environment.


17. It was transferred back to the Department of Education and Science in 1964, and has been moved around in many subsequent reorganizations of government departments.

18. Pick (1991), whose book is quite critical of the Arts Council from its inception, accuses Keynes of exaggerating the novelty of the Arts Council and of underestimating the vitality of the arts in the United Kingdom before the Arts Council was established. For instance, Pick writes:

Elsewhere [Keynes] said that he could count the number of museums in pre-war Britain on one hand. As there were in fact some hundreds of
museums, theatres and concert halls, we must add yet another reason for admiring him, for it would appear that Keynes achieved all that he did in spite of being secretly encumbered with an embarrassing superfluity of fingers. (p. 22)

19. It is interesting that the arms-length principle is often written about, in arts discourses at least, as if it were invented by the Arts Council in 1945. However, it existed in British political thought much earlier, and is in evidence in the state-supported national trustee museums as well as in the arrangements made for the BBC in 1927, and in arenas outside the arts.

20. Charles Osborne, the Literature Director from 1971 to 1986, notoriously broke the secrecy agreement when he published his autobiography in 1986. His account starts in 1966, when he first joined the Arts Council, and charts a progress from, as I see it, small funds sensibly disbursed, through a period during which the funds increased while, disconcertingly, the sense decreased, to the present time, where funding has leveled out and is, in real terms, decreasing, thus forcing the Council to take, albeit reluctantly, some common-sense decisions. (Osborne, 1986: 150)

He was especially critical of the ‘Community Arts’ program.

21. In a chapter of this length, only a few of these changes can be mentioned.


23. Although British museums, including art museums, operate as quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations), most are legally registered as charities.

24. The mechanisms of the deeds are somewhat complex. In a deed of covenant, the donor makes a gift, giving a payment of the gift amount minus the basic-rate income tax to the charity, and pays the tax to the Inland Revenue. The charity then claims the tax from the Inland Revenue. For instance, if a donor wanted to give £100 to a charity, and the tax rate was 30 percent, then the donor would send £70 to the charity, and pay £30 to the Inland Revenue as tax. The charity would then claim the £30 back from Inland Revenue. In this way, the donor makes a gift worth £100. (In practice, donors usually do not make these calculations; rather they make a contribution knowing that the charity will receive an extra amount when it claims back the tax. Indeed, in the example, the actual cost of the gift to the donor is £100, but it may be perceived as costing just £70, as tax is paid regardless of whether the donor makes a gift.) The system may sound complex, but it makes it very clear which resource streams are from donation and which from taxes foregone by the government.

The system is unlike that in the United States where tax relief is given to the donor rather than the charity. An American donor writes off a tax-deductible contribution against income and thus pays a lower tax. Assuming a rate of tax at 30 percent, an American would give $100 to a charity, but at a net cost to himself or herself of only $70. In the United States, it is therefore more difficult to separate out donations from foregone taxes in the charity’s budget.
25. British tax laws also support corporate art collections by allowing revenue and capital deductions from corporate taxes for art works (considered as analogous to other business assets).

26. A crucial distinction must be made between party politics and the potential political impact of the arts in general. A 1977 policy background paper on arts policy issued by the Labour Party stated:

In so far as most works of art are concerned with man as subject matter – his ideals, beliefs, fears, joys – they are inevitably political in content. It is difficult, not to say impossible, to tell a story which does not take an attitude – either questioning or reassuring. Such an attitude may be implicit or explicit but it will be there and the culmination of such attitudes is political. In the same way, where you present a work of art, how much you charge for it, what forms receive subsidy, will have an inevitable political effect. (quoted in Pearson, 1982: 79)

While it may be true that the arts are inherently political, there is a difference between decisions made by government that may affect the arts, and decisions made with respect to the arts designed specifically to further the interests of political parties.

27. Wu (2002: 140) reports that the Tate also hosted 40 evening receptions for Ernst and Young, which along with advertising and promotions reportedly cost the firm an additional £500,000.

28. And in a new twist, as Wu (2002: 295) points out, museum websites now may provide links to the websites of their corporate sponsors, for instance, the British Museum’s website pointed to the Chase Bank site.

29. In its fundraising, the British Museum took up a strategy long used in the United States, but not familiar in the United Kingdom, of naming galleries after generous benefactors, which included both individuals and corporations.


31. Wu (2002) discusses the commercialization of the avant-garde, pointing to the fact that Whiteread designed a label for Beck’s Beer, which displayed a photograph of *House*. Wu writes, ‘The irony is that *House* is the house you cannot walk into, and Beck’s is “the beer that you buy not to drink . . . when the label is more valuable than the contents”’ (p. 147).

32. However, Prince Charles has taken a stand against certain pieces of modern art and, especially, architecture – with some effect: In 1984, ‘the Prince of Wales attacked the plans for a proposed extension to the National Gallery as a “monstrous carbuncle”. As a result the radically modernist design has been dropped in favour of sympathetic pastiche’ (Hewison, 1987: 43).

33. For current information on the DCMS, see its webpage at www.culture.gov.org. Also useful are the current webpages for Resource (www.resource.gov.uk), the Arts Council of England (www.artscouncil.org.uk), and the National Campaign for the Arts, an independent lobbying organization (www.artscampaign.org.uk). Though now out of date, Museums and Galleries Commission (1988) and National Campaign for the Arts (1993) provide helpful information.
34. The name of this organization, established in a 2000 reorganization, is also sometimes written ‘Re:source’.

35. The funding situation in the United Kingdom is quite complex, and difficult to describe simply but accurately. One difficulty in describing the system is the number of departments and agencies involved at the state, national, regional, and local levels, with various partnership links and complex monetary streams. A second difficulty is that it is continually reorganized, with different functions moving from one part of government or one agency to another, often with an attendant name change.
4
Art, Art Institutions, and the State in the Welfare States of Norway and Sweden

Marilyn Rueschemeyer

Although support for the arts and for artists existed even before the full institutionalization of the social democratic welfare state in Norway and Sweden, this chapter will reflect on the development of this support in the 1960s and the transformations that have taken place since then. I will examine public support for the arts, focusing on painting and sculpture. The chapter begins with an analysis of the historical development of cultural policy and then turns to the role of artist associations, whose goal it is to advance the economic supports and artistic autonomy of its members. Finally, it addresses recent developments in support for the arts, growing decentralization of funding and decision-making, changing relationships between the artists’ associations and municipal and state governments, and the growth of new attitudes and expectations among the younger generation of artists. I will focus on Norway and make some comparative comments on Sweden where they seem appropriate. The organization of art and art institutions as well as a number of developments in the art world are quite similar in the Nordic countries; yet there are also interesting differences among the social democratic states that have developed over the years.

State support for the arts in these welfare states is taken for granted across a wide spectrum of political positions. It is characteristically linked to associational activities, both in its historical development and in the way it is dispensed; and its rationales are intertwined with the abiding Norwegian and Swedish public policy of supporting regional and local diversity.

State support for the arts is today often viewed with skepticism. In the United States, many wonder whether such support does not at the same time mean control by the state (e.g. Marquis, 1995). And even in the social
democratic welfare states, there are questions of whether an art removed from the challenge of the market can retain its quality and creativity. The cases of Norway and Sweden give a reassuring answer to these concerns, one very different from the state socialist countries of the former Soviet bloc (Rueschemeyer et al., 1985; Rueschemeyer, 1991). Because of its historical and organizational links to artists’ associations, because of its relation to regional and local diversity, and because of a deeply embedded public conception of art as an autonomous sphere of culture, state support does not seem to endanger the freedom and creativity of art in the two countries. The pattern of support is, however, neither static nor conflict-free, nor devoid of critical assessment. I will explore tensions and conflicts as well as the potential for change in the future.

Cultural policy

Cultural policy developed in Norway on a large scale after World War II, while in Sweden a strong state interest in the arts goes back to the eighteenth century. In both countries, support for the arts became part of the social democratic program of social planning in the course of the twentieth century (Berg, 1987: 158–9). Before that, ‘there was less official involvement in culture in Norway than in many other western countries’ (Simonsen, 1990: 11), even though Norway, too, had a modest national gallery since 1842 and there were occasional awards of artists’ salaries or bursaries in the nineteenth century. But in Norway, it seems that a smaller and historically less established state relied on negotiation and collaboration with private dignitaries and organizations well before the later corporatism associated with welfare state development (Simonsen, 1990: 8, 11). The Swedish Royal Academy of Fine Arts was established earlier, in 1735. Aside from the training of artists, a function that has long since devolved to the College of Fine Arts, ‘the Royal Academy of Fine Arts was to keep up to date on new developments in international art and was also to act as a censor of art movements whose works represented a conflict with the ideals of the state’ (Ericson, 1988: 25). This statist tradition has been transformed with democratization and the emergence of a mode of state action that puts a premium on cooperation with societal organizations.

After World War II, there was anticipation that with peace and increasing prosperity Norwegians would spend more on culture and that the arts would need less public support than was provided immediately after the occupation in response to the great demands for culture at that time. As in other countries, these expectations were wrong; people used
their money elsewhere, and the private support for culture diminished with economic normalization. Neither the cultural institutions nor the artists could survive only from market income. What was the extent of state responsibility in this situation?

If people spent their money elsewhere, why should the state support artistic traditions and institutions? Here, notions of national identity, the ‘common good’, and pride in the nation and its creative productions play an important role. A nation takes its place among others and is respected, among other things, for the quality of its culture and the education of its population. It is in this sense that the state saw itself obliged to encourage the arts, to strengthen its public identity, and to advance the social democratic values for which it stood.

But if the state was to advance the ‘common good’, it had to try to define what that was for a diverse population. And it had to attempt to reduce the inequalities that existed in the access to public institutions, whether they were economic, educational, or cultural. In Norway, the sparse presence of professional or elite culture in many Norwegian localities and the absence of an urban environment in many of the regions of the country were defined as a severe problem for gaining access to the arts. Ideally, neither location in the country nor income should prevent people from exposure to the arts, through education or by attending cultural events. Secondly, there was a popular, ‘democratic’ culture that had to be encouraged; that is, different groups and citizens living in different areas in the country have a variety of cultural interests that might not be included in ‘high’ culture, and the state, by supporting these ‘amateur’ or semi-professional initiatives, not only helps to enrich the quality of life of its citizens but links these activities to the broader world of culture. Even the earlier support for culture had included grants for leisure-time activities, sports, youth work, and the building of community centers.

The rationale for state intervention broadened somewhat over the years, in reaction to other developments in the country. But these initial goals, which resulted in concrete state policies, still remain crucial for support of the arts.

A number of national and touring institutions were supported in order to bring theater, concerts, film, art exhibits, and so on to outlying regions all over Norway, as well as to attract groups who ordinarily did not attend such events (Bakke, 1994). The Norwegian Cultural Council, established in the mid-1960s, lifted some of the decision-making out of the ministry (Irjala, 1996: 111), and the cultural boards established in the counties and in most municipalities resulted in further decentralization
and possibilities for innovation. Decentralization became even stronger through a scheme developed in the mid-1980s, which transferred funds from the state to counties and municipalities based on criteria such as population size and age structure. Commissions of art for public purposes increased.

Over the years, a number of different grants became available for individual artists as well as professional and amateur groups. These supports include working grants for artists of various kinds, exhibition grants for younger artists with special difficulties (living in the periphery of the country, for example), and exhibition fees. The largest item, however, is guaranteed life income mostly for mature artists. In 1995, 520 artists of all fields (including writers, composers, and others as well as visual artists) received such income payments. The average grant was 65,000 NOK or about $10,000 in 1993–94. In that year, ‘visual and handicraft artists had on average no more than about 100,000 NOK in total income (about 55 percent of the average income among industrial workers)’ (Elstad and Pedersen, 1996: 219, 221).2 In Sweden, the average grant for visual artists in 2000 was 110,000 kronor or $11,000.3 An interesting grant of the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs was established in 1998 for galleries run by artists engaged especially in experimental art. Artists are able to keep whatever they earn from sales, though given the kind of work they do, selling is often difficult.4

In a broadly comparative context, it is worth mentioning that artists are, of course, also eligible for the income supports that the Norwegian and Swedish systems of social provision offer to those who lost work, fell ill, and became too old to work.

Artists’ organizations were an important player in the development of support for the arts and negotiated for their own interests. I turn now to their relation to the state.

Artists’ associations

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, studies indicated that many artists in Norway were quite poor. Several temporary subsides and new initiatives were suggested to address their difficulties. There had been some support for artists (e.g. for travel) even in the nineteenth century, and after the turn of the century an established artists’ organization, The Norske Bildende Kunstneres Styre, BKS (Council for Visual Artists), had offered some support, but at the time it judged and accepted artists according to long-established standards; indeed there were tensions with other artistic groups throughout the century. In the 1970s, younger
artists expressed dissatisfaction with what they saw as ‘the old boys’ network’ and proposed that this Association could continue to pay attention to quality while the younger artists negotiate with the government in the style of a trade union in order to receive grants and money.

The relation of the state to artists changed dramatically at this time. In 1974, the Artists Action, supported by artists’ associations from all cultural fields, demanded to be considered part of the welfare state, requested income if they were unable to earn enough through their art, asked for compensation for the use of their work, and pushed for increased public use of their productions. These actions resulted not only in much more support for artists but also in a new relationship between artists and the state. In the decade of the 1970s, government expenditure for grants nearly doubled.

Because so many artists were members of both the BKS and the new organization initiated by younger artists and perhaps because the corporatist character of state–society relations encouraged consolidation, the two groups merged after a few years into the NBK, Norske Billedkunstnere (Association of Norwegian Visual Artists). This Association, in turn, is affiliated with the Norwegian Artists’ Council, the joint body for all Norwegian artists’ associations. Under the umbrella of the Association of Visual Artists (NBK), which has 2000 members, there are presently 21 sub-organizations. These include the regional organizations, the specialized organizations of painters, and so on, as well as the Association of Young Artists in Norway with about 500 members. The Swedish Artists National Association (KRO – Konstnärernas Riksorganisation) has 3000–4000 members. The KRO was founded in 1937 partially in response to the interest of the state to have an organization to work with associations that represented the needs of artists.

In Sweden, ‘cultural workers’ joined together in the early 1960s to express complaints about poor earnings, the lack of fellowships and scholarships, and the poor art education. As a result of an analysis by a general Commission on Cultural Policy and a large comprehensive report published in 1972, an extensive bill was debated in the Riksdag. At that time, there were considerable differences among the parties on the issue of quality in granting support and increasingly on the extent of economic support (Kleberg, 1987: 177). Both issues, though somewhat transformed, are still salient. Social democratic cultural policy in Sweden supported the engagement of national and local authorities in the world of art. At the same time, it also emphasized the role of independent voluntary associations.
The artists’ associations play an important role in the negotiation with the government on the conditions for funding as well as in the decision-making process on applications. In Norway, artists’ committees prepare a list which is submitted to a state committee. This final committee, composed of artists and bureaucrats, checks that the artists receive what they applied for but generally accepts the nominations of the artists’ committees. The Swedish KRO uses the policies of the welfare state to improve the material conditions of artists and now sees its primary function in negotiating these conditions with the state. The Swedish Visual Arts Fund, part of the Arts Grants Committee, receives an allocation from the Parliament. Artistic quality, activity, and economic need are considered in the awarding of grants. The Swedish Visual Arts Fund does have members of the KRO on its committee but changes in the selection of committee members (appointed by the government) are taking place.

How do the Norwegian and the Swedish artists’ associations and the influence they exert compare? The comparison of the two welfare states is a complex question that goes beyond the limits of this discussion, though it may be noted that Norway has an even larger public sector than Sweden. Norway had a more centralized system of funding grants for the arts than Sweden, and this is still the case in spite of recent increases in decentralization. Overall, it seems that the Norwegian NBK is in a stronger position than the Swedish KRO. The KRO appears to have greater difficulties getting its representatives on boards that make important decisions affecting the art world than the NBK. While there have been changes over the years, the NBK is still a strong negotiation partner, and the association itself controls two large funds for artists and is efficient in raising funds. It collects, for example, considerable amounts of money from pictures used in books or in the media. Some informants suggested that artists in Sweden have been more encouraged than their colleagues in Norway to depend on the private market rather than the state. Certainly, graduates aim to make it on their own and several attempt to link up to the prestigious Stockholm art galleries (Ericson, 1988) or private galleries in other parts of the country. One respondent, much involved in an important art institution, lamented the chase of artists after the media and the importance of selling oneself. It has also been suggested that young people in the Nordic countries generally are less interested in joining unions than were their parents. Here it is relevant that any benefits that are negotiated are there for all artists, not only union members. But in fact nearly all artists eventually join the union in Norway. In Sweden, about 1000 artists are not members.
of the KRO. And interestingly, 20 percent of the new members of the Norwegian NBK are Swedish artists with an address in Norway!

An earlier development further complicates the work of the KRO. In the early 1970s, there was an internal fight, and artists left the KRO and established another organization, the Swedish Artists’ Union (Svenska Konstnärsförbundet). This organization has 700 members. The KRO claims that each time it makes an effort to be included in an important committee or board, this organization demands the same and thus weakens the KRO’s potential effect. Even though smaller, it is a competing organization.

**Regional Artists’ Centers in Norway**

One of the most important developments in Norway is the establishment of artist-run and -controlled Artists’ Centers in 14 regions in Norway. These provide crucial support for artists and are much more embedded in the art world of Norway than similar institutions in Sweden. The counties receive money from the state, which then goes to the Artists’ Centers. This is a recent change; until 1995, the subsidy came directly from the state.

Bergen, the second largest city in Norway with approximately 230,000 inhabitants, where much of the earlier research was conducted, is part of the region of Hordaland, with a population of nearly twice that of Bergen. The Hordaland Kunstnersentrum (Artists’ Center) has an exhibit space, a shop exhibiting the works of artists in the associations, and a cafe. In addition to individual purchases of the artists’ productions, major museums and other public collections have bought works at the Center. However, the goal is not primarily to sell the art, but to allow artists whose work may or may not be successful on the market to exhibit at the Center and to be seen by others.

The artists run the Center through the artists’ associations. The heads of the regional visual arts association (BKF) and the arts and crafts association (NKH) are located there. There is a larger board and a number of committees at the Center in which association members participate on a rotating basis, along with secretaries and curators and members of related organizations, such as representatives from the Architects’ Association for the committee on public art. The emphasis is on democratic decision-making, in contrast to the approach of the private gallery where decision-making about exhibitions is made by the owner or manager.
In Bergen, there are 200 fine arts and 100 arts and crafts people who are members of the Center. The dues they pay vary according to the number of subgroups to which a person belongs. For example, the head of the Board of the Kunsterntsentrum pays the equivalent of about $170 a year, while the head of the regional artists’ association pays about $250 a year because she is also a member of one of the subgroups, the Association of Young Artists. The Artists’ Center receives approximately $50 from each contributor’s amount. There are a number of criteria for admission; graduation from the Academy of Arts now results in automatic admission, but one can also be a candidate after graduation from another established art school or on the basis of equivalent qualifications. It is not necessary to be a member to be selected by the jury for exhibition. If work is sold from the gallery, the Center gets 25 percent; from the store, where there is no jury, 30 percent. An additional 3 percent is paid to the Association of Fine Artists.

While the Center receives support from the region, the municipality plays an important role in the support for the arts. Artists and their associations pay close attention to what is being decided in the municipality; both the individual artists and the Artists’ Center submit requests to the city of Bergen.

**Decentralization and support for the arts**

During the last 15 years, both the municipalities and the regional county administrations in Norway have been given far more autonomy in their cultural expenditures and activities than they had before. (Responsibility for culture in municipalities and regions has a long tradition in Sweden; county councils collect taxes.) While many Norwegians welcome these developments others fear this decentralization of decision-making with respect to the arts and the increased power of the regions and municipalities could ultimately endanger the support that artists can take for granted. Since under the new policy the intervention of the state in regional and municipal affairs has been reduced, local cultural sectors have lost some of their protection by the state authorities. Except for libraries, the state does not force the localities to support culture. Can art support hold on its own on the local level, where interests that may be less concerned with art as a public good have a more powerful impact? Will support for the arts be endangered when other priorities that compete directly for the same budget funds emerge among politicians and administrators? Mangset discusses these dangers of what he calls a policy of ‘deregulation’ for the future public support of art and culture.
But he also reports that a recent study shows no decline but an actual increase in municipal expenditures on culture in Norway between 1989 and 1994 (Mangset, 1995).

Yet if local support for the arts did not decline overall, several cities and local communities face financial difficulties, and there is some indication that if local areas are financially strapped and at the same time receive funds they can spend ‘flexibly’ for various needs, cultural subsidies may be arranged that are less generous. And there are indeed differences in the enthusiasm for public support for the arts in the various political parties, even if these are not immediately apparent in municipal politics. The artists themselves may have to engage in extensive organizational activity to ensure the continuity of their funding. This is as true for the regional council as it is for the municipality, although the county’s contribution has had a somewhat different tradition (Bakke, 1994: 116). In fact, the former head of the board of the Artists’ Center saw contact with the regional board as one of her major tasks. And the recently appointed director complained that Bergen is one of the very few municipalities not giving sufficient financial support to the Center.

The head of Uppsala’s Cultural Department in Sweden thought that the position of culture was weak even though politicians talk about it and acknowledge that tourists are attracted by a vibrant cultural life. She was concerned that three dance groups in the city might leave because of lack of funding. The 15 or so private galleries have been relatively stable and although there are some very modest grants for arts, most artists work at other jobs. The adult education associations are linked to political parties and receive considerable funding compared to other cultural groups.

There are radically different assessments of the social democratic party’s support for the arts. Several of the Swedish respondents thought the party gave funding to culture ‘without end’. Yet others saw the party as divided with respect to its relations to professional or ‘elite’ culture with an important segment distancing itself from professional artists. Those planning major exhibits may therefore be under considerable pressure to present art that attracts a large audience.

A number of people referred to the support advocated by the Liberal Party and the lack of financial commitment for the arts in policies of the conservative party Moderaterna, which has seriously challenged the assumptions of state support for artists. In Uppsala, there is one gallery run by an organization connected to the Social Democrats, the Konstsfrämjandet. Established in 1992 out of a similar voluntary
organization, Art Promotion (with 31 member organizations) is part of the Labor Movement. One important goal is to attract as many people as possible to a gallery with art that can be understood and that is affordable. In contrast to most other galleries, many of the participating artists have not been professionally trained. The artists exhibited are paid 5000 kronor but pay 40 percent to the gallery for each piece of work that is sold, still less than what is taken by the private gallery. Since most of those involved are older and retired, there is now an effort to involve younger artists – and a younger audience for the arts. There is also a gallery of the Artists’ Association in Uppsala with about 100 members (Uppsala Konstnärsklubb). The members officially belong to the KRO, the Visual Artists Association or the Arts and Crafts Association, and they also pay dues to this organization. Members tend to concentrate on developments in the art world, rather than on the so-called union rights, though the Association does apply for grants. An artist exhibiting in this gallery receives 1000 kronor and pays nothing if a work is sold.

The decentralization of decision-making about cultural expenditures may have given cultural issues a new salience in local politics. On the one hand, the central state, which in Norway is doing well financially, has with its new Cultural Policy taken nearly complete responsibility for the funding of certain selected ‘national’ institutions in Norway – some symphony orchestras, museums, and so on in order to make sure they are properly maintained. But aside from these, one informant believed, it is in the cultural field that city politicians can attract attention because so much of health policy and educational policy is determined by the state. As a consequence, decisions about cultural supports become part of local politics.

In Bergen, funding for culture represents about 2 percent of the operating budget of the city (though some informants disputed this figure as too high, a discrepancy that may depend on different definitions of ‘culture’). There is a chance – and some fear – that this proportion may be reduced in the future since during the next few years educational facilities must be expanded because of a rise in the number of school-age children, a development that could lead to cuts in the culture budget. However, the head of the municipality’s Department of Culture envisioned no particular change in the support for culture, at least under a social democratic government. ‘It is only the far right parties, which are very weak in Norway, that seriously challenge the social democratic policy on the arts. . . . They are like the right in your country [United States] on the subject, although they
represent a much smaller percentage of the population. Otherwise, there is consensus here – even with some minor differences – about the importance of support.’21

Despite the concerns mentioned above, there are some indications that the relation between the municipality and the artists has even improved over the years. As the city of Bergen restored its public spaces, streets, and houses, and became a candidate for a ‘European City of Culture’, it reached out to the artists. It is in this sense that the artists believed there was a greater understanding of the contribution that artists make. During this period, the former head of the Hordaland Association of Fine Artists joined with independent artists and groups of all kinds to develop a Culture Plan for the city and met with members of the Board and the political head of the social democratic party in the city council to discuss their concerns. In 1998, the administrative head of the Nordaland Kunstnersentrum experienced ongoing cooperation and support by the representatives of the Board. Yet their support for culture and the visual arts has been disputed by the present head of the Hordaland Artists’ Center. In fact, he concluded that funding for culture by Bergen has been reduced.22 He has received support for his evaluation from one of the most important Employers’ Associations in the country.23

How then are municipal expenditures for the arts allocated?24 In Bergen, the City Council appoints a Board of 11 members to oversee the municipality’s activities in the areas of culture and leisure. Its composition reflects the percentage of the vote the parties received in the elections. The head of the Board, when a social democrat, for example, is also the political leader of the social democratic party in Bergen. All grant applications, project proposals, educational innovations, and so on, which are submitted by the City’s Cultural Department, are acted on by the Board. In the Department of Culture, there are special councilors with art, music, and other specialties as well as advisory committees, for example on public art projects, which include artists or architects and evaluate proposals. The Board that makes the final decisions, however, is composed of politicians.

Professional artists, museums, and theater groups, as well as semi-professional and amateur groups compete for funding. Some administration officials are concerned about the fact that once a particular group gets support, it is very difficult to reduce it. If funding is eventually reduced, the artists’ associations go to the politicians and attempt to get their money back. So do other more vocal groups, and some of these may be amateur or semi-professional groups, whose competition causes
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great resentment among professional artists. This is an issue which is now being much discussed in the municipality.

Administrators and artists working in the museums, in private galleries, and in the Artists’ Center all complain about how difficult it is to attract a large audience for the arts. They believe that people in Bergen are not used to spending money for art, not used to seeing innovative work; if they do buy art, they travel to Oslo or purchase work abroad, rather than support local artists. Although these artists want to create an innovative and interesting art community, they are faced with a struggle that, except for most of the private galleries, is moderated by the subsidies they receive.

When all complications are taken into account, however, public support makes a significant difference to the arts as a whole. Artists, theater people, and symphonic groups are somewhat less pressured to adjust to the comfort of their audience than in a more exclusively market system, and attending the performances and exhibits is less prohibitive because the price of the tickets is more moderate. Market pressures do indeed exist but they are not quite as intrusive as in places where there are no subsidies at all.

Public supports and creativity

Does public subsidy for the arts imply state control of the arts? The short answer to this question is, no. The actions of the state are mediated and monitored by a complex network of artistic associations. The multiplicity of decision points about public support, recently enhanced by the decentralization policy, makes the imposition of a single vision impossible. Furthermore, the prevailing conceptions of state and culture accord culture an autonomy that is incompatible with administrators or politicians simply imposing their will on art.

Direct control of artistic output has not been a goal of the Norwegian and Swedish systems of support. In any system, though, where decisions are being made, there will be an inclination to favor projects that make sense to those evaluating them. If a municipality funds an amateur project that involves adolescents, it is because it believes it important to incorporate adolescents in organizational activities. If the state supports a modern dance group in Bergen (the Nye Carte Blanche dance company) and insists it remain in Bergen rather than setting up permanently in Oslo (the capital, where there are more people involved in the arts and where the members of the group may prefer to be), it is because there is
a belief in the decentralization of artistic activity in order to allow greater access to the arts.

However, it would be most unusual to interfere with the productions themselves, to close an event once funding is granted. Art does arouse antagonism and conflict, and there have been objections and even revulsion about a particular performance or exhibit. The Nye Carte Blanche dance group, to return to a company just mentioned, was commissioned to put on a dance program in a region of Norway as part of a celebration of 1000 years of Christianity. The manifest sexuality of the performance resulted in a scandal, and the performance was dropped from the millennial program. It continued, however, with the opening of the dance season in Bergen. There was also a discussion about an exhibit that took place in early summer of 1995 in a new gallery, which had received some subsidy from the city. The object of criticism was the immodest form in which modern technology was criticized and ridiculed. But there was no question of closing the exhibition itself.

In Sweden, there were a number of exhibits connected with Stockholm’s designation as a European City of Culture. An exhibit at the History Museum of photographs of young naked boys was taken down by a group of young Nazis. Later, one of the artists who participated also showed work at the Moderna Museet that upset a number of people who were worried about legitimating pedophiles. But no further action was taken.

An intense, though very different in kind, debate erupted in Norway about a project that was to bring the work of sculptors from a number of countries to smaller cities and towns in the north, supported in part by the local communities. The project, Skulptur Landskap Nordland, evoked discussion about whether communities should spend that kind of money on art, even on permanent art constructions, what the appropriate art should be, whether these ‘international’ artists use up money that could be made available to local artists, and so on. The population was divided and reacted strongly to some of the proposals; many politicians needed to be convinced to support the project. In one town, the bureaucrats called on artists to help them decide but the artists were unorganized and, the politicians claimed, unable to articulate their ideas. In the summer of 1995, the artworks themselves became a major tourist attraction, which increased local pride in the international project.

An independent, subsidized initiative of seven Bergen artists, who took one of the ships leaving each day for communities in the north, could be thought of as a tiny follow-up to this much larger, permanent exhibit. Through building temporary forms with materials they could take
with them on the boat, the artists captured the attention of townspeople and of children who worked with them. They were invited into schools to talk to and work with the children. This reception was prepared by the initial, much larger effort. Its initial dubious reception and the ensuing controversy brought the debate about contemporary art into the public sphere and to the attention of many people for the first time.

Does public support diminish or even stifle creativity? I encountered some criticism of the supports artists take for granted (including criticism from owners of private galleries and a museum director), their expectations of ongoing support, and the casual attitude of some of the artists in trying to produce and sell their art. There was also mention of the smallness of the country, and the reluctance of some artists to put forth their work, to push it as something special, to produce intensely, and to try and make a grand career with a broader and larger audience; this was said to reinforce a national Norwegian trait, a norm not to put oneself forth as someone special. However, the involvement in the art world, the intensity of the public debate about art, the fights about philosophy, education of the young, and the quality of art that is exhibited indicate an art world that is alive and creative.

The issue of freedom for artistic innovation has always involved generational differences. Many young artists believe they have to struggle to do their own work. Exploring differences in generational perspectives helps us in gaining a more differentiated understanding of the issues of public support and creativity.

**Generational perspectives**

It is the artists’ associations that through their committees on the national and local levels recommend the funding of grants of all kinds. Several local administrators and gallery owners, and some young artists have suggested that these committees stifle the production of art because they support the established, rather than the innovative; they support what they know, rather than what is different. This is the complaint of especially some of the younger artists in relation to the established institutions, even the Kunstnersentrum, the Artists’ Center in Bergen, which the artists run themselves. Though these complaints were contradicted by a number of people involved in the arts, including a prominent art historian and curator at a private museum as well as by younger artists, who thought that it was in the Artists’ Centers where innovative and not popular art could be shown, the complaints themselves throw an interesting perspective on the welfare state.
There are only a few private galleries in Bergen, a city which has a number of impressive museums and art schools. One of them was started by a recent graduate of the Academy of Arts. First alone and then with two of his friends, he applied to the municipality to begin a new kind of gallery, one that could be more political, more critical, one that could create the very kind of exhibit mentioned above, the exhibit dealing with the effects of technology. He managed to receive about $8000 from the city, which would pay for renting a space for several months. His complaint about the Artists' Center was that it took too long to get exhibited there, that it was necessary to go through too many hurdles, and that it exhibited good art, but not the kind he wanted to show. He claimed that younger artists would leave Bergen if they could not get help from the city.

This artist did not feel the need to join the regional Artists' Center in Bergen nor the regional artists’ association because he belonged to the Association of Young Artists, one of the subgroups of the national Association of Visual Artists, where he intended to remain, ‘forever’. Among the supports that are important to him are legal counsel free of charge in case of difficulty with a gallery and receiving a loan in emergency, among other services.

The organizer of the new gallery saw himself as an artist working his way in a complicated world in order to survive. He worked in a mental institution when he found the time, he worked setting up exhibitions in a museum, he had received unemployment compensation until recently, an emergency loan from the Association of Young Artists, a subsidy from the city for the gallery, and most recently, a position through a special fund for the unemployed in the cultural field (which in his case meant director of his gallery with a regular salary for an arranged period, usually ten months with the prospect of renewal). Yet he did not connect the supports with social democratic party policy and believed all the parties, except for the far right would carry on the same supports for the arts. He took these for granted. From his perspective, the efforts to create a new gallery – and his place in the art world – were difficult and involved effort and much entrepreneurship.

Two of the older people I spoke with at the Kunstnersentrum reacted strongly against what they both thought of as a certain lack of loyalty on the part of such young artists. One, a former head of the Arts and Crafts Association, criticized them for forgetting the early battles of the Association and what they had achieved. Another stated that both the educational qualifications and the increasing professionalization of the Association made it more difficult to be accepted now. The fact that there
were so many more students wishing to study art also meant less easy entrance into the art academies and the profession and an additional challenge to the Artists’ Association which strives to maintain the same level of support.

During a later talk, a young woman who studied art history and was now working part-time as an administrator at the Artists’ Center indicated that the earlier discussions with the older women active in the Association taught her some things about which she had previously no idea. She added:

I was astonished at H.’s political commitment. It was another generation. They fought for something. We take it but it doesn’t mean anything. Now, it is hard to get a job. . . . I was very lucky to get this. Apartments and housing are expensive, and we still have to pay back school loans. If I wanted to have a child, it would be hard. I take the welfare state for granted, but I am critical.

Finally, there tend to be some generational differences about what it means ‘to be political’. The older artists referred to their political work, how they shaped and created a new relation between the state and the artists, and how they as artists took their place along with all the others whose work contributed to a more decent society. Some of the young artists also saw themselves as political; but for them this meant that their art expressed deep criticism of the society and brought to public attention the enormity of existing social problems. The older artists, they thought, who had once fought political battles, were working in old forms, more aesthetic, abstract, and more formalist in orientation. But I also heard older artists, who remained active in the Association, mention that art was important for challenging social assumptions. Actually, most of the people working in the Artists’ Center were quite young, and the organizers of the new independent gallery said they had good friends working there. It seems that for the younger artists, the new gallery and other similar experiments31 add to the diversity and the excitement of the art community in Bergen, though they note that the decision-making in the private galleries is not democratic in the same way that it is in the Artists’ Center and that the supports for travel and fees for the artists’ exhibits are not sufficient.32 The older artists are more concerned with maintaining the power of the Association in dealing with the local government, because they believe that in the long run, they achieve more as a united group than as a diversified string of applicants who have to sell themselves to the municipality.
On the other hand, the head of the Board of the Artists’ Center, who had been active in the ‘1970s’ battle, stressed that there was a real problem that had to be resolved, that more funds were needed for cultural supports, and that some of the artists had truly legitimate complaints, even with the extensive system of supports in place in Norway.

Professionalization of support decisions

In any system of public support the question of who decides about the allocation of funds is a central issue, critical for the legitimacy of the support system and for its objective consequences. Recent developments have brought these questions again to the fore.

Since the establishment of the artists’ organizations in Norway, artists received most of the positions on boards and committees that dealt with the exhibition and purchase of art, as well as the stipends awarded to groups and individual artists. For a long period of time, there were relatively few art historians dealing with contemporary art. All this has changed in the past few years, and the control artists have over decisions in the art world has been challenged by art historians and curators, who claim that they know the collections better than the artists and that they are professionally trained to take on this decision-making. The artists’ associations themselves have come under increasing pressure to maintain and demand a high professional quality from its members. And, as mentioned above, the educational qualifications for entrance into art school have also become more extensive.

Art historians and curators claim they are primarily oriented to the quality of the artwork they consider for exhibition, purchase, and so on; there is also an interest in getting work, rewarding professional positions, and power. In addition to these specialists who are becoming more powerful, art administrators have considerable say about funding, and bureaucrats press for representation on significant committees. Tensions revolve around which works are shown and especially which new works are bought by the museums. One major fight involved the Museum for Contemporary Art in Oslo. There the artists, who insist on being well represented when art is evaluated, left the committee in anger when its composition changed.33

Ironically, it is the contemporary artists and their allied associations who are now being accused of representing a clique, and not only by the young new gallery owner mentioned above who criticized Norwegian ‘gatekeepers’ for not rewarding innovative work. These conflicts exist in the Bergen museum world as well. On one board, shared by two of the
museums, the artists had succeeded for several years in constituting a majority of the members of the committee that decided on purchases, although not on governing the museum. According to one municipal administrator, the curators and museum administrators now make the major decisions and also have more influence than the artists on the decisions of the politicians with respect to the arts. Negotiating the tensions among these groups is an important task of the officials of the Norwegian Artists’ Association, some of whom may be more sanguine about power-sharing than many of the artists they represent. A recent head of the NBK left the organization after attempting to initiate certain reforms; a new board was elected to address economic and other issues.34

The KRO in Sweden, in response to past criticism about pressing for particular interests on the committees and boards in which it participated, now suggests that its main function is to negotiate with the government and press for good working conditions for artists. Furthermore, it recognizes the importance of quality and maintains that it is important to have ‘good’ artists on the committees that are concerned with whom to support. It recognizes that these artists may or may not be affiliated with the KRO. The organization’s representation in important committees dealing with the purchase of art or grants has been considerably reduced over the years. The choice of seven artists (out of thirteen members) serving on the Visual Arts Fund’s committee came from proposals made by three organizations, including the KRO. It has recently been decided to accept proposals from a number of organizations, perhaps as many as 30. The traditional corporate negotiation that characterized such decisions has been considerably transformed.

Conclusion

Alice Goldfarb Marquis warns in her recent book Art Lessons – On the Rise and Fall of Public Arts Funding in America of the dangers of supports for artists: ‘When grants prop up artists unable to attract audiences, individuals with limited abilities persist, crowding out superior talents.’ She argues that the best will not move ‘in new directions when they can depend on government entitlements to support the same old activities’ (1995: 250–1). In Norway and Sweden, most political groups, except for the most conservative parties on the right, Fremskrittspartiet in Norway and the conservative Moderaterna in Sweden, as well as most intellectuals believe exactly the opposite, even while recognizing the value of some form of private sponsorship. There is widespread confidence that the
welfare state will not turn its back on the production of art and that its supports will not blunt creativity. Art is too important to be left to the market. Indeed, it is the market, it is claimed, that encourages homogeneity because it finds the formulas that appeal to the broadest common denominator in the population and uses them again and again. A description of the goals of the Swedish Riksdag in 1996 includes this formulation: ‘to promote cultural pluralism, artistic renewal and quality, thereby counteracting the negative effects of commercialism’. That does not mean that there is no pressure to attract a substantial audience to cultural events; indeed, directors of cultural institutions are well aware of such expectations. But faced with the increased use and the internationalization of programs on television and radio and the greater opportunities for leisure activities, the state is called upon to protect the freedom of the artists and to insure that its citizens are also able to experience that which is not familiar, and not supported by most people.

State, regional, and municipal support for the arts has been embedded in the social welfare state. Involvement in and access to the arts are considered part of the ‘common good’, and a re-enforcement of the values of social democratic societies. Support is considered crucial in these countries – for creativity and for promotion of their culture inside the country and abroad. The State in Norway and Sweden (as well as in Denmark) is responsible for 40–50 percent of public cultural expenditure.

Organized artists fought for and attained many of the benefits they now have. The regional Artists’ Centers in Norway and the artist-run galleries in Sweden, for example, show art which might not easily sell on the private market. A number of mature artists are fully supported, though even in Norway the continuity of this support is being debated. Artists’ associations have decision-making power with respect to grants and the purchase of art.

At the same time, art institutions in Norway and Sweden have evolved somewhat differently. In particular, the Association of Visual Artists in Norway has a more developed financial base and, even with the changes that have taken place, it has a stronger voice with respect to policies affecting the arts and funding for the arts than does its Swedish counterpart. Furthermore, the Norwegian Artists’ Centers, which provide a myriad of opportunities, are more developed.

The power of the artists’ associations and the support artists receive are challenged in different ways. There has been an increase in the number of art historians and curators knowledgeable about contemporary art.
They, together with art administrators, challenge some of the assumptions of power artists taken for granted, while the artists see themselves as more knowledgeable, especially compared to the art administrators. And politicians are also involved in defining what is important to support and which priorities cultural funding should address; in this, local differences may be considerable. Younger artists have also challenged the official artists’ associations by opening up private galleries and approaching the municipality for funding. Similarly, amateur and semi-professional groups and individuals request funding from art administrators who are seen by the older and more professional artists as not adequately oriented toward professional work.

Most artists worry about making a living, whether they will manage to get grants to allow them the time they need to work, or whether they will be able to sell the works that are exhibited. They take the political constellation of the state – and its supports – for granted but are critical of its deficiencies. A segment expresses increasingly individualistic sentiments. But though this may in the long run threaten the political cohesiveness of artists, it is the decentralization not of access nor of the ‘democratization’ of culture but the decentralization of funding that is most problematic for the future support of their work. This decentralization has gone further and is longer institutionalized in Sweden. Though the impact of this process varies, there is concern among those involved with culture on the municipal and regional levels that the traditional support for the visual arts may weaken in the competition for resources among various constituencies.

If there is difficulty in legitimating funding for art in comparison to other important needs, the strong role of the visual arts in the cultural life of the nation may diminish. Yet most of the political parties recognize the important role of art. The social democratic welfare states attempt to broaden constituencies for the arts, provide access to it in places that are relatively isolated, and narrow the gap between the creators and the audience. Artists here as in other political-economic systems may push for more openness toward their creations and reject the conventional expectations of their audiences. And if they are pressured ‘to go it alone’, to compromise in order to be exhibited, they may be responsive to tastes other than their own creative inclinations. Individual artists, most gallery owners, and museum directors feel the need to attract a substantial audience. But generous subsidies are important for their confidence as artists and artistic managers. Their associations strive for support for visual artists, for recognition that their work is important. The associations are effective, and especially in Norway retain an important role in
councils and other decision-making bodies that decide about cultural policy and funding for the arts.

The relation between the art world and the state in these two Nordic welfare states is characterized by tensions, important changes over time, and differences between the two countries. Yet both present a picture that is very different from the situation in the United States and western European countries. While they encourage artists to seek success in the private market, they give more direct public support to the arts than most western European and North American countries. It is difficult to arrive at comparative assessments of public support overall, but it seems important to single out direct state support and to separate it from the indirect support through tax rebates for private supporters, which is most developed in the United States. Direct support creates a different relationship between the state and the arts. For many, it raises the specter of state control.

In Norway and Sweden, public support for the arts does not lead to direct control of the art that is produced. Even given the conservative artistic ideas of some politicians and of many people who look at art and think of what should be supported, the debates are open, intense, and lively, rather than oriented toward artistic control. Art is viewed as a common good that has its own integrity and autonomy. In its very conception, art is seen as an endeavor that would be critical of existing institutions. These views protect art from controlling interference, be it of a moralist or a political kind, even though Norwegian and Swedish politicians are as responsive to popular sentiments as politicians in any democratic country. Such responsiveness takes the form of seeking to develop broad access to the arts rather than controlling interference. In fact, it seems that granting policy in Norway has recently supported even greater individualization of artistic production and taste.

Finally, these two Nordic states are set apart from other countries by the peculiarly close relation between associations and the state. Associations are not just pressure groups for artistic interests; they also act as immediately helpful institutions. They are a part of the overall support system for artists. Such cooperation between state and civil society organizations is a characteristic feature of the Nordic version of democratic corporatism.

Notes

1. I am most grateful to my colleagues at the Rhode Island School of Design for their interest and support of this project, to members of the Department of
Administration and Organization Theory at the University of Bergen, Norway, for their warm hospitality, and to Vibeke Erichsen, Dag Sveen, Marit Bakke, Svein Bjørkås, and Kari Dahn Sælen for their suggestions and help. The subsequent research in Sweden was done in fall 2000, while I was a fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences. Barbro Klein and Björn Wittrock were enormously helpful both in discussion and in their efforts to bring me in contact with a number of people engaged in art and cultural work. Gudrun Dahl, Helena Wolff, and Johan Söderberg all discussed and commented on various aspects of the project.

The earlier research in Norway was conducted mainly in the summer of 1995 and completed in the winter of 1996. I returned for a short visits in 1997, 1998, and 2000. My respondents included the owners of three private galleries, the acting director of the Bergen Fine Arts Society (Kunstforeningen), the head of the Board of the Hordaland Artists’ Center, two administrators of the Center, three directors of the Center, the head and former head of the Hordaland Association of Fine Artists, two representatives from the Association of Arts and Craft Practitioners, four administrators from the Bergen municipality, including the head of the Culture Department, an employee of the Labor Party serving as a member of the municipal board on Culture, three General Secretaries of the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists, the Chair of the Norwegian Artists’ Council, two art historians in Bergen and Oslo specializing in contemporary art, and the Cultural Attaché at the Norwegian embassy in the United States. An earlier version of this chapter contrasting Norwegian and American state supports for the arts appeared in the Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society (Rueschemeyer, 1997). I would like to thank the Journal for permission to use passages of that earlier article. My respondents in Sweden during fall 2000 included the head of the Artists’ Union (KRO) in Uppsala, the head of the Cultural Department of Uppsala, a Board member of the Uppsala Konstársklubb, an employee of Art Promotion in Uppsala, the director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm, the Secretary General of the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts, the head of the Department of Arts, Museums, and Exhibitions at the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs, the Secretary of the Visual Arts Fund, the General Secretary of the KRO and the editor of its magazine, Konstnären, as well as with a journalist with Swedish Radio who has done work on art in the Nordic countries. I am very grateful to all these informants.

2. One of the artists I interviewed who received this guaranteed income, a weaver in Bergen, does some outside work because the income she receives from the State is not quite enough. She and other grant recipients have to submit a report every year and show their work every three years in order to have the support continue. In 1997, the new minister of culture, Birkeland, developed a long-term plan to reduce life-stipends and encourage members of the artistic establishment to turn further to the market. Furthermore, the ‘automatic’ art school grant would be replaced by stipends for the most promising graduates. In a recent report on artists in Nordic countries, the author noted that while 260–70 mature artists received that guarantee in Norway (until the age of 67), there were 45 government income guarantees in Sweden and no retirement subsidies in the same year (Thurfjell, 2000: p. 3 of summary).

4. Interview with Agneta Westlund, Department of Arts, Museums and Exhibitions, Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs.
5. Interview with Jon Øien, then General Secretary of the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists.
6. Information from Carl-Morten Iversen, the then Chair of the Norwegian Artists’ Council.
7. Interview with Martin Wall, Secretary General of the KRO and Jan Nordwall, editor of Konstnären.
8. Interview with Lars Olof Gustavson, Secretary, The Swedish Visual Arts Fund.
10. The one area of Norway where this change has not taken place is in the North, where one artists’ center for three regions is supported by the state.
11. For an interesting discussion of local government from a more general perspective, see Offerdal (1995).
12. The force for decentralization of the arts comes from the State but is also supported by independent artists who want to create an interesting and innovative artistic community where they live or in other peripheral communities, and it comes from amateur and semi-professional groups of all kinds who want the support to engage in creative activities on their own level.
13. One issue of concern is maintaining the agreement on public art, which provides work for many artists. Ideally, though this is not always realized, 1.5–2 percent of the building funds for large construction is to be spent on public art. Sweden has similar regulations insuring that 1 percent of the funds for public buildings is spent on art, though here, too, this goal is not always fully realized.
15. Interview with Kerstin Sjögren Fleischer, head of Uppsala’s Cultural Department.
16. The establishment of the Foundation Culture of the Future in 1994 was seen as an attempt by the non-socialist government in Sweden to implement a cultural policy in which quality and creativity were to be the most important elements of its funding policy. For an analysis of subsequent developments, see Nyhagen Predelli and Baklien (2003).
17. On a broader level, the political right in Sweden is more generally skeptical about intervention by the welfare state than their Norwegian counterparts (Svallfors, 1999: 260).
18. One of the Board members noted that since the 1980s, artists in Uppsala are receiving less help and that cultural funds are targeted elsewhere.
19. This policy was presented in the Department of Culture: ‘Kultur i Tiden’ (Culture in the Present Time) St. meld. nr. 61 (1991–92).
20. Interview with a municipal planner and administrator.
21. Interview with Björn Holmvik, Department of Culture, Bergen municipality.
22. Interview with Geir Kragseth (2000). Even if the differences with respect to the arts among the political parties seem to be less significant than in Sweden, with elections on the regional level of a center-led government, there was fear that funding for the arts would be reduced.
24. For background on the Bergen administration and culture, see Hanson (1993).
25. An internationally known ‘figurative artist’, Odd Nerdrum, had been refused support over the years. In response to criticism, two professorships in figurative arts were established in Oslo. This was received with anger because they were so specifically defined, and in the end, Nerdrum failed to receive the professorship.


27. Interview with Beate Sydhoff, Secretary General of the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts.

28. This trait is thought of by some as a characteristic of the ‘Norwegian mentality’ though it was also clear that there were quite a few ‘exceptions’, artists who have no hesitation in promoting themselves and marketing their work.

29. In one study, several young artists indicated distrust of mixing arts with ‘non-artistic concerns and activities, such as trade union activities, democratic promotion of the arts to the “non-public,” arts education among youth and children, or market oriented activities.’ Interestingly, Mangset (1998: 63) notes that much of the youth opposition and critique within the visual arts in Norway seems to have developed in the art academy in Bergen.

30. A number of the supports for young artists to work in art institutions, including new galleries, were heavily reduced after there were more possibilities for employment. Such funds are now given to new projects for a limited period of time. The Kunstnersentrum hired one of the young people involved in an ‘alternative’ gallery for its administration. After a period of time, the older people dropped out. The administrative head in 1998, Kari Kleppe, saw the return of the older people as important for the younger artists as well, important for ‘artistic’ discussion to take place, important for the ‘comment’ younger artists are able to make. In addition to including more older artists in exhibits, Kleppe hoped to include more younger people on boards (interview with Kleppe, 1998).

31. A former sardine factory, for example, has been rebuilt with a mixture of private and government funds, to include a cinema, exhibition and conference space, studios, as well as a restaurant.

32. Artists are paid approximately the equivalent $1500 for a three-month exhibit, which may move to more than one region in the country.

33. Interview with Carl-Morten Iversen, former Chair of the Norwegian Artists’ Council. Svein Bjørkås (in an interview) claims that the political position of the artists’ associations has weakened, that its leaders have to lobby hard to gain access to the ministry and politicians, and that they can no longer take for granted their former positions as exclusive negotiators for the artists and for policies on the arts.

34. For a more detailed discussion of some of the issues debated, see Norsk Kunstårbok (1998).


37. The proposal to increase Artists’ grants in Norway (as a percentage of the Ministry of Culture’s total budget, from 4.6 percent in 1985 to 7.4 percent in 2000) reflects a willingness to address the traditional difficulties of individual artists (Bakke, 2001: 29).
38. Interestingly, the introduction to *Swedish Cultural Policy* included the following: ‘Most people in Sweden . . . accept . . . that limits affecting the arts need to be clearly defined by legislation: for example, at what point an utterance of deliberately offensive opinion, or a video depicting simulated violence exploits and injures the general principle of free expression’ (*Swedish Cultural Policy*, 1997: 7).
For 40 years after World War II and for 70 years after World War I, communist rule established a relationship between the arts, the state, and the society – first in the Soviet Union and later in the eastern European countries – that differed radically from the place of art in the capitalist west and from the lines of historical development which had shaped European art for many generations. Since the nineteenth century, art and artists had become more and more emancipated from particular patrons and oriented to the market. In the process, autonomy for individual expression increased greatly, while innovation and experimentation became norms that dominated critical discourse as well as the upper-end marketplace. Artistic developments in the Soviet Union as well as in eastern Europe after World War II took off from this modern experimental art of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. But the thrust of communist rule and its transformations over time gave art a place in politics and society that was radically at odds with central tendencies of modern art, which included the premium on experimental innovation and, at least for a significant minority, the critique of established culture and society.

Now the state, the party, and their organizations were to become the new patrons of the arts. And art was to pursue public tasks. It was to speak to the working people and not only to an aesthetically educated elite. It was to articulate the goals of social transformation and, increasingly, praise the emerging status quo. Eventually, it was to submit to a political control that became as concerned with the maintenance of power as with the construction of a new society. Yet this conception of art and society inevitably created dilemmas that were productive of tension and, in the long run, of change. If the egalitarian idea of working for a broadened audience had appeal, the values of the craft of art as well as
esoteric standards established in the development of modern art did not become irrelevant for many artists. The critique of culture and society was not easily forgotten, even if many were willing to join in the creation of a new society. And if artists embraced the public place of art as well as the patronage that offered them a secure living, these came with burdensome controls.

There were great differences in the art worlds of eastern Europe during the communist period. After the death of Stalin, artists in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia (at least until the end of the Prague Spring) had more possibilities for developing their work, more exposure outside their countries, and greater toleration from the state than artists in the other countries of eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union itself and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) of East Germany. This chapter will concentrate on developments in the GDR but will incorporate a few glances at related events and changes that have taken place in Poland and in the Czech Republic. It will examine the role of art and artists during the communist period as well as the changes in the art world that came about after the collapse of communism. The issues that arose in the transition to a more market-oriented economy and a more pluralist politics are not only instructive about the emerging new situation of art and artists but also throw a revealing light on the place of art in the state socialist GDR.

The chapter will first offer a brief background sketch of the visual arts in eastern Germany and the important institutions of art that shaped the experiences of artists during the communist period. It will then address the transformations that took place in the art institutions themselves and in the production of art during the 1970s and the 1980s before unification took place. The final section of the chapter discusses the changes that have taken place since 1990 and their implications for the supports artists receive, their relation to viewers, buyers, and sponsors, and their self-understanding of what it means to be an artist in the east of the newly unified Germany. These changes are of interest in themselves but also for what they tell us about the old system and its legacies.

The transformations in the polity and economy of the former GDR after the end of communism differed from the processes of transition in other eastern European countries. After unification, eastern Germany became part of the Federal Republic of Germany and took on its political and economic structures as well as many of its social institutions. That does not mean that the forms that evolved, and the norms and expectations of different groups in east German society were simple replicas of those in western Germany but the boundaries of transformation were much more
defined in advance than those in Poland or the Czech Republic. Still, we believe that examining the changes in the world of art in eastern Germany before and after the events of 1989–90 can tell us a good deal about the relations between the arts, the state and the society under communism.

The beginnings of the GDR and the visual arts

Although the GDR was created after the fall of Nazism, its artists inherited not only the immediate past of heroic and sentimental art, but sought roots in the Weimar Republic and in traditions of much earlier periods, for example in the realism of nineteenth-century painting. In 1946, after the end of World War II and the defeat of the Nazi regime, artists who had been persecuted by the Nazis were exhibited in Dresden and Berlin. Art produced in the first part of the twentieth century could now be shown. The work of expressionists, of former members of the Association of Revolutionary Artists of Germany (ASSO), which existed from 1928 to 1933, as well as artists identified with other artistic movements of the pre-Nazi period now represented the new Germany, the new start for both the east and west. But by 1949, the diversity that existed in eastern Germany was seriously threatened. The impact of the Soviet Union and the tensions of the Cold War gave strong support to those sympathetic to socialist realism, and they, along with others who just conformed to the new political demands, took over positions of power in East German art institutions and academies.

The interests of many artists in gaining exposure, commissions, and positions, led them to turn away from styles that could be criticized as Western, or formalistic. Others emigrated. Ironically some of those who now left for western Europe were artists and writers who had fled Nazi Germany and returned to East Germany, some during the McCarthy period, only to experience severe criticism of their work. And it was only after the death of Stalin in 1953 that the political pressures on the artists were eased. The period of Khruschev raised hopes for greater artistic freedom from state control throughout the Soviet bloc (Rueschemeyer et al., 1985). In the GDR, artists such as Willi Sitte, Bernhard Heisig, and Werner Tübke turned to more individualist forms of realism. They became the typical representatives of GDR art abroad in the 1970s and 1980s, though there was also other work that appeared more impressionist, decorative, and expressionist in style. But one cannot speak of a simple liberalizing of the arts after the Stalinist period. There were setbacks and tensions in both the Soviet Union and the GDR. And, as we shall see in the case of the GDR, these led to concerted efforts by the artists themselves
to challenge state assumptions and control of the arts, to achieve more openness and autonomy in their work.

At the outset, GDR officials wanted the public to be exposed to art that would reeducate them out of their old, reactionary views and increase their general aesthetic understanding. Art was to be embedded in popular culture and accessible to the people. A common culture was to be created through wide participation in amateur clubs of all kinds and through broadened exposure to exhibitions, which included art shows in some enterprises and talks at the place of work as well as work collective excursions to exhibitions. Though there is little question that the general educational level was increased, with few exceptions school children had no exposure to more contemporary art forms and were taught the established positions. It is probably fair to say that despite the efforts to create a common culture, GDR intellectuals and artists created and supported more complex forms of the arts (Rueschemeyer, 1991) than were supported by the broader public.

Erich Honecker, after becoming the first secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in 1971, declared at a talk to the Central Committee that provided one started from the standpoint of socialism, there could be no taboos in art and literature, neither in content nor in style. Honecker was responding to pressures from writers and artists as well as to more general demands for greater economic and social improvement. From that point on, developments in the arts in the GDR reflected the ongoing tensions between these pressures and the self-defined needs of bureaucracies and ideologies.

Organizing the arts in the German Democratic Republic

The responsibility for policy on the arts, museums, and exhibitions as well as for the allocation of important funding was, following the model of the Soviet Union, given to the Ministry of Culture. Together with the Artists' Union, it shaped the institutional world of GDR art and provided patronage; both were linked to the leading SED. Both Hans Joachim Hoffmann, minister for culture in the 1970s and 1980s, and Willi Sitte, who was head of the Union until 1988, were members of the Central Committee of the SED. Exhibitions and sales took place in 35 national galleries. The Kulturbund, a cultural umbrella organization, sponsored lectures, exhibits in small galleries, amateur circles of a variety of sorts, and hobby groups. These activities often took place in the Kulturhäuser or club houses, which were created all over the region in an effort to relate culture to a broader audience; the scope and quality of their offerings to the public varied.
The union played a particularly important role because it negotiated collective or individual contracts for socially important art such as monuments and murals commissioned by various social organizations, enterprises, and the state. The cultural work of the Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB), the national organization of labor unions, included such contracts with industry and culture. The Offices of Fine Arts in the 15 district governments were also important sponsors. These were part of the department of culture in each district administration. Artists generally worked through the district branches of their union section to receive commissions, contracts, interest-free loans, and other benefits.

The union enforced official policy on the arts, but it also mediated between official policy and the demands of the artists. Eighty percent of the artists in the GDR joined the union as candidates after graduating from art school. Aside from greater access to jobs and studios, union membership also offered a number of other benefits, including access to vacation houses. As in other eastern bloc countries, even with the differences that existed among them, conformity to prevailing norms was a criterion for the broad exposure of one’s art as well as the other benefits that came with being a member of an official artistic community.

Galleries were run by a variety of institutions, including both the national and city governments, the Artists’ Union, the Kulturbund, and subordinate political parties such as the Christian Democratic Party. None were privately owned, though by the 1970s semi-private distribution alternatives were created. Increasingly, they were to show work that appealed to a variety of tastes, so that artists with some diversity in style could gain exposure. Artists still had to be aggressive in cultivating connections to institutions and organizations sponsoring artwork, and in obtaining commissions, even if they got some help through the mediating activities of the Artists’ Union. Sometimes a museum, a factory, or a city government commissioned a piece of art which if uncomfortable for the audience or the politicians, was simply stored. Though complicated to arrange, it was advantageous for artists to sell their work abroad, not only for the foreign currency earned (artists retained only about 15 percent of what they earned in western currency), but for foreign recognition.

Changes in the 1970s and 1980s

As mentioned above, even quite significant changes toward greater diversity were marked with reversals and accompanied by intense concern about consequences. But over the years, artists who were first considered
unacceptable were invited into the union in an effort to integrate young and innovative artists. The union was pulled in the direction of what it saw as its traditional responsibilities and was pulled as well toward some response to new developments in the outside art world. Aside from artistic predilection, those who attained positions of power and privilege reinforced what was then considered acceptable art. Willi Sitte’s work was seen as innovative and new at the beginning of the 1970s after Honecker came to power. Later, however, he became a symbol of stagnation in his artistic style and philosophy, and in 1988 he lost his position as head of the Union. Yet it was Willi Sitte who articulated the call for an open discussion of differences and mutual respect as well as greater participation of artists in financial decisions and aesthetic concerns. Over the years, the possibility for travel abroad increased, and some artists were given permission to work in the west while retaining their GDR passports. The district elections that preceded the 1988 Union National Congress indicated that changes in the formal structure were likely to take place, though those elected did not all have an interest in developing alternative policies. Still, nearly half of those who were elected were new and many of those had no party affiliation. And the elections at the Union National Congress resulted in a new head and the replacement of vice-presidents, reflecting again the successful organizational efforts of union members to increase flexibility and openness.

Aside from changes in the governance of the art world, from the mid-1980s on, there were exhibits, concerts, and happenings – mainly in particular areas of the city – that were more experimental and not officially sponsored. Visual artists crossed beyond the boundaries of their own media and cooperated with poets, dancers, and musicians. Some of those participating were members of the union; some worked at other jobs to support themselves and were not members of any formal artistic institution. Though there was no one shared political philosophy, probably nearly all of those who participated had some ideas about the independence of the arts and rejected restrictions on critiquing their own society. At the same time, however, some of these independent efforts were stopped by the authorities. One well-known incident during this period took place at a festival in Dresden, which included contemporary art with jazz and rock. An artist reading from the leading official daily *Neues Deutschland* threw the headlines to the audience; consequently, two artists were arrested and the director of the culture house fired (Rueschemeyer, 1991).

Support for independent artists and space for independent exhibits and performances were also provided by the Protestant Church, which
became an umbrella location for groups of various kinds, among them those who gathered to promote environmental and peace initiatives. The *Evangelische Kunstdienst*, a Protestant Artists’ Service, sponsored seminars on the arts with West European speakers and collected art journals.

There were differences within the SED about how to handle these activities. Complicating those discussions, especially in the later years of the GDR, were the changes taking place within the communist bloc and especially the Soviet Union. GDR citizens could travel there; the House of Soviet Science and Culture in East Berlin sponsored talks and exhibits as well as selling journals (which were on occasion banned), and West German television reported developments in the Soviet Union as well as in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, where East Germans also visited.

Similar movements in the art world were taking place in eastern Europe and as mentioned above had actually begun earlier there than in the GDR. Of course it is impossible here to sum up all developments in eastern Europe during the communist period. Thus a few observations must suffice. One could see enormously interesting art in Czechoslovakia from the late 1950s until well after the end of the Prague Spring with its hopes for introducing substantial change. Hlaváček noted that art had begun to look for truth in the tradition of Czech modernism, in contemporary Western movements, and increasingly ‘in the deepness of soul of the individual artist’ (1992: 74). Though harassed, artists and intellectuals began to create small unofficial groups, in which they felt less vulnerable vis-à-vis the official bureaucracies. Vaclav Havel, the later president, had been a member of Charter 77, a well-known group of human rights activists. Artists understood that they had to come together to struggle for their own integrity and to communicate with the larger society.

The possibilities for artists in Poland were the envy of their colleagues in the more restrictive countries of eastern Europe, who visited Poland to attend festivals of all kinds and to have easier access to what was happening internationally. It has been suggested that by 1955, the period of mandated socialist realism in Poland was over and that prior to Solidarity and Martial Law, when artists were pressured to take sides, they basked in the sun of stately patronage. Even if others would consider that view somewhat exaggerated and remind us that there was censorship, the situation in the arts in Poland was more benevolent than in the other bloc countries (cf. Hoptman and Walsh, 1995). Since the 1970s, private patrons or owners of privately run galleries in Poland provided
some opportunities for painters. Connections with the western art world often resulted in additional income as well as prestige. That does not mean that most Polish artists were satisfied with their earnings. One of the main sources of discontent was the low income of artists compared to other professionals as well as the inequality of income among artists in a society with a strong egalitarian orientation. The differences among artists were attributed to favoritism among party members and/or those in decision-making positions. Solidarity attracted many artists who were intent not only on improving their incomes but also on expanding civil rights (Goban-Klas and Kwasniewicz, 1992: 29–30). The Union of Polish Artists (ZPAP) joined the Solidarity movement and remained in opposition until the first free election (Rottenberg, 1995: 29). After Martial Law was declared, artists turned toward niche audiences, and many showed their work in apartments and in private studios.

Aside from increased pressures for reform that developed especially in the 1980s in eastern Europe, even among people inside formal institutions, inside the mass organizations, and even inside the Party, there were artists and writers who were amazing spokespeople for the complexity of reactions experienced in their countries, including alienation, awareness of contradictions, the difficulties of coming to terms with ongoing ambiguities in everyday life, despair about human rights, and annoyance with the myriad of trivial impositions on their lives. Many were enormously respected. Even when they were not able to exhibit officially, artists attracted enthusiastic visitors to happenings, to small shows in their apartments, in clubs, and workplaces, and sometimes they sold their works even to government officials. They were watched and restricted because art was viewed as powerful, as having potentially a major impact on social and political life.

Even after the 1970s, after the promise of greater freedom for artists, there were still forbidden themes that could not be addressed, such as criticism of atomic energy, the Berlin wall, the military structure, or nostalgia for certain landscapes that might refer to the ‘other Germany’. One possible indicator is emigration. In the years prior to these developments, especially before the borders were closed, many artists had left the GDR. According to one estimate, about a third of the 50 best artists in Germany left between 1982 and 1987; this was similar to the proportion of artists who emigrated during the worst period of Stalinist influence in the 1950s. In the 1980s, a number of artists had actually been given permission to visit and even have extended stays in the West in the hope that they would remain in the GDR. But the matter is complicated. According to Matthias Flügge,\(^3\) the then editor of the journal
Neue Bildende Kunst, artists defected in the 1980s, not because of any substantial government impediment to their work but because of greater opportunities to travel and boredom, though he also writes that ‘the history of art in the GDR mutated into a history of the softening of ideologically-based positions but not into a history of their basic undermining’ (Flügge, 1998: 21).

A final point worth remembering when we consider the changes that took place in the art world before the unification of the two Germanies is that the development of an internal market for art and the increasing interest in a number of the less official and often younger artists meant that a type of ‘other culture’ existed within which artists worked and ‘which often shared a capillary exchange with the official culture’ (Flügge, 1998: 32). One of the complaints of East German artists now is the lack of public recognition in western Germany of the diversity that existed within the art world of the GDR.

Changes in the East German art world after unification

After considering the changes that took place in the GDR before unification, it is tempting to conclude that much of the transition had already taken place before the fall of the regime. The artists had worked to achieve some changes in the union, changes in leadership and increased acceptance of new art forms. A number of artists were able to sell their work not only in the GDR but also in western Germany and Europe. The opportunities for travel, though still restricted, had increased. Artists were exposed to new developments in the arts not only in the eastern bloc but in the west as well. They had the experience of building and maintaining an interested audience. Furthermore, outside of the immediate production of art, many took part in the protests and actions that brought about the end of the regime and became members of newly formed political groups and parties. The opening of the borders, the increased opportunity to pursue one’s art without political constraint and to be part of a broad and sophisticated art world, led many artists to express feelings of relief and excitement about the future.

Yet the demise of the old system and the incorporation of the former GDR into the political and economic framework of the West German Federal Republic was not without its problems. It is probably fair to suggest that the younger artists had the least difficulty with the transition. But for many others, there were concerns with making a living in a market economy, with the new art institutions that were established in eastern Germany after unification, and as with the challenges the
transition posed to their self-understanding. These complexities provide us increased insight into the interrelationship between artistic understanding and production and the economic and social world in which they take place.

**Art in a new economic situation**

Although the arts are heavily subsidized in the Federal Republic,\(^5\) the income and income security of artists depend primarily on their success in the market. This is mediated by local and regional cultural public institutions, which have primary responsibility for cultural policy,\(^6\) by the changing gallery scene, and by some self-help initiatives. But even with some possibilities of support for artists in the form of contracts and studio spaces, artists are not helped on a regular basis to gain contracts, work in affordable studios, acquire materials, and find exhibition opportunities as they were in the GDR. The primary role of the market means that many are no longer able to make a living from their art, while a few benefited considerably from the transition. Some found work in related, more applied, fields. Others could rely on temporary public employment schemes, on unemployment insurance, and on welfare, which in Germany has been available for quite long periods. But many had to find other means of livelihood. The first important change, then, was in the benefits artists had come to take for granted. Some of these reductions were gradual so that it was sometimes possible to make other arrangements even if at a lower level of support.

There is no longer an institution equivalent to the official union of artists of the GDR. In May 1990, in the phase after free elections and just before unification, the union played a much diminished role, even though it was still receiving funding from the state. A specially convened congress resulted in a thorough restructuring of the organization and with its changed name, which excluded any reference to the GDR, it increased decentralization and proclaimed political independence. But because West Germany had no union counterpart, the future of the East German union became problematic after unification took place. At that time, a few of the upper-level union functionaries in Berlin opened a new gallery near the central union office, where they planned to exhibit work by east German and other artists as well as continuing their union as long as possible.

The professional association of artists in the Federal Republic, the *Berufsverband bildender Künstler* (BBK), had been negotiating with the GDR Artists’ Union, but the union eventually dissolved. The functions
of the West German Association are different and more restricted. The Berlin association, to take one example, includes some services for artists, legal advice, help in finding studios for rent, and providing work opportunities, such as teaching groups of amateur artists. These work opportunities have been considerably reduced in the last few years. Associated with the BBK is Kulturwerk. Among its activities are a sculpture workshop and a publishing workshop.

There are 13,000 members in the Federal Republic, 2000 in Berlin. There are few eastern members; in the late 1990s in Berlin about 200, from both Berlin and Brandenburg, and they are mostly young. Several eastern artists cannot afford to pay the dues. Some eastern artists received public grants from the employment creation program (*Arbeitsbeschaf-

fungsmassnahmen*, ABM). These ran at first for one year, then were extended to a second, and in the end it was possible to apply for support for a longer period, for three or more years. This support system was later cut back but then increased again before the elections of 1998. The administrator of the BBK estimated that perhaps 50–100 artists received this support but maintained that many eastern artists did not even apply.

There has been some support for studios and for renting galleries with the help of ABM positions. For example, artists willing to take part in the reconstruction of a neglected house may receive gallery space in the house itself. In certain areas the rent is lower than in others. However, the BBK in Berlin announced at the end of 1999 that about 1300 artists were still searching for affordable studios (*Berliner Zeitung*, 15 December 1999: 45).

In 2003, the BBK was asked to take on a new program to support visual artists. The Berlin Senat (government) administration for Science, Research and Culture is proposing a change from the purchase, placement, and storage of artistic work by the Berlin government to the transfer of 150,000 Euros each year to the BBK for the direct support of artists.

Public art funding in Germany, as mentioned above, takes place essentially at the local and state levels. The Federal Republic is characterized by a decentralized cultural bureaucracy. This means that the much poorer new states of east Germany are more constrained in their support for the arts than their western counterparts. Since Berlin is cutting back more generally in its support, artists have to take on other jobs or receive help from family or friends. The Culture Fund of the GDR, financed by a tax on all cultural events to benefit artists, can still, through its capital, provide some stipends. At some point, the state of Saxony requested that the Fund’s money be given directly to the states to distribute. The funding also supports special houses, in Brandenburg and Ahrenshoop, to name two, where artists are given time to do their work. Here a jury
composed mostly of art historians from the east makes the final selection. In Berlin, there is a seven-member board that deals with politicians in order to retain sympathy and support for its programs. In 1998, its members were from the West, reflecting the limited participation of eastern colleagues at that time.

It seems that most visual artists cannot count on either governmental subsidies or sufficient sales in eastern Germany to support themselves, even if many do succeed in selling some of their work. They are not the only artists in difficulty. In many places in eastern Germany, actors and musicians play before half-empty halls. Positions are being reduced, companies are being combined, and the number of performances is being reduced. There are public statements about the dangers of mostly concentrating on that which is commercially successful and the dangers of an abandonment of the avant-garde.

In a report, however, on the Third Thüringen Art Fair, the speaker of the Board of the Association of Visual Artists of the state, Thüringen, commented on the relatively poor situation of visual artists compared to those employed in the theater. He noted that only three or four of the 350 are able to live fairly well from their artistic work. If there are large projects in the state, the contractors usually come from the west and tend to bring in artists and specialists they know from the west.

Complicating the general introduction of the market system are the pressures from many quarters to expand private funding for the arts. Municipal theaters, museums, and also symphony orchestras are pushed toward market competition as well as more private funding. A number of artists support the system of American sponsorship for the arts and want the state to make it easier for donors to the arts to reduce their tax payments. The tax regulations for private, nonprofit giving are now under review. These changes are being debated in Germany. The critics expect that the state should provide supports for the arts rather than having private networks determine the beneficiaries themselves. Interestingly, while some politicians are advocating increased private initiative in the arts, there are private patrons who are somewhat reluctant to fill gaps left by the state – and politicians and cultural administrators who are reluctant to share responsibility with private actors (cf. Strachwitz, 2000: 65–72).

In a discussion of the development of foundations in eastern Germany, Strachwitz notes the major impact of west Germany and the integration of the few east German foundations into that prevalent system:

It is not surprising that the development of foundations... followed a different pattern than in other Central and Eastern European
countries. At no point did there arise a serious debate as to whether the European or World foundation community should make a major contribution, foster networking centers...European and U.S. foundations did of course give grants to projects in East Germany in individual cases...Unlike the independent reform states, such as Hungary, Poland or Estonia, neither the post-1989 government nor the governments of the newly established federal states...sought help or advice from outside Germany. In fact, one of the most fundamental rulings of the West German government...was that the new federal states should be modeled as closely as possible on those existing in West Germany. (Strachwitz, 1999: 220)\textsuperscript{15}

During the early transition years, many state-supported galleries remained open. However, the municipalities were interested in increasing their resources through rental to more profitable businesses. Consequently it became increasingly difficult to pay the asking rate, and a number of galleries closed.\textsuperscript{16} Studios were now commercial spaces. Eckhart Gillen concluded that a whole infrastructure of about 400 local galleries and 39 state-run galleries collapsed after the end of the regime. Art was neither purchased nor commissioned by the institutions that had previously supported it, the SED and the bloc parties mentioned earlier, the mass organizations, such as the Free German Youth, regional and local authorities, and industrial combines.

In addition to their loss of privileges, artists feared that West German galleries with their extensive market experience would move into their territory (Gillen, 1995b: 19). Along with the movement of west German galleries into the east, some east German local gallery owners have opened up in the larger cities, exhibiting foreign artists, as well as east and west German artists. Harry Lybke owned one of the few private galleries in the east. He now runs Eigen+Art in Berlin. After attempts to establish successful galleries in New York and Paris failed, Lybke is now mainly active in eastern Germany.\textsuperscript{17} His Berlin gallery represents 18 artists, including four he had previously worked with in Leipzig; he is said to be extremely successful in placing his artists in important national and international exhibits.\textsuperscript{18}

East and west artists have Bezirk or district galleries; indeed according to an official in the Berlin Ministry of Culture, this infrastructure is better in the east.\textsuperscript{19} One of the galleries of the former GDR, known for exhibiting young, innovative artists was the Galerie Weisser Elefant. The character of these surviving galleries differs from each other and from what was exhibited before; for example, foreign artists are included in these exhibits.
At the same time, it seems that even with financial difficulties, some municipal and district galleries in the east retain important functions for the integration of artists and maintaining certain traditions. Christoph Tannert, who had been very active in the contemporary art scene before unification and who, with a West German partner, ran for a time one of the first private galleries in East Berlin, mentioned that in addition, young curators are using these platforms to also render ‘unconventional concepts into deeds’ (Tannert, 1999: 287).

Some young artists show enormous initiative, whether as working artists or as gallery owners or managers trying to attract an interested public. One young artist who runs a gallery that is also a ‘communication space’ with lectures and music organizes 150 events during the year attended by (his estimation) 700 people, and also arranges street festivals with artists of all kinds invited to participate. Previously, he worked for the Komische Oper, building stages, received an ABM, then applied for unemployment funds. He has had support from the Volksbühne, a Berlin theater for his latest projects – space, workers, and money. Such intensive activity in order to maintain oneself as an artist or gallery manager is rather unusual. Again, Tannert observes that such artists prevent established forms of culture from dominating the entire scene.

At the beginning of the transition, artists feared that art would not fare well in competition with the full spectrum of consumer goods that was now available. During the immediate transformation period, sales to foreigners, especially west Germans, were maintained. A number of western galleries arranged exhibits. In fact they bought a great deal of the art at what were for them moderate prices, and one could hear complaints that the prices set for east German art had been too low.

Some observers involved in the arts believe that now west Germans are not generally buying eastern art and that it is the easterners who, when they can afford to, continue to buy the work of eastern artists, work that typically refers to a classic, more conservative tradition. There is also a smaller east German audience that is more familiar with experimentation in form from their association with artists in the GDR and from ongoing visits to galleries and museums in the east and west, where they come in contact with the contemporary work of east German artists.

It has been observed, however, that when western doctors, lawyers, and other ‘similar types’ actually move to cities with a rich art tradition, to Dresden for example, they do indeed buy east German art. Though this is not yet typical of Berlin, the transfer of government personnel from Bonn may eventually provide a larger western clientele.
After unification, the number of east Germans visiting museums and smaller galleries dramatically decreased. In 1989, the art museums had 8.9 million visitors, the next year around 4 million, and in 1991, 3.6 million despite the increase in exhibits. This decline was followed by a gradual increase, which was due to interested people of a high educational level coming more than a few times. Both characteristics – multiple visits and a high level of education of museum goers – hold as well for western Germany (Lindner, 1998: 258). Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in great detail interpretations of this development in light of a more general evaluation of the success in creating a common culture in the former GDR, I did refer earlier to the difficulties attracting a broadly based audience to the more ‘contemporary’ and less representative visual arts. Nevertheless, workers with their work collectives did visit galleries and museums in the GDR; whether some of them will eventually return will depend on a number of factors that are not yet quite clear. Lindner warns against assuming that the efforts to bring workers into the art world were completely unsuccessful. Some of the visitors who found innovations in art and sculpture in the GDR state exhibitions puzzling were interested in listening to explanations of what they were seeing.

There is still considerable interest in the visual arts in eastern Germany. The audience includes those who follow developments in contemporary east German art as well as a number of viewers still committed to an art that is socially engaged – who see mutual reinforcement in artistic engagement and social engagement. But the isolation of many artists, especially of older artists of the former GDR is severe. It is aggravated by a lack of contact with colleagues (which a number of other older citizens in the former GDR, not able to retain employment, experience as well). Many of the artists have withdrawn into their work and otherwise live out their lives privately.

Contrasts in style and content: East versus West and present versus past

The material problems of artists in the transition to the social market economy of west Germany were overlaid by – and intertwined with – issues of artistic reorientation, tensions and conflicts between the east and west German art worlds, and changes as well as continuities in the ideas about the role of art in society.

One very experienced analyst of the east German art scene maintained that eastern artists were typically excluded from participating in the art
and architecture western investors support, and that west Germans as well as internationally recognized artists and architects receive nearly all the commissions and contracts in the east. Flierl’s critique has been backed up by a very interesting article by Johannes Heisig on the east German art scene in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Artists have also expressed cynicism about west German goals of creating a higher ‘quality’ of art in the east. An artist and an art professor insisted that important positions in museums in the east and professorships in art schools are being given to westerners. They maintained that westerners who would have difficulty obtaining these positions in the west were being placed in museums and art schools in the east. However, there is little doubt that the younger generation studying in professional art schools take for granted their exposure to contemporary developments in the arts. It is not astonishing that given the difficulties of surviving as artists in the east as well as the competition between ‘east’ and ‘west’ visual artists, there is only limited contact between them. Some easterners believe that westerners simply are not interested in eastern art, that ‘eastern’ culture simply has no value.

Although some nonconformist artists working in the GDR found support for their efforts in the very concept of modern art and in the self-understanding of the international community of contemporary artists, a significant problem faced by a number of visual artists was their lack of familiarity with much of the art being done in western Germany. Some accuse western artists of being committed to constant innovation and experimentation. Függe identifies the idea of culture that defined the criteria of quality for GDR artists until the mid-1980s, when a new ‘anarchic generation’ became a voice in the art world:

A concept of the programmatic internalization was contrasted with the official euphoria of progress, which sought and found a connection to the western European classical modernism, at least by the time of Giacometti. This was an imminent political strategy of a cultural quest for identity; and it was also the crux that caused the works of GDR artists…to fall out of the international context as their system of references disappeared. (Függe, 1998: 33)

Gillen notes that many painters from the GDR, ‘basing themselves on Expressionism and Verism and taking their lead from Corinth, Kirchner, Beckmann, Dix and others, used the formal element only as a means to an end, to convey their oppressive, content laden messages’ (Gillen, 1995a: 22).
Rejection did not lead to a quest or experimentation in new forms, but to a ‘historicism’ of that which was modern. The problem of the GDR artists was to remove themselves from their society. They wanted to be citizens of the world, but their self-understanding in many cases had been shaped by the artistic world – with its particular contradictions – in which they had always worked as well as by an intense engagement with their own society. After unification it was difficult for artists with such a connection to West European classical modernism to enter the international art world; their terms of reference had disappeared.

It is probably fair to say that intellectuals and artists in the GDR identified intensely with their society, even if in opposition to it. And their art had a particular importance, in opposition or in support of the system, depending on the audience. The arts revealed a more complex world, ambiguities and tensions in the system, individual striving and anomy, a world that had less public discussion in the media. That was a crucial reason for the importance of art, its importance to the audience that followed it, and its importance to the authorities who worried about its impact on the society.

The new openness of the western art world also diminished the importance of the eastern artist, at least in that sense. The Federal Republic had no use for state artists or dissident artists so that the pressure rests on the individual. Politically, nearly anything is acceptable; no one is interested to the same extent as in the east, even if certain works outrage critics for one reason or another. Tannert maintained that it is good for art to have lost its political meaning and to be judged by other criteria, by aesthetic criteria, which were less discussed previously than now.30

But there are artists who want to be part of the world of contemporary art while, at the same time, rejecting a definition of their participation as pure individualism. For other artists from the east, there is too little public discussion of the modern. Creation is for the market, it is not serious in the same sense, it is a release from ideology and the search for truth, an arrival in randomness, according to one Leipzig artist.31 The focus of many artists in the former GDR on forms and colors, the abstract perspective, is seen by a number of their colleagues as an accommodation to the market,32 new trends, and museum policy, which these east German artists learned to exploit: ‘And, with the eye of faith fixed on Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, they are convinced that the source of their new identity will come bubbling from the Deutsche Bank’ (Tannert, 1995: 46).
Interestingly, from the point of view of east German galleries, especially in smaller places outside of Berlin, it is more profitable to exhibit more ‘conservative’ art that sells – and does so at more reasonable prices – rather than contemporary, more internationally recognized work.\(^{33}\)

It has been noted that art which was different from that produced in the official culture had developed its own ‘system of valuation’ and that this system was not immediately accessible in the artwork itself. Because of this it was not critiqued in the west. Flügge points to the importance of recognizing GDR art as an informative, particular path of recent European history rather than limiting it to a museum exhibit on totalitarianism and an unpleasant past.\(^{34}\)

More generally, there has been great sensitivity to the frequent parallels between Nazism and Communism – not only but also with respect to the visual arts – that are frequently made in west German political and intellectual discussion. A prominent eastern member of the art world complained about ‘well-meaning’ people in the west who speak about the two systems as if they were the same:

Whom are they kidding? It is infuriating to people here (in the east), even to those of us who fought for change and had difficulties with the regime. And it is dangerous because if they are not more careful, they will alienate the intellectuals who have begun to work with them.\(^{35}\)

Gerhard Wolf in an interview in 1991 in East Berlin said the following in response to the question, ‘Why was the critical literature of the GDR, unlike that of Eastern Europe, aimed at improving rather than undermining the state?’ Referring to a writer from Prague who lived in the GDR, he notes that his work would have been immediately seen as political dissidence in the CSSR. In the GDR, it was certainly kept under observation.

But the unofficial periodicals were left alone. If you like, you can say that there was a rich samizdat culture here. Not – as in the Soviet Union – with a ‘Chronicle of Events’ about camps and things like that, but still different literature, quite consciously different from what prevailed otherwise. Because of the German situation, there was scarcely any direct persecution. (Hallberg, 1996: 289)

Although many of his colleagues would not agree on the relative softness of the regime with respect to unwanted art, they would probably agree that for the most part, the kind of reprisals were generally different and less severe.
Ulrich Roloff-Momin in his response to the Berlin CDU’s proposal to investigate the background of eastern Academy of Art members for any possible earlier connection to state security asked his colleagues how posterity judged artists like Herbert von Karajan and Richard Strauss, who at some periods had been involved with the Nazi regime. Roloff-Momin, a West Berlin politician, writes that he is very uncomfortable with the comparisons between the two regimes (Roloff-Momin, 1997: 287). Though certain similarities in everyday life, especially during the Stalinist period, are still being debated, many artists and intellectuals see this kind of discussion as just another indication that GDR society, problematic as it was, is misunderstood in the west.

Incorporating the eastern Academy of Arts in Berlin with the western Academy involved drawn out and tense discussions. The Academy of Arts in the GDR was responsible for the highest level of training for artists; in the west, the Academy left that to the Hochschule der Kunst (College of Art). After unification, the Academy in the east was granted temporary financial status. The head of the Academy, Manfred Wekwerth was replaced by Heiner Müller. Walter Jens was President of the Western Academy of Arts. Jens did not feel comfortable with simply uniting the two academies because he did not recognize the independence of the eastern Academy. Müller was uncomfortable with making distinctions. The ‘self-cleaning’ compromise was rejected by the Arts section and several artists left the western Academy, though eventually the Academy of Arts was established in Berlin-Brandenburg and the two were unified.36

It is important to note that east German artists themselves are divided about their relationships to the GDR regime, which have on occasion become the subject of intense discussion. The New National Gallery had an earlier exhibition than the one discussed above, which included established east German artists along with well-known west German artists. Willi Sitte was placed in the middle of the entrance hall. At that point, east German artists who either never joined the Artists’ Union or who tried to introduce change were upset that such established artists as Willi Sitte, the former head of the union and member of the Central Committee were represented while they were not. These conflicts led to a number of public debates about the exhibition. And similar problems arose with the nomination of Bernhard Heisig to be included in the art exhibited in the Reichstag, the German parliament.

We know that there was considerable contact between artists who had left the GDR and the art scene in the west. There was also more frequent contact among artists in both Germanies in the years before unification. However, not only were many east German artists unfamiliar with the
developments in the art world of their new colleagues but artists in the east were seen as linked and supportive of what was considered an unacceptable political position; and their art appeared conservative in style. Even much of the ‘oppositional’ art seemed familiar and not particularly innovative. Artists in the west were criticized by their eastern colleagues for being over-responsive to the market, too committed to ongoing innovation, and were somewhat feared as competitors who were familiar with contemporary forms in a way that was uncomfortable for a number of artists in the east.

Several of the developments in eastern Europe after the end of communism were similar to those in eastern Germany, though the issues of contact with the west are not as complex and contradictory as in unified Germany. In an interesting article on art in Czechoslovakia after 1989, the authors suggest that art was presented in the west for its aesthetic value and that ‘codes of perception and criteria of selection were based on visual similarities with Western art’; thus – using an argument frequent among GDR artists – Czech art was misunderstood in the west. ‘Groups with high moral expectations and noncommercial feelings created for themselves visions and illusions of the possibility for change’ (Ševčík and Ševčíková, 1995: 71). The authors note the absence of metaphysical and political statements in the art of many younger artists now and point to the tensions among the generations of artists in the Czech Republic. It has been suggested that internationalism as the driving force in the world of art is destroying ‘the very fabric of a fragile Czech culture’ (Mckay, 1994: 27). During the communist period, the contact with the west was important not only for the art that could be seen – and shown abroad – but in the battle of the artists with the state. But a number of younger artists, as in the former GDR, are now excited about becoming part of the western art world. In fact, sometimes the young artists see themselves in battle with a conservative state and a conservative audience for the artists. It is especially the generation of older artists that experience difficulty finding an identity, a function, a place of importance as artists in the Czech Republic, who with members of the intelligentsia played a crucial role in their own society. And despite the greater contact with the west compared to the former GDR, many Czech artists, too, have difficulty even establishing criteria for evaluating art.

The situation in Poland is complex. On the one hand, the art market is not yet fully developed. Paintings are often bought directly from the artist. The Artists’ Union there (as in the Czech Republic) plays a diminished role. In Krakow, for example, it runs two galleries, and especially the gallery directly in the center of the city is under pressure both to sell
and to exhibit work of mixed quality because of the number of artists in Krakow without exhibition possibilities. A number of galleries were forced to close because of high rents. The city of Krakow supports one private gallery by paying half the costs of rent. Others introduce ‘selling points’ which deform the character of the space in which the exhibits take place. Kolczynska (1994: 61–71) notes that among other changes in the art world, it is the free market that has influenced the gallery interior. However, a number of galleries have remained, some dependent on the Ministry of Art and Culture for their survival. Ilczuk and Wieczorek write that after an initial fascination with the free market (and an extensive cut in the budget for the arts), there has been a growing awareness of the necessity of some state intervention in the support of culture (2000: 60). A few centers emphasizing European cooperation have been important for exhibiting contemporary Polish art. There are also new institutions with their own funding supporting the promotion of art such as the Open Society Foundation supported by George Soros. (Actually, Soros supports centers all over eastern Europe, including the Czech Republic and Slovakia.) But a number of artists complain about the insufficient number of good galleries and exhibition organizers. Many feel that they are left on their own. Those who are able to do applied work, graphic artists for example, tend to reorient their skills to the market; many are quite successful.

As in the Czech Republic and in eastern Germany, the role of the artist in Poland has dramatically changed. Artists, traditionally part of the Polish intelligentsia, have lost influence and prestige. The emerging middle class spends its money and time in other ways while many teachers and others associated with the ‘old’ intelligentsia who are interested in art generally do not have the resources to pay for artistic work or expensive books, theater tickets, and so on. Of course, the most prestigious Polish artists have more possibilities to show their work in Europe and the United States but they are few in number. However, there are still artists and artistic events that address cultural and political issues, sometimes challenging the authorities. Resigning from her directorship of ZA cheta, a state-owned contemporary art gallery after a feud with the ‘right wing’ culture minister, Anda Rottenberg maintains that art has become less introspective and more radical. And again, as in the Czech Republic and the former GDR, there are generational differences. It is the older artists who have the most difficulty arranging their lives in this new artistic system and are pessimistic about their futures as well as about the potential to have an impact on shaping the new Poland. Many older artists have decided to retire and live on their pensions.
Concluding observations

The art world of the former GDR has been radically transformed, a process that began well before the end of the communist regime. Unification brought an end to its supports as well as the public mission and the ideological controls that characterized it. And the transformation opened unprecedented access to artistic developments in the west. The change was embraced by many, even though a large number of artists could no longer make a living from their art. For those who continued and for their audiences, the new situation required complex artistic reorientations.

Although the transformations in other eastern European countries were in many respects similar, artists and artistic institutions in eastern Germany had to respond to the established and more powerful art world of the Federal Republic, which came to dominate unified Germany. This particular closeness with one version of the west brought about by unification was a source of complex tensions. On the one hand, the west Germany art scene is closely integrated with international contemporary art and, furthermore, art in unified Germany enjoys considerable public funding, especially at the state level. On the other hand, the impact of west German art, art criticism, art galleries, and museums is extremely forceful and yet not informed by a differentiated understanding of the art scene in east Germany, both before and after the fall of communism.

While unification opened up enormous opportunities for east German artists, the art institutions of west Germany, the political groups involved in decisions about culture, and the more general west German audience found it difficult to evaluate much of what they were seeing, criticized the art for its conservatism or for its lack of originality and imitation of western trends, and undervalued the diversity that existed in the east German art world. The art world of the GDR was viewed with skepticism and suspicion in western Germany. For GDR artists the transformation came swiftly. It was a push into a different world with all its opportunities – and potential dangers.

The problems of transition elucidate the special character of the art world of the GDR. This is most obvious in the transition from a public support system to the difficulties of surviving in a market economy, even if the west German soziale Marktwirtschaft offers buffering public supports in the arts as well as in other spheres of life. Less obvious, but in many ways more interesting are the insights that can be gained from the reorientations in artistic work, in the self-understanding of artists, and in their conceptions of the audiences for whom their art is made.
The complexity of these reorientations reflects the fact that the world of GDR art was not simply an artifact of a political imposition, vanishing once the coercive props were removed and transforming itself swiftly into another instance of modern and postmodern art. The public place of art, its role in a common and more egalitarian culture, and its participation in creating a more humane society after the catastrophe of national socialism – these features of GDR art had real roots in the attitudes of many artists and parts of their audiences. The public mission corresponded to older conceptions of the cultural importance of art, even if its substance was new and distinctly political. If it was perverted in the Stalinist years, the struggles for more diversity and freedom of expression added yet another dimension to art’s public importance.

Echoes of these attitudes are found in the current art world of east Germany. The feelings of responsibility that many artists experienced in the GDR for what was produced and shared with an audience and the respect for the arts from those who followed internal developments seem very different from the self-understanding of their western colleagues. While some east German art historians and critics think it important to now focus more on the aesthetic and to stop the support of those who were subsidized on non-aesthetic grounds, a number of eastern artists feel that their efforts to create a more open GDR had failed and that they are not needed in the now united Germany. In the former GDR, many artists challenged and attracted an audience – through innovations in their work, through their form of presentation, and through their efforts to transform the organization that represented them. A number are now critical of colleagues who ‘easily’ adapted their art to western styles and contemporary forms and accuse them of running after an audience.

A great disappointment for a number of intellectuals and artists was this failure to create a more humane society, and for some a better socialism. Through their work and their other activities, they hoped for gradual change and movement to a more open society. And indeed discussions had increased in the mass organizations and even at certain levels of the Party; there were changes in a number of artistic institutions. In the arts, there was more acceptance of forms not previously considered legitimate and more flexibility for artists to travel and sell their work abroad. But in the end, the rigidities in the upper levels of the political hierarchy and the push for unification led to the end of the GDR and the transformation of the east German art world.

Very few artists regret the absence of political control, which was loosened, though still present in the seventies and eighties. Yet there was
a paradoxical correlate to political control, especially once it became less intolerant, that reinforced the public role and importance of art. Those that ran into trouble with the authorities were followed by an informed and intensely interested if small audience. This contrasts with a sense that art now is both arbitrary and irrelevant. Some argue that a politicized art reflects flaws in the political society – politics belongs to the political sphere – and that the elevated sense of the public importance of art is part of the peculiar course of German political culture. Yet the fact is that art has many uses. And whether a renewed yearning for a more important function in society will develop beyond a few small groups is an open question, especially since it is now possible to shape at least a political future through social and political engagement.

Notes

1. The research on which this chapter is based was carried out in 1998 and 1999, and supplemented with additional conversations and gallery visits during fall 2003. An earlier project on east German art institutions during the communist period and the immediate transformation was done in 1987–88 with a follow-up visit in 1990 (Rueschemeyer, 1991). During all these return visits, I tried to revisit some of the artists and colleagues working on the arts as well as union functionaries. In addition, I met with people important in the art world a decade after the end of the communist period, art historians, artists, gallery owners and managers, representatives of the Professional Association of German Artists, and politicians involved in cultural policy on the local, state, and national levels. Most of these talks are detailed in the notes to this chapter. The comments on art and the state in eastern Europe are not only based on recent literature but also included visits and interviews with artists and gallery managers in the Czech Republic and Poland, intensive discussion at a workshop on the arts after the end of communism at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1998, and participation in panels at the World Congress of Sociology in 1998, the American Sociological Association (ASA) in 2000, and the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in 2002.

2. Artists working in Poland did have greater opportunities to view contemporary art but much of what they had access to was an accidental, rather than a systematic, overview of western contemporary trends. One artist, now an Assistant Professor at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts recalled how difficult it was to arrange a trip to Europe even for a three-week period. After her return, she was not permitted to keep her passport at home (interview with Joanna Kaiser, 2001).


5. Chapter 2 offers some comparative estimates which indicate that public support for the arts is far more generous than in the United States. In Germany, direct and indirect tax-based public support for the arts per head of the
population is more than four times the amount spent in the United States. A second difference is that Germany, like most continental European countries, relies primarily on direct public funding, while in the United States indirect tax-based support for the arts is roughly three times as large as direct funding.

6. For a detailed explanation of German cultural policy, see Burns and van der Will (2003).

7. A lawyer is paid by the Association from the membership dues.


9. The proposal by Dominique Krössin (a professional assistant in the Office of Science, Research and Culture) was a response to the large amount of money used for simply storing art that had been purchased (interview with Dominique Krössin and Dr Torsten Wöhlt, Fall 2003).

10. Berlin is one such state, the only one in which an eastern and a western part are joined at the state level. The western part, geographically an island in the GDR, had been heavily subsidized before unification, often through investments in the cultural sphere. These subsidies were drastically reduced after unification.

11. There have been a number of protests against consolidation. Schwerin, in Mecklenburg Vorpommern, had been very successful in attracting audiences to a number of theater productions, both before and after unification. Citizens have also vigorously protested against firing – and thereby reducing – the number of musicians in the Schwerin Orchestra. One of the more dramatic initiatives was the effort to merge two opera companies in Berlin, the Deutsche Oper in the West with the Staatsoper in the East, endangering many jobs. By the end of 2002, the Christian Democratic Party advocated including the Komische Oper in East Berlin in this merger. Involved in this ongoing debate was the present state minister for Science, Research, and Culture in Berlin, Thomas Flierl, a member of the PDS (reformed communist party). In 2003, there was a proposal to have all three opera houses in Berlin administered by one foundation funded by Berlin and the national government; the discussion and final ratification are still in process at this writing.

12. Rolf Lindner, however, did concede that many west German artists were in a similar situation though there were more people in western Germany able to afford the art. He noted that it was necessary to earn a minimum salary as an artist (enough to contribute to social security) to maintain membership and receive support from the Artists’ Social Fund. Otherwise, the alternative is welfare (Liebers, 2002).

13. Peter Radunski, the then Senator for Culture and Science, Berlin; talk at a conference on Berlin, Center for European Studies, Harvard University, February 1998. For an overview of early attempts to link arts and business in Potsdam, see Kirchberg (1994).

14. See, for example, Hohmeyer (2000).

15. Interestingly, in an overview of foundations in Eastern and Central Europe, Quigley and Popson conclude that ‘foundations should rely less on Western intermediaries and that direct funding . . . empowers local institutions’ (1999: 249).

16. The Union gallery (which received a 30 percent fee on all sold work) gave up its space in 1994. A women’s organization was able to afford the rent after receiving a grant from the work creation program ABM (interview with Gudrun
Urbaniak, 1998). Urbaniak, who had worked at the Artists’ Union before it dissolved tried to become an art therapist. She was told that she was too old to receive the training. At the age of 62, she will receive 2000 marks a month (approximately $1000); 800 marks will be used for the rent of her apartment.


18. One of these east German artists, Neo Rauch, has done interesting figurative art; his work has been in demand in Germany, Europe, and the United States.


22. Interview with Barbara Bell, GDR Artists’ Union (1990).


24. Lindner notes that east Germans frequented private galleries and antique galleries less often than west Germans and owned fewer works of original art (Lindner, 1998: 291). For a discussion of visitors to museums in Germany, see Kirchberg (1996).

25. Observations of work collectives at the State exhibition; interview with Lindner, 1988. For an interesting overview on the relation of the major political parties to changes in cultural orientation among their constituencies in Germany, see Wolf-Csanády (1998). A study of some 15 countries found that fewer than a quarter of the population had ever visited an art museum but as income and education increase, so does participation. Vera Zolberg notes from these studies the small variation among countries, ‘despite differences in government policies, the mix of private, quasi-public, and public institutions, levels of public subsidy, admission charges’ and the difficulties of expanding the ‘reach of high cultural institutions to a more diverse population’, the less educated, and those in rural areas (Zolberg, 1993).

26. Interview with Bruno Flierl (1999). Interestingly, Flierl was one of five east German representatives in a Commission of 23 advising on the future of the ‘Castle Plaza’ in the center of Berlin (in former East Berlin). See the Berliner Zeitung, November 2, 2000. By the spring of 2001, the commission seemed to think it impractical to reconstruct the Castle and suggested that a museum might make more sense. The discussion continued; by 2003, it seemed reasonable to delay any new construction and simply create a green space. Some are advocating leaving the building, which housed political and cultural events, in place and using it for public activities until the Berlin budget is more stable.


29. A recent comprehensive exhibition (2003) in the New National Gallery in Berlin concentrated on the diversity in the east German art world. Matthias Flügge, whose journal Neue Bildende Kunst was no longer supported after 1999, commented that although the exhibit was important, it would have been more effective having it in the 1980s and that in some sense, the exhibit seemed a funeral honoring GDR art (interview with Matthias Flügge, Vice President of the Academy of Arts, 2003).

30. Interviews with Tannert, 1990 and 1999. By 1998, Tannert was working at Künstler Bethanien, a public institution in Kreuzberg providing stipends and possibilities for artists of various kinds to work in Berlin for a year. Künstler Bethanien is run by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the
Academy of Arts. Tannert can now also be heard on German radio, commenting on cultural events.


32. Within Germany itself, there is discussion of art as a symbol of power. Artists strive to sell their work to the government or large corporations rather than to museums and small galleries. For a discussion of the work of the art historian Wolfgang Ullrich on this theme, see Kühn (2000). Walter Grasskamp, also an art historian, believes that art may be more present, but not more powerful. See his article, Grasskamp (2000).

33. Actually, the art schools in Dresden and Leipzig have been important in legitimating some return to realism. In Berlin, the so-called conservative art as well as works of art that contain political references attract visitors; and on two east Berlin streets with several galleries, there was an enthusiastic reaction to two exhibits of Russian artists, one contemporary, the other a collection of work done in the 1960s–80s in the Soviet Union (2003).


36. For a discussion of culture and politics in Berlin, see Roloff-Momin (1997).

37. One artist who participated in an exhibit with Willi Sitte in the mid-1990s noted that previously, she had no interest in being shown with official artists: ‘But now that I am placed in the GDR corner in the West, I might as well show my work.’ However, in the summer of 2003, an exhibition at the New National Gallery in Berlin included works that had not been officially exhibited in the GDR, thus recognizing the diversity that existed.

38. In 1997, a group of well-known Czech glass artists issued a manifesto for transforming the glass industry. They proposed combining traditional techniques with new technology and design and complained that western design trends were being ignored. One commentator maintained that these artists were sick of the kitsch (Louie, 1997). Speaking after the closing of the private, contemporary art gallery MXM in Prague in 2002, Jan Černý, the owner, noted that potential buyers have difficulty dealing with experimental art and that art has ‘disintegrated among many of the younger artists’. ‘Today you won’t find a style-defining tendency in art that would suggest development for the next ten years, as was the case with pop art in the 1960s and abstract art before that or cubism even earlier’ (Šír 2002: 18).

39. Charlotta Kotik, chair of the department of Contemporary Art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, observes limited activities of union members such as common ownership of part of a building in order to exhibit work or meetings around special interests but notes the diminished power and prestige of the Czech Union (personal communication, 2001).

40. The second gallery run by the Union is also in the center of the city but somewhat to the side of the main streets. It is less popular but has a higher standard than the first and is known to have exhibited a number of good Polish and foreign artists (interview with Joanna Kaiser, 2001).

41. In a recent article in the magazine Umělec, proprietors of Czech galleries called for a reduction of the VAT on the sales of artwork, noting that in many of the countries of eastern Europe, the tax is as high as 25 percent (in Hungary), while Poland, considered the most liberal environment for the arts, does not tax artwork sales (vol. 6, 2002: 20).
42. The possibilities in Warsaw for applied work are greater than in Krakow because more corporations are located there. But in Krakow, one painter who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts also builds furniture... that is not at all unusual now (Interview with Andrzej Plaskowski, 2001). Both Kaiser and Plaskowski collaborate and exhibit with five other artists in Poland and abroad, typically in Polish Cultural Centers. But they are not paid for exhibiting and even have to pay for transporting the art. That may happen within an east European country as well. For example, Viera Jančeková, now director of the Ján Koniarek Gallery in Trnava, Slovakia, noted that due to a reduction in funding from the Soros Foundation and the modest funding from the regional government, the artists exhibited there also receive no fees (personal conversation, Fall 2002).

43. For example, Rottenberg believes that artists who want to comment on church art by displaying kitsch statues inside glass tanks ‘are reacting to a resurgence of the Catholic church in public life, including education...’ (Wagotyl, 2001: VI). See also Szmagalska (2002).

44. And, of course, some of the decisions regarding which institutions and artists to support were based on the needs and constituencies of west Germans in important positions in the art world.

In the preceding chapters, we focused on artists working in different political and economic systems. Significant differences in the art worlds of the United States, Britain, and Scandinavia emerged from these discussions. In eastern Germany, artists experienced dramatic transition in their own society – the introduction of new artistic institutions and a developed market system for the arts accompanied the political transformation. Yet significant elements of GDR traditions remained in some of the artistic circles in eastern Germany. Furthermore, the strong public supports for the arts and the west German welfare system addressed a number of the difficulties east German artists experienced in the new environment. The movement of Russian artists to the United States from the 1970s on involved a drastic change for the individual émigrés. The experience of this change throws a very personal light on the contrast between two different political and economic environments in which art is produced. This chapter will begin by offering a brief historical background to the role of the arts in the Soviet Union, then review the experiences of artists who emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, and finally turn to the most recent emigration from Russia. This last section of the chapter will also include a few observations of Russian visual artists who immigrated to Israel during the 1990s, thus providing an additional perspective on the importance of the social and political context. A related development is the extent of the immigration – the Russian émigrés to Israel now comprise approximately a fifth of the Jewish population of the country.
Art in state socialism

Though this section will focus on the arts after the death of Stalin, it is important to have some sense of the complexity of the earlier forces that shaped the trajectory of artistic development in the Soviet Union. During the tsarist regime artists were relatively free to develop their work; and in the last years of tsarist rule, influenced by western culture, they produced extraordinary art. This change came about with the emergence of a new class of industrialists, some of whom became patrons of Russian art. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Russian and West European capital became increasingly linked, resulting in the patronage of European art that could be seen by the Russian public and by Russian artists. This change in the patronage system weakened tsarist influence on artistic production in Russia. The Imperial Academy of Arts, which dominated the old system, also lost some of its power before the revolution.

The art we associate with the communist revolution, the experimentation, and the excellence of the work was comparable to the most interesting art produced anywhere in Europe. Many artists were enthusiastic about the overthrow of the old regime and about the opportunity to have an important impact on the development of a new social world. Those who saw themselves as part of a revolution in the arts would help and engage in the revolution of social life. Several of the artists who had occupied a somewhat ambiguous position in bourgeois society took on administrative tasks and became involved in pedagogy. A number of Russian artists living abroad, including Kandinsky, Gabo, and Chagall, returned and became active participants in their society. New art schools and free state art studios opened in Moscow and in other important centers. A number of foreign artists came to the Soviet Union to engage in particular projects or simply to gather their own impressions of Soviet society. Experiments in painting and sculpture were paralleled in other art forms – in music, dance, and literature – as well as in interesting collaborations among artists of all sorts.

Yet only a few years after the revolution, realistic art was judged to be the most suitable for the task of constructing the socialist society, now the overriding concern. The political victors of the debates about the role of art in Soviet society wanted an art that the masses could understand, a realistic art that would support the revolution, an art that would glorify the new society that was being created. By the end of the 1920s, Russian Cubists, Futurists, Constructivists, Symbolists, and others who challenged socialist realism through their work had their productions stored and
no longer publicly exhibited. Nearly all the contemporary art of the west became inaccessible and was labeled bourgeois, reactionary, and even fascist.

Consolidation and conformity intensified with the establishment of the Union of Soviet Artists, the Academy of Arts, and later, the Ministry of Culture. These institutions, linked by their connection to the communist party, controlled artistic life in the Soviet Union. Their rule, however, was not completely monolithic. There were conflicts among these institutions as well as tensions and changes within the organizations themselves.3 Still, they determined the education of young artists as well as the system in which artists created and exhibited their art, and they had an enormous impact on artistic life in the Soviet Union. The now established policies distanced Soviet artists from the international art scene and muted the memory of the effervescence of modern art associated with the revolutionary period.

Three years after the death of Stalin, from 1956 to 1963, there was at last an increase in cultural exchanges with the west. There were major exhibitions of American, French, English, and Belgian art in Moscow and Leningrad. One of the largest exhibits took place at the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Moscow in 1957. It was the beginning of a decisive relationship between the western world of art and the creative work that would emerge in the Soviet Union. Articles on the art of other countries began to be published in the Soviet Union. Although many of them were critical, these, too, were an important source of information on western art.

Some Soviet artists had broken with aspects of official art earlier, in the 1950s; a number of these artists had participated in World War II. They engaged in a realism that revealed the miseries and complexities of Soviet life. Artists in other ‘eastern countries’ had begun to express alienation in their work, loneliness, isolation, and in addition made use of expressionist and surrealistic forms to bring forth their critique and distance from socialist ‘realism’.

Soviet policy with respect to the arts opened up in the early 1960s, but this easing of control was followed by periods of extreme tightening. Many younger people were introduced to abstract art in unofficial studios, such as that of Ely Beliutin, who had begun his work in the mid-1940s. Beliutin was attracted to the New York School of Abstract Expressionism and encouraged those who worked with him to experiment with new art forms. In 1959, because of his interest in ‘abstract’ productions, Beliutin was banned from teaching at the Institute of Graphic Arts. A number of other underground studios emerged that
were engaged in experimenting with modern art. Earlier, a more open group had emerged in the Moscow section of the Union of Soviet Artists.

The well-known exhibit at the Manege became a symbol of both innovation and repression. Innovative artists were invited to show their creations at the Manege in 1962, where the work of ‘Thirty Years of the Moscow Union of Artists’ was being exhibited. The hostile reaction of Nikita Khruschev, who visited the exhibition, was in part provoked by the leadership of the Academy of Arts who encouraged Khruschev’s anger with the artists. Khruschev did not have any background in the arts. Thus the critique of the innovative artists and the warning that deviations influenced by western ideology might eventually undermine the state may have fit in with his own inclinations. The results were harsh, even if moderate compared to the Stalinist period. Experimental studios were closed, more liberal editors and members of juries and boards were moved to less responsible positions, and several of those who participated in the exhibit lost their jobs. Sophie Schiller’s husband commented on his feelings at the time:

Sophie had to resign from her job. I knew that was a possibility. But I was really petrified. I didn’t want to say anything to her; I wanted to encourage her and support her in any way I could. I kept my feelings to myself.5

There were important differences in the reactions to the exhibit at the Manege, both in artistic institutions and in the Party leadership, as well as confusion about how to react to these artists. Some of these differences reflected developments in the politics of the Soviet Union, the movement away from Stalinism and even an attempt to reach some state of coexistence with the west. After all, the participation of more ‘modern’ artists in the Manege exhibit would not have taken place had there not been advocates high up in the hierarchy interested in creating a somewhat more open society. Beliutin, after some time, returned to his work. Furthermore, as the discussion on the Manege developed, there were other exhibits of contemporary western art. Young, contemporary poets continued to give readings, and writers continued their scheduled visits to the United States and Western Europe.

At the same time, the leadership of a number of institutions, including the union, was replaced. Membership in the union gave artists important benefits, access to studios, possibilities of exhibiting, contracts for work, supplies at reasonable prices, and so on. It was also possible to belong to a union, take on contracts for book illustration, theater design, and so
on or even produce art that conformed to the norms of socialist realism and do more innovative work privately. Actually, many of the artists that we think of as ‘unofficial’ artists were able to survive that way.

In the 1960s, opposition became more open. Some disagreements with policy on the arts evolved alongside with a broader rejection of Soviet ideology. Groups of artists organized events and exhibits that were not approved of by the authorities in apartments, in scientific institutes where there was interest in the work, and outside in the open air. Sometimes these exhibits were closed after one day. A number of the artists presented themselves as groups that were persecuted, or ignored – not reviewed. They were developing and living an alternative culture, sometimes as part of particular artistic circles.

During this period, some artists turned to the western community, to journalists, and to others in the business and foreign service community – diplomats who were interested in the art. Perhaps the self-understanding of artists was more oriented toward the cultural event, the event also involved the rights of citizens who wanted to exhibit; and the productions, art book productions as well as others, were commentaries on the society as a whole. These ‘commentaries’ in works of art that reached the United States and Europe were used by the west in ideological battles with Soviet communism, though literary manuscripts smuggled out of the country seemed to receive more attention.

In 1974 at the ‘Bulldozer exhibit’, a show of paintings in the open air in Moscow, the action against the artists and the art seemed extreme to those from the west who observed the destruction of the art. Indeed, a few who tried to come to the aid of the artists were themselves attacked. Some artists landed in prison during this period, and there were expulsions of artists as well as collectors who were accused of being agents of a foreign power. The western papers equated the effort to achieve artistic freedom with efforts to achieve political freedom by calling attention to those who had to leave unions and academies or were expelled from the country. Oleg Tselkov was expelled from two art schools because of ‘formalism’. He maintained that he wanted to communicate an emotional idea in a form that was simple and intelligible.6

The intense reaction to the brutal closing of the 1974 exhibit was an important factor in the decision of the authorities to allow in the summer of 1975 an open air exhibit in a park in Moscow. For four hours, masses of people were able to see ‘unofficial’ art. In 1976, the Moscow Municipal Committee of Graphic Artists formed a ‘painting’ section, which Golomshtok describes as a ‘buffer between the Union of Soviet Artists and the stream of uncontrolled art’ (Rueschemeyer et al., 1985: 48).
Though the Soviet authorities were much more concerned with political and military issues than with their artists during the period of the Cold War, the efforts to exert some control over artistic contact with the west in the 1960s and 1970s stemmed from the fear of its influence and support for ideas and for potential movements that might rise to challenge the regime. Indeed, the west gave legitimacy to a critique of older artistic forms and ways of creating art that did challenge the regime and that did encourage solidarity among artistic groups. That challenge to the regime and its efforts to control contacts with the west as well as to limit the critique of the regime in the artwork that found its way there continued well into the 1980s.

It is helpful to remember that developments in Soviet art from the 1960s on was not simply a transformation of socialist realism under the impact of western artistic styles. Soviet artists attempted to deal with their own heritage of artistic ‘modernity’, a heritage that is characterized by the deep involvement of Russian artists in the contemporary art movements of Europe and by their own enormously creative work both before and after the 1917 Revolution. Soviet art, then, while inspired by western contemporary developments, was also imbued with interpretations and understandings developed by Soviet artists in their own society. There were of course artists who were rather uncomfortable with their early encounters with contemporary art; after all, contemporary art had not been part of their visual world. It was also difficult for some artists to connect their innovative work with contemporary work they saw from the west.

The western art world, however, was seen by many as a model of artistic freedom. It allowed a diversity of approaches to art and it was open to ongoing experimentation and change. It was only after artists emigrated to the United States that they really understood how difficult it was to survive as full-time artists and that despite the diversity and the possibilities available to all kinds of artists, certain styles were preferred though not mandated. In any case, the efforts of some Soviet artists to provoke through their art and the very interest in western art in part came about because of the critique of Soviet artists of their own society. Some of the artistic experimentation seen at these early exhibitions, therefore, was a response to what was happening in the Soviet Union, though it is also true that many artistic initiatives involved an intense excitement with participating in the opening of the conventional boundaries of art.

**Soviet artists emigrate to the States**

From the 1970s to the mid-1980s, over a hundred painters and sculptors left the Soviet Union for the United States, mostly settling in New York
City. This approximate figure refers to those artists considered professional by members of the New York art community. It is probably fair to say that much of the initial excitement in the United States about the work of the Soviet artists revolved around their deviation from socialist realism and the political implications of their stance. Aside from collectors in the Soviet Union such as George Costakis, many foreigners, European and American had bought art while visiting the country. By the mid-1960s, Soviet artists were already exhibiting abroad. Eugenii Rukhin participated in an exhibit at the Parsons Gallery in New York, and the work of other artists was exhibited in Western Europe. The difficulties ‘unofficial’ artists experienced in their own society further fueled the interest of Americans in these artists. And the circles of artists that developed within the Soviet Union as well as the numbers of Soviet intellectuals, professionals, and even members of the communist political hierarchy who were interested in their work reinforced the attraction of these artists to westerners.

Of course, some of the artists appealed to knowledgeable viewers who appreciated the sophistication of their forms and the beauty of their work. Mikhail Chemiakin’s art, surrealist in character, had an excellent reception in Paris and in New York. But some of the older artists, such as Lev Meshberg, whose impressive craft was applied in a more conservative context, initially had more difficulty after emigration. Often, the praise in the west and by visitors to the Soviet Union was exaggerated and a number of Soviet artists were actively encouraged to leave and work as artists in the United States. They imagined a magnificent reception upon arrival.

For those who identified as Jews, a considerable number during this emigration, there were formal agencies to aid them in the initial stages of their immigration, in Europe and then in the United States. Their stay in Europe before entering the United States also brought them into contact with dealers and galleries, interested and supportive of their art. After their arrival in the United States, there were exhibits in Jewish community centers and synagogues, in Armenian galleries (Armenian artists also were among the émigrés), as well as in a number of local galleries and even a few newly established galleries for Russian art owned and managed by Russians – who also had to find their way in a new art world. Although grateful for the support they received and the interest in their art that was expressed, most of the artists had broader visions for their work in the United States.

For the most part, the artists were only dimly aware of how to access the world of private galleries. They soon realized that some of the most
prestigious galleries would typically ignore work that was not personally recommended. They did not know how to address the difficulties of getting the attention of critics. They learned that not only was it extremely rare for them to have their exhibits publicly reviewed by critics but that the American artists they met faced the same difficulties. They quickly became doubtful of whether they would be able to live as full-time artists without the traditional supports provided in the Soviet Union.

In the Soviet Union, it was difficult for ‘unofficial’ artists to have their work reviewed; indeed many of the exhibits were closed as soon as they opened, despite a large and engaged following. Artists recognized that reviews of exhibits in the United States were free from the particular restrictions of a ruling Party but many maintained that the underground discussion of the art in the Soviet Union was on a higher level than much of the public criticism they followed in the United States and that intellectuals were more broadly educated. The émigrés wanted to communicate the philosophical basis of their art, which Americans did not understand, misinterpreted or simply ignored. Their ideas included bringing critics together to discuss particular exhibits or publish a journal that would include pictures as well as extensive commentaries.

The Soviet artists had little contact with viewers and with buyers, most of whom dealt with the gallery in which their work was exhibited. A number of the artists expressed an interest in knowing who they were and what they were interested in. They looked for artistic sensibility. Although recognizing that buyers had generally high incomes, they were unfamiliar with the considerations of investment that motivated many of them.10

Women experienced additional difficulties. During this first period of emigration, most women believed that though many problems of women were not yet resolved in the Soviet Union, they had lived their lives as professional artists. After coming to the United States, these women complained that they were not taken as seriously as male artists and were astonished by their experiences. Trained, as many of their male colleagues were, in the applied arts, their main emphasis had been on their own creative work. American women artists during this period have voiced similar complaints and maintained that they were not being taken seriously either by their professors or their male colleagues in the art world.

The distress of the women émigrés, however, also seems to be related to their experience of doing collaborative work in the Soviet Union. Collaborative and group work in a variety of contexts related to the arts was not unusual in Soviet society; in fact, it was probably a more common
way of working in the arts than in the United States. The Beliutin studio was previously mentioned as a place where artists came together to become familiar with contemporary art forms. In the Soviet Union, some women worked on projects with their husbands, others with colleagues outside the family. Coming to the United States perhaps at different times and faced with a number of personal as well as professional pressures, the creation of art (which for the women I spoke with was not a hobby, but rather a full professional commitment) as well as their collaborative work suffered.

The male artists complained about the lack of a colleague group. Most of the artists lived in the periphery of the New York art world, and may or may not have had a stable gallery connection in New York city, and saw their former colleagues from the Soviet Union rather infrequently. Although it is tempting to idealize these earlier relationships in the Soviet Union, which also had elements of jealousy as well as other tensions, the work that artists did together and the supports for ‘official’ and applied arts reduced some of the difficulties of being able to work as an artist and survive in the society. A number of artists, even with gallery connections in other states, expressed feelings of isolation. They tried to express elements of their past in the work they did with a new audience. But there emerged the increasingly significant realization that they did not belong to either art world and that as artists, in their work and in the public’s understanding of it, they remained alone.

A few of the artists, as mentioned before, eventually became integrated in their new art world during this period. There were a number of reasons for their success at this time. One of the earliest émigrés to New York, the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny, had a studio in the Soviet Union which attracted many artists and intellectuals. He moved into SoHo and retained a somewhat similar circle even though people lived in various parts of the city. A small group of young artists in SoHo created a community through their performances and their mail art. Through their mail art ‘exhibitions’ in Europe and the United States, they moved beyond the boundaries of their studio.

Differences in artistic style have also been important. I have mentioned the work of Chemiakin. The experiences of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid both before and after emigration were also very encouraging. Tourists and diplomats had been bringing out their work, and even before their emigration to the United States, Ronald Feldman arranged an exhibit which attracted considerable attention. Komar and Melamid found an eager audience that was in part strengthened by ongoing lectures on their art at the Feldman Gallery.
The ‘sots’ art of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid contains elements of classical painting, the happening, the concept, and the performance, but the stylistic paroding fitted the consciousness of artists of the 1970s better than the perhaps anti-social seriousness of happening and performance art in the west or even in earlier Soviet unofficial art. Golomshtok writes:

Even Soviet culture was an extremely fertile soil for the development of these genres; it was suddenly transformed into such a collection of dead clichés that young artists, who had by now assimilated other values, found themselves experiencing the natural aesthetic reaction of putting these clichés to shame, destroying them and doing a dadaist buffoon’s dance on their national graveyard. (Rueschemeyer et al., 1985: 50)

Komar and Melamid have used these genres in the United States as well, even while reflecting on their positions between two cultures. Komar and Melamid did what they consider ‘American art’ in the Soviet Union, art that was closer to pop art; while in the Soviet Union, their ‘socialist realist’ use of posters and banners was provocative. They made fun of Soviet bureaucracy, socialist realism, and poster propaganda. In one of their works, which focused on the United States, they compared the overproduction of consumer goods in America with the overproduction of ideology in Russia.

Komar and Melamid continue to develop their work in the United States; they express what they see as being similar to both societies, despite distinct appearances by recreating the parallels in their own art. A large project, ‘American Dreams’, done in the 1990s, which includes an opera – or as Komar and Melamid put it, a parody of an opera – Naked Revolution, explores the father figures of both societies, Lenin and Washington.11

A decade after the actual event, the artists Rimma and Valery Gerlovin wrote the following about their performance ‘Zoo’:

Our own work has always contained… a language of lyrical ambiguity. In the performance ‘Zoo’ (1977), we spent a day naked, in a cage labeled ‘Homo Sapiens. Mammals. Male and Female.’ The documentation of this event was interpreted by the Western press as a symbolic image of Russian artists during the Eastern European Biennale in Venice in 1977. This non-conventional metaphoric incongruity permits escape from or at least suspends, the law-like character and meaninglessness of the world’s order. Our cage protected us, not only in
our motherland of vapid propaganda, but here, too, in the capital of the monetarist hegemony. The world is not as large as people have thought. (Gerlovin and Gerlovin, 1986: 78, 80)

Ilya Kabakov and other conceptualists of the 1970s and 1980s experimented with non-fitting combinations of things and meanings. He did large empty canvases with ‘monumental’ but meaningless phrases. Artists associated ‘static and stable constructions of mind’ with an ideology they wanted to distance themselves from:

An extraordinary philosophic parallelism between the ‘West’ of Europe and the so-called ‘East’…Independent art…may be said to reproduce a specific state of mind, one of confusion dismemberment and numbness, in which opposites easily collide…Western thinking…seems hypnotized by the ‘crisis’ of humanism, the ‘end’ of rationality and morality…The rational world inherited from the Enlightenment is said to have disappeared: old and new, tradition and innovation, sense and nonsense, the real and the fictional, these demarcations are now said to have become erased. (Yakimovich, 1993: 213)

There were certainly artists in Soviet society who rejected activism and propaganda of any sort in their art. They believed it rarely resulted in social change and that the very effort to use art for ‘other’ ends was reminiscent of the Soviet official art world they criticized. These artists who emigrated to the United States appreciated the possibilities of experimentation and the diversity of art they encountered. There were also émigrés who were now able to concentrate on the spiritual dimensions of their work. The use of Jewish and Christian symbols in the Soviet Union among some of the leading unofficial artists did not have the goal of advocating any particular orthodoxy but implied a rejection of materialist values and an effort to make contact with an ultimate – human or transcendent – reality.

But most of the artists who emigrated during this period noted the different function of the artist in American society and sensed that the differences between Soviet and American artists were significant, whether or not the Soviet artists were involved in work that was similar to what at least some American artists were engaged in or whether or not the artists were relatively successful in the United States.

Despite the differences in the goals of Soviet artists and the artistic forms used in their art, it was very rare for artists to think of what they were doing as simply experimenting with form or, as Soviet artists put
it, engaging in ‘art as recreation’. Art had a function in Soviet society during the years following the Revolution and it had a function – and perhaps a number of functions in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s – before Perestroika.

One collector of Soviet art maintained that

Russian artists don’t paint for themselves. They are always serving an ideology. Art for its own sake is a dear notion for Russian underground artists. They say they should be allowed to paint what they want, but the reasons for painting have another ideological context. There are major exceptions such as those who flirted with abstraction for a while; but inevitably, it led to a message.

The challenges to official art in the Soviet Union were a public manifestation of the refusal to accept boundaries set by political institutions and artistic institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, the Academy of Arts or the Union of Soviet Artists. It is clear that the efforts to engage in this confrontation had not only problematical personal implications – the loss of a position, official contracts, or other supports but also served to galvanize individuals and groups to press for greater flexibility and institutional change even if they were not able to reach the masses and influence their beliefs.

Of course many artists were unable to live from the sale of their ‘dissident’ art and forced to accept official commissions. They expressed feelings of frustration and alienation. At the same time, a considerable number of these artists were seen as having a very important function in the artistic and political developments that emerged in Soviet society and also saw themselves as artists who were respected, who made a difference – even if limited, who had followers and strong supporters in their society, including members of the very elites that were being challenged.

The lack of success of so many of the artists who emigrated to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, the futile attempts at abstract art of some in order to appeal to a wider variety of people, the wish for attention and success – and at the same time, the reluctance to turn the creation of art into a business endeavor – created not only contradictions but a considerable loss of self-esteem. If one member of the family was able to work (typically the wife), the economic situation eased; but both husbands and wives were severely pressured by the lack of success of the artists. It is also true that some of the émigré artists were separated or divorced before coming to the United States. The initial exhibits by
particular communities were not sufficient to satisfy the ambitions of the artists. But Russian galleries such as the Nakhamkin Gallery that opened during this period eventually became very important to the artists, and considerable effort was made to publicize and support the work exhibited there.

This emigration was seen as a final one; yet there was little integration into the American art world, and very limited relationships of most of the artists to American artists and American intellectuals. Although most of the artists persevered, a few did commit suicide. And most expressed strong feelings of loneliness and unease.

Emigrating after Perestroika and the end of the communism

The Gorbachev years, the period of Perestroika, offered considerable opportunity for visual artists to advance their own creative work and to view the work of colleagues who had had enormous difficulties showing their art in the Soviet Union. A number of exhibits of Soviet émigré artists opened.12 Russian artists were able to become more familiar with western artists through exhibits that were shown in their own country and while traveling in western Europe. A few were able to arrange exhibits of their work in eastern as well as in western European cities. In 1988 and 1989, for example, Alexander Zakharov showed his work in Zagreb, Warsaw, and Stockholm, as well as in Kiev and Moscow. Dmitri Plavinsky's work was included in Sotheby's auction in Moscow in 1988.13 At the same time, though, as private supports and gallery exhibits increased for some of the artists, the general system of support for the arts was shaken, and artists had to now deal with working in an unfamiliar art market.

The years 1990–1998 were the most difficult years of our lives. It was the collapse of the entire system of art. There were few resources that allowed artists to be creative. As an artist, the goal is not to be in business. Artists don’t work for money but because they have something to say. When I am in the United States, I am more isolated from these troubles and can concentrate on my art.

The Union did not have the same power to arbitrate acceptable – good – art. Furthermore, the resources it had were not able to compete with what some artists were able to gain by other means. Nepomnyashchchy claims that in the early years of the transition, only a small percentage of the members of the union were young (Nepomnyashchchy, 1994: 131–51).
The situation was complicated by a complex tax system and smuggling. Much of the art sold abroad by art organizations sold for very little. Eventually, galleries expanded in the large cities. By the early 1990s, there were 100 galleries in Moscow and 60 in St Petersburg. Catalogs, which include artists from the provinces, advertise the work. In 1992, the seven leading galleries formed an Association of Moscow Galleries, AMOG (Barbanov and Eimermacher, 1996: 572). Their artists are paid better than many others. Other associations have also developed. Those involved in the international art world are now paid better than most, but very few artists are among the chosen few for this market. There is also an internal art market that includes figurative art, which tends to appeal to the conservative taste of the newly rich as well as to others; artists sell landscapes, flowers, and decorative art of all sorts, but this work is not representative of the majority. Not surprisingly, some artists chose to leave their profession and attempt to find other work. And some left the country.

The emigration of artists from Russia after Perestroika is quite different than the emigration of their colleagues during the 1970s and 1980s. First and foremost, the context of the East–West conflict was removed. This means that the motivations for migration are more varied. While access to information and opportunities for varied art production opened in Russia, the specifically political interest in Russian art declined in the west. The new context also explains why most Russian artists who came after the end of the 1980s did not think of their move as necessarily permanent. Nearly all of them believed that it would be possible to return home and unlike their colleagues who emigrated earlier, they were much less likely on return to face conditions that were worse than those they had experienced before emigration. In fact, some of the artists visited for a while, traveled back to Russia, and then decided to return to the United States. There is another difference: Especially the younger people had a better grasp of English and were more familiar with contemporary art.

For some, the unstable political regime in Russia itself became a significant factor.

I was waiting to see if Gorbachev would get kicked out and feared that if he did, the situation in the country would get very bad. If I had remained two years longer, I would have had a career there, and support from Russian collectors and clients with whom I had earlier contact.
We went to the States to do a show in San Francisco as normal artists. We didn’t think we would leave Latvia. We began to have more and more projects and became very involved in our work. A friend of ours had filmed the Soviet Union taking over Latvian TV; he was shot and we saw the camera still running. We didn’t know what would happen. We believed Latvia would gain its independence and we would return. In the meantime, the grandmother took our daughter out of Russia and met us in Stockholm.

There were of course also Jewish artists among the emigrants from the former Soviet Union. One, who saw himself as a refugee, came from L’vov, in the Ukraine. He does not now think of returning to live there though he would visit perhaps in the future. He believes that his art college was anti-Semitic and is generally concerned about anti-Semitism, even though he has also very positive associations with the city. Interestingly, he believes that after Perestroika nothing much changed in the world of art. ‘It became easier to exhibit in L’vov and prices were not very high. People who loved art bought art . . . and collectors bought the art.’

A few emigrated for personal reasons, having met and married an American, either in Russia or the United States. Two artists came because their children were living in the United States. In the meantime, one of these families returned to Russia, while they, the parents, were still living in the United States and traveling frequently to Russia.

Importantly, several of the artists had invitations from galleries in the United States to come and work for a period of time or to come for an exhibit of their work. One artist arrived only to find his gallery closed because of tax and financial issues. However, a number of collectors – and colleagues – the artists met helped them during their early stay in the United States but whether they would be able to remain and work as artists was an issue they all had to face.

As in the earlier emigration, the exposure to the varieties of art in the United States was quite exciting for artists coming from Russia. And the projects that some of these artists were able to become involved in gave them hope for what they might accomplish in the future. At the same time, they were aware that it would be impossible to take these supports – help from collectors or foundations – for granted. As one artist put it, ‘If you are not supported as an artist in the United States, you have to be commercially oriented for the rest of your life here.’ To be exhibited by a gallery with a focus on Russian art – the Mimi Ferzt Gallery, for example – was seen as an important step in establishing oneself as an
artist and, at least for most of the people attached to the gallery, a vital support. An art curator at the Grant Gallery, essentially run by former emigrants from Russia, maintained that their goal was not to establish a national Russian gallery but to have their exhibits include Russian and non-Russian artists while emphasizing the kind of art they are interested in, for example figurative work. There are times when the artists exhibited sell none of their work; after awhile, their relation to the gallery is affected. Plavinsky whose work is in collections at both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York also experienced such a situation during one of his own exhibits in the United States. In this particular exhibit, none of his works was bought. Interestingly, half of these, slated for an exhibition by a gallery at the Art Moscow Fair, were sold in Russia before Art Moscow Fair even opened! Some artists who tried to reach out to other galleries in the United States and in Europe have over the years succeeded in arranging occasional exhibits. Others supplement their income by doing more commercial work such as photography, a variety of skilled computer work, graphic design and limited editions of prints.14

Even the artists who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s learned that in order to survive as artists, they had to be very active in promoting their work. Some stressed their political and philosophical critique of the Soviet Union, which was interesting to a number of Americans then involved with Soviet art – even if Soviet artists complained that most Americans did not understand their art.

The recent emigrants have had more experiences with the art world outside of Russia than those artists who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s but a number of the recent émigrés have a similar critique of their place in the American art world:

I don’t know the people who buy my art and I don’t know why they are buying it.

Even if we are able to be commercially successful, we cannot act as cultural representatives.

For collectors here, I am not an Icon but a tiny part of a large wardrobe.

When I exhibited in Europe, people came up to sympathize with the difficulties I had as an artist in the Soviet Union and I didn’t at all challenge them. But our situation really wasn’t so bad. We had supports, studios, etc. And we had lots of respect as did our artists and writers.
When artists first came to the United States, a few did think that having to do work outside of their art in order to make a living was something only foreign artists faced. They slowly learned that this was the prevailing situation for artists in the United States. As two émigré artists comment:

For most Russians, art was a spiritual experience, related to ideas, philosophy. Americans are more decorative, commercial, more money oriented. We are also commercial but we don’t paint money.

The interesting and morally evaluative work of many Russian conceptual artists is completely ignored in the United States. Americans love Andy Warhol!

Certainly, the struggle to make it in the United States is very intense, even for the more experienced emigrants. Indeed, several believe that there is less interest in the Russian artists now in the United States than there was earlier. Some of the same intense difficulties are experienced by these younger artists – galleries closing, showing in exhibits in which nothing sold, struggling for years to establish clients, and having to engage in commercial work to survive. And some of the same stories of even greater ‘failure’ are discussed below.

The situation for émigré artists in Israel is similarly complex. Greeted on the one hand with great enthusiasm, many soon experienced intense difficulties having their art exhibited and appreciated. Some of the artists left the country and attempted to build their careers in Europe or in the United States or at least to arrange exhibitions there which would be helpful to their opportunities in Israel; a few returned to Russia. Several became involved in related professions that were similar to the new work of Russian émigrés to the States mentioned earlier.

I know Russian artists in the United States who are nearly desperate. Lucien Dulfan who is now in his mid 50s was very successful in Odessa. He came to the United States in the nineties. An American dealer saw his work, invited him to the United States and paid for his studio, where he worked for a year. But the dealer was unable to sell his work. Lucien has no particular computer skills and does not take on other jobs. If it weren’t for his wife, a music teacher, he wouldn’t be able to survive. At first he was fascinated with what was going on in New York but he lost his own signature. I have seen many marriages break up, but generally the women were flexible with their own work than the men.
There are artists in Israel who are similarly desperate. The director of the Jerusalem Artists House described a recent phone call by the wife of an artist whose husband was becoming increasingly upset and depressed by the difficulties of getting his work exhibited. She contacted a ‘patron’ who had previously offered to contribute financially in such a situation and he agreed to help her promote the artist’s work.17

Artists in Israel complain that in Russia, their union provided regular work and opportunities to exhibit and that it was difficult to understand why that was not happening in Israel.18 Their argument is interesting since the position of the unions in Russia deteriorated after the end of communism. Still, there are some unions in Russia that are more successful than others and that have retained property and other benefits. By comparison, the Association of Painters and Sculptors in Israel has fewer official functions.

However, artists who immigrate to Israel and are officially recognized as artists do get supports at various levels for a number of years before having to manage on their own. Artists requesting support are placed in three to four categories; the lowest indicates that the artist is not considered really a professional; a middle category recognizes the applicant as an artist and makes it possible to receive the supplies needed to work; and the next to highest and highest categories, often combined, indicate that the applicant is considered to be very good or excellent and therefore entitled to receive funding for a studio, for exhibiting and for the accompanying catalog.19 There are also supports for immigrants with special difficulties, such as single parents with children who are in difficult work or non-work situations. Although some supports are seriously challenged by the present government, they are seen as part of the commitment to the immigrants; they are ‘part of the family and have the right to help in Israel’.

Importantly, the Russian immigration is increasingly seen in Israel as providing an enormous number of impressive cultural specialists, and people living outside of the largest cities connect the increase in cultural opportunities provided by the municipality for those who live there to the Russian immigration.20 It is true that most of those who attend the exhibits of Russian artists are Russians who may not be familiar with the Russian émigré artists who are younger and more in tune with contemporary western artistic traditions.21 At the same time, well-known Russian artists are increasingly taking part in Israeli exhibitions abroad, and they do so as Israeli artists. In contrast to the United States, the Russian artists move into Israeli society as Russians and Israelis. Mikhail Grobman notes that he has two homes and that if he lived in Europe, in
a city that was like Moscow, he would be deeply nostalgic for his Russian home where he still works and exhibits. Israel is his second home, and it is his integration as an artist and as a citizen in Israeli society that provides enormous support for the work he does and for his freedom to develop artistically.

That said, it is important to remember that however Israel differs from the United States, there is a form of market economy in Israel that necessitates compromise in the artistic work one engages in. The situation is especially difficult for those artists who are not well-known, who cannot be assured of exhibitions in galleries and museums. Artists often take on work they consider deeply compromising in order to earn money. One example is the work of painters and sculptors, organized by the Jerusalem municipality, in Gilo, a section of Jerusalem that is close to Bethlehem. Here artists were to recreate on a wall the landscape that could no longer be seen. Oriented to more contemporary artistic notions of art, they very much looked down on the work they were doing.22

In the United States and in Israel, there are a number of Russian artists supporting themselves by teaching art. Those in the States typically work in schools in New York and in New Jersey, where a number of them live.23 Most of the Russian artists had a classical educational experience in the arts, in anatomy for example, though they believe that there is much less emphasis on ‘craft’ among the younger generation.24 In any case, two of these younger artists in the United States have had an interesting and fairly successful experience in the United States. They differ from their older colleagues in a number of ways.

Igor Vishnyakov, born in 1968, was the son of a Russian trade diplomat. He has lived all over the world and came to the Soviet Union at the age of 12. Although he studied in an art school for children, he was not accepted into the art school of his choice, studied cinematography for a year, and became involved in painting and photography while developing some interesting combinations in his work. One of the teachers he worked with, Timur Novikov of the New Academy of Fine Arts, arranged an exhibit of his work there and offered him a formal affiliation, which he has not yet taken up. Part of the rationale for this school has been labeled ‘Neo-Academism’, a return to the values of the ‘classical aesthetic’ in contrast to ‘near monopoly Moscow conceptualism in the presentation of modern Russian art’.25 Vishnyakov, who has also been exhibited by the Russian State Museum in St Petersburg, does some commercial work in the United States to support himself. He has also been given a small cottage in a French village in exchange for his work,
where he spends several weeks each summer. Some of these experiences are shared with the older artists, the ongoing connection with Russia for example, but there are significant differences. The first is his educational experience, which has been extensively self-arranged and directed. Secondly, he sees himself as part of a different generation, an adolescent during the prime of Gorbachev, rebellious with dyed hair at the time – part of the punk scene.

Yaroslav Mogutin, the second young artist, who also works from a photographic base, came to the United States in 1995. Living on his own while still in adolescence, he was expelled from the Polygraphic Technical School, the Moscow Institute of History and Archives, and the Russian State Humanitarian University, where he was accused of being amoral. He, too, sees himself as someone who rebelled against established norms after Perestroika. His difficulties in Russia intensified as a journalist, with the expression of gay sympathies in his writing. Mogutin, who worked as a model to support himself, has lectured on such subjects as contemporary Russian literature and journalism at Columbia, Cornell, and several other American universities. He is also exhibited at the Mimi Ferzt Gallery. In contrast to practically all of his Russian colleagues, Mogutin believes ‘that artists on welfare aren’t real artists’. In that sense, he has internalized American norms. He is also perhaps more integrated in an American milieu than the other Russian émigrés.

The experiences of these younger artists involved a different political and philosophical stance, shaped by the opening-up of the state, the exposure to the west, the company of ‘alternative’ young people engaged in non-traditional revolutionary activities, and of course their own particular development in Russia. The majority of artists who emigrated carried a ‘traditional’ artistic baggage with them into emigration – a notion of what it means to be an artist, an expected relationship with other intellectuals, a need for certain kinds of support and recognition in their society. Russia in some sense remains a place where some of these expectations are realized even after the reduction of supports of all kinds for artists and the weakening of those institutions that provided the legitimacy for their existence. Indeed, a number of artists who had been active in the 1980s now have prominent positions in the art world. Although, as mentioned earlier, the unions have a much weaker position in Russian society and are not able to provide their previous extensive supports, Ivan Kazanski, chairman of the Moscow Sculptors’ Association, noted that the Artists’ Union mentioned above retained property which they were able to rent; artists were then offered studio space. The
Soros Foundation and private entrepreneurs and banks offer additional benefits; not surprisingly, these are especially helpful to the most enterprising artists.

But in Russia, as well, the artist is no longer the outsider, the critic, he or she once was, even if some of the art is imbued with philosophical ideas and interpretation. Artists, increasingly dependent on private support, become part of the market system in Russia as well even if they are able to gather with cherished colleagues to work. At the same time, the city and even the state now realizes the importance of support for culture and the danger of being overwhelmed by outside ‘cultural’ forces and by individual cultural entrepreneurs with a great deal of power. The great tradition in several of the arts also has to be maintained in order to attract visitors, many of whom come because of the cultural life in especially Moscow and St Petersburg. And of course Vladimir Putin values increasing support from intellectuals and artists. Visual artists benefit from these developments as well as larger institutions. 26

Ernst Neizvestny, a sculptor, is one of the most known of the older émigré artists. I mentioned previously that he managed to gather a group of interested – and interesting – people around him and that he has been widely exhibited. Yet he finds himself much appreciated in Russia, exhibited and supported especially by collectors and financiers who were previously interested in his work. Furthermore, Neizvestny believes that neither the Russian artists nor his students have made a mark on artistic development in the United States. 27 It is rumored that Chemiakin is moving to France (his home after leaving the Soviet Union and before coming to the United States) where he has more exhibitions and where he is closer to Russia. 28 The artist Lev Meshberg, part of the earlier emigration to the States, is presently living and working in Italy, though he retains his New York apartment and shows in a New York gallery.

Interestingly, the desire to retain a strong connection to Russia is not restricted to the older generation of Russian artists. For those who are seen as especially good artists with a solid reputation, there are a number of opportunities for contracts of all kinds. And to some extent, many of the artists in New York depend on these for their economic – and spiritual – survival.

There are also contracts that involve artists in a quite different milieu than they were used to under the old regime. Ivan Kazanski, who continues his work for the Union in the United States (and with frequent trips during the year to Russia) was contracted to work on the rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, a Russian Orthodox Church,
to do a sculpture of a Saint, which he prepared with his daughter, who completed the larger model in Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church tends to have not only far fewer statues than the Catholic Church but also different traditions for these. When Kazanski arrived in Moscow, he and his daughter were criticized for creating a Saint that looks up to heaven and Kazanski had to change the position of the head so that it bowed down toward the ground. Interestingly, the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny has been involved in work containing religious themes.

Younger artists also like to return for visits or to stay for long periods of time because they can earn money, sometimes from corporations – which goes further in Russia than in the United States and allows them more time for their own creative work. Those trained in computer graphics and animation, for example, may work for a short period of time for foreign corporations and earn enough money for the entire year. A few have decided to remain in Russia. Artists in the United States and in Russia do set-design, mostly for the stage in Europe and in Russia.

Many artists expressed pleasure in being able to work collaboratively with Russian colleagues and return regularly to do so. Suzanne Scherer and Pasha Ouporov who have worked collaboratively on paintings and installations since the time they met believe that such collaborative work is still more extensive in Russia than in the United States. And the discussions of art and intellectual issues in groups remain appealing to the Russian émigrés of all ages. Pasha Ouporov added that ‘the psychology in Russia is quite different. Group gatherings were a part of how we lived.’ For those artists who emigrated when they were older and who still are not able to speak English, the return visits are akin to a spiritual renewal.

Oleg Vassiliev spoke about the differences in how the artists live in the two countries, and in a catalog written for one of his exhibitions, Amei Wallach wrote the following about their American apartment:

Their apartment is a one-bedroom. The livingroom is Vassiliev’s studio. It is where he spends all day every day, at work in the company of his paintings. A corner has been cleaned for a card table on which Kira has set out cheese, nuts, and wine. There are no old friends to stop by, however. They have dispersed… For Vassiliev’s 65th birthday four years ago, he and Kira Vassiliev – inspired by Ionesco’s play *The Chairs* – set empty chairs around the card table. They held imaginary conversations with the absent friends who used to gather 35, 45 deep to celebrate his birthday – the poets, the musicians, the painters who once knew everything there was to know about what each other thought. Who fed one another in every sense.
Several of the artists still have apartments in Russia, some in neighborhoods which feel more luxurious than the New York and New Jersey neighborhoods in which they now live. And several have parents, children, and grandchildren still in Russia and travel regularly to be with them. These enduring personal and professional ties make it likely that the artists will remain for most of their lives in two social and artistic worlds.

As the artist Zoya Frolova put it:

We grew up feeling we should belong. Some people identify with a nation. We identify with artistic goals, though we do go back and forth.

Zoya Frolova and Janis Jakobson and many of the émigré artists and intellectuals from Russia are very international in their orientation. They do not see themselves as embedded in one society. For the émigré artists, artistic goals and possibilities are paramount and these as well as the likelihood of being able to survive decently determine where they will work. They immigrate to Israel, to Europe, and to the United States. Many of the artists move again or travel ‘in-between’ for professional and for personal reasons. For those who are among the successful, there is an emphasis on being seen as part of the international art world rather than being appreciated as Russian artists – even if it is important and imperative to return to Russia. It is not that this way of being in the world is new. But it is consciously articulated by Russian emigrants – and legitimated – though not without ambivalence.

Conclusion

The communist revolution in the Soviet Union involved an important transformation in the art world and in the lives of Russian artists. Some elements of these changes preceded the formation of the new regime. But the new developments were moderated and shaped by artists, some of whom returned to the Soviet Union from abroad after the Revolution – in negotiation, so to speak, with political and institutional representatives of the new regime.

The conjuncture of several factors – among them a strong ideological bent of artistic movements around the turn of the century, the anti-western implications of the civil war following the revolutionary break, and above all the Leninist agenda of transforming society and culture through centralized political control – sealed the fate of the initial phase
of artistic experimentation and of competition among various modernist and conventional styles. Russian art became isolated from international artistic developments, and the dominance of party and state in cultural and economic life made artistic work dependent on state support and shaped it along narrowed ideological lines.

Change within the Soviet Union began after the death of Stalin. Exposure to some of the developments in modern art, and the experimentation and challenges to socialist realism in the Soviet Union itself were paralleled by competition among and within the main artistic institutions, political and economic tensions with the west, and ongoing efforts at maintaining control of artistic life. The very fact that artistic control became associated with political ideology and with the party’s claim to ideological dominance gave artistic deviations from the official doctrine a particular significance.

The so-called unofficial artists tried to open up the system of art and to challenge old assumptions about the relation of the state to cultural productions. Yet the politically opaque symbolic character of much western and ‘unofficial’ Soviet art made its toleration – first halting and intermittent, then more widespread – into a signal of a partial opening of the Soviet system. The reactions and enthusiasm of western representatives and visitors to these developments were related in part to the tensions between the countries. However, the encouragement artists received from the west and the promises of future success and the ‘good life’ in the United States were exaggerated and had an impact on the readiness and preparation of émigré artists to deal with the reality of the American art world.

The decision to leave the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s involved a number of factors, political and economic, as well as issues of anti-Semitism for some of the artists. The decision to come to the United States meant leaving the Soviet Union, probably forever, because returning involved innumerable difficulties and disadvantages. The new system of art, excitingly varied and open, very much depended on private initiative and support. Not only were artists not funded by the state, but the importance of artists seemed incomparable to their role in the Soviet Union. Those who viewed their art for the most part seemed uninformed and unable to understand the political or philosophical significance of the work. Their dependence on community, ethnic support, and even galleries run by Soviet émigrés was a disappointment, a failure to become integrated into the American art world. Only a few of the artists managed to create an interesting environment with colleagues and to appeal to viewers who could understand their work.
During the Gorbachev period, artists faced in their own society the transformation to a market system for the arts. The galleries that opened, the associations of galleries that were eventually created, and the interest of foundations and private supporters initiated a fascinating and open art market. Artists who had not been able to show their work were now exhibited in the most prestigious Russian museums; they exhibited and traveled to Europe and in the United States, and some were invited abroad to work and to exhibit their art. Yet those artists who were chosen to be exhibited in their own society, who had international contacts, did not represent the majority of artists in Russia. A number left their profession and worked at other jobs to support themselves.

Devoid of support and uncertain about their future and about future developments in their country, some decided to leave Russia and to work in the United States. This most recent immigration, the immigration of the 1990s involved a number of similar elements as the older one, even with their greater exposure to the contemporary art world. The ability to develop professionally and their exposure to the great variety of art that existed in the United States were tempered by difficult ongoing efforts to search and seek support, and their realization that they had no special role as artists in the United States.

But something did change in the lives of Russian artists. These émigrés were able to return and work in Russia. They were able to engage in collaborative work. They could meet with people who appreciated and supported their art and were given contracts that ensured their acceptability as artists and their ability to meet their economic needs. Aside from private supports and contributions of the cities to culture, the Russian government is increasingly cognizant of the importance of culture and of the importance of support from those involved in cultural and intellectual activities. Some of these artists move between two art worlds because the development of a market system for the artists does not necessarily mean that the Russian system of art is a carbon copy of the American system; it emerges out of some of its older traditions and retains some of its older goals.

Both the ‘old’ émigré artists from the Soviet Union and the later ones after Perestroika experienced drastic contrasts in their life and work that give vivid indications of how political and economic structures shape art worlds and the work and outlook of individuals. These personal experiences not only point to the overall differences between an art system that combined state support with political mandates and regulation and a primarily market-shaped art world. The relation between artists and their audience, the self-conception of artists, their sense of mission,
their relation to commercialism – all of these are in subtle ways related to the material organization of art and its relation to the state. This relationship in Israel is somewhat better because of the initial supports and the large number of Russian émigrés who value the work of Russian artists.33

Yet the impact of political and economic structures is mediated by the culture of the art world itself, a culture that is to some extent – and at least in the short run – independent of material conditions and political openness or constraint. Both the émigré artists who left behind a disliked political system and those who came from Russia after the recent transformations had experiences and reactions in the United States that were in many ways similar. Both found working in an open art market a difficult challenge. But more importantly, both often distanced themselves from a mere commercial conception of the value of art and by contrast sought to retain a sense of intellectual responsibility that – perhaps paradoxically – had been nurtured by a materially secure position as well as by a sense of mission that underlay both the official mandate for art and an insistence on autonomy from such regulation.

Notes

1. This chapter is based primarily on two sets of interviews. The first were conducted during the early 1980s with official and ‘unofficial’ painters and sculptors in the Soviet Union as well as with union representatives, professors in art schools and the Academy of Arts, and managers of salons in Moscow and Leningrad. It is also based on in-depth interviews during the same period with Soviet émigré artists in Israel, Germany, and the United States as well as with gallery owners and managers in these three countries. These interviews were supplemented by long conversations with art historians and art curators who had immigrated to England and were affiliated at different periods with Oxford University. Soviet Émigré Artists (co-authored with Igor Golomshtok and Janet Kennedy) in 1985 includes a number of these findings and I will refer to them in this chapter.

More than a decade later, at two intensive workshops with artists, art historians, and curators held at the Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University in 1992 and at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1998, it was possible to review this period again. I then had the opportunity for further talks with Ely Beliutin, Vitaly Komar, and Alexander Melamid.

The second set of interviews, with recent émigré artists, took place at the close of 2001 and during 2002 in New York City. I am very grateful to the Rhode Island School of Design for their interest and support of this project. I revisited some of the artists who had emigrated in the 1970s and want to especially thank two of these artists, Sophie Schiller and Ernst Nezvestny, for their help, as well as Dr Sergei Khruschev at the Watson Institute at Brown University for recent discussions. I want to express my gratitude to Christine
Sperber, co-owner and manager of the Mimi Ferzt gallery, for her welcome, encouragement, and help in reaching recent Russian émigré artists. I thank the artists Zoya Frolova, Janis Jakobson, Ivan Kazansky, Nonna Kazansky, Yaroslav Mogutin, Pasha Ouporov, Suzanne Scherer (an American artist who lived in Russia for two years and works collaboratively with Ouporov), Oleg Vassiliev, Dmitri Plavinsky, Alexander Spivak, Igor Vishnyakov, and Alexander Zakharov, the art historian Masha Plavinsky, Larissa Larionova, an art curator at the Grant Gallery, Ronald Feldman (Ronald Feldman Gallery), who first exhibited the work of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid in 1976, Ernst Neizvestny, Asya Meshberg, Susan Tumarkin Goodman, Jerry Goodman, and Mark Handelman for the time and effort they took to help with this project.

2. The Israeli Ministry of Absorption has estimated that 1400 plastic artists arrived between 1990 and 2002 (Green, 2002). The interviews with Russian artists in Israel were done in the winter of 2004.

3. Interestingly, during most of the Soviet period, though not in all of its phases, the exposure to contemporary art and the possibility of exhibiting more varied art was comparatively greater in the ‘non-Russian’ republics than in the center of the country. Richard Tashjian organized an official exchange between Armenian artists in the Soviet Union and the Armenian Artists Association of the United States in 1973. Since that time, Armenian artists had direct exposure to contemporary modern art through official visits to the United States and through exhibitions of Armenian émigrés and Americans of Armenian descent at the Museum of Modern Art in Erevan (interview with Tashjian, 1984, and talks with guest artists from the ‘non-Russian’ republics at the Rhode Island School of Design through the 1990s).

4. I have learned much about the Beliutin studio and the background of his work from long and repeated conversations with one of his students, Sophie Schiller. Later, after the fall of communism, I had the opportunity to explore these issues with Beliutin himself.

5. Personal conversation.

6. Interview with Tselkov, done jointly with Janet Kennedy, 1983.

7. In one study, Dodge and Hilton (1980: 13) estimated that altogether 200–300 professional artists left the Soviet Union. Of these, about 50 emigrated to Israel and 35 to Paris, while others settled in Vienna, Berlin, London, and other cultural centers in Europe.

8. Mudrak, looking at the patterns that evolved over the years, in turn suggests that ‘invariably, it seems that to gain official recognition in the homeland, progressive Russian artists had first to have been “commodified” in the West through exhibitions outside Russia’ (Mudrak, 1999: 473).

9. Chemiakin and Meshberg, both of whom I interviewed in New York, had very different experiences during this period. Chemiakin, who admired such American artists as Frank Stella and Jackson Pollock and who had a studio in a downtown area of New York dominated by relatively successful artists, described Meshberg as a genius. Meshberg’s work, which did not fit the model of socialist realism, was represented in a number of Soviet collections including the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and the Russian Museum in St Petersburg. While he was seen as an artistic innovator and leader in the Soviet Union, he has had some difficulty finding an audience for his work in the United States.

11. The main character in this opera is a Russian taxi driver. Komar and Melamid noted that many of the Russian artists became taxi drivers in the United States and served as important links between the people and the elite of the society. For an overview of their recent work, see the exhibition catalog, ‘Komar and Melamid’s American Dreams’ (Thistlethwaite et al., 2001).

12. A number of émigré artists were exhibited in the 1990s, including several of the artists mentioned thus far in this chapter: Komar and Melamid, Chemiakin, Neizvestny, and the painters of the Beliutin Studio.

13. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, a private museum funded and directed by Zurab Tsereteli, which opened at the close of 1999, also included the work of Plavinsky.

14. As Larissa Larionova put it: ‘Then there is the really commercial work. At Art Expo at the Javits Center, a few artists are employed by publishers, paid a modest salary while the publishers retain the rights to their work.’

15. That is indeed one reason why the Grant Gallery decided not to restrict their exhibits to Russian art.

16. According to Marina Genkina, an art historian who ran one gallery that eventually closed, she also does some work at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (Interview, Winter 2004, Jerusalem).


18. Ruth Zadka (ibid.). Those younger artists who manage to have exhibits typically do not see their success as something unusual (compared to the experiences of Russian émigrés in the United States). Sergei Bunkov emigrated with his Jewish wife four years ago from Birobijn. His wife joined us to help with translating and commented that her husband ‘knows no Hebrew and is not planning to learn. His art is his life. We are cosmopolitan and belong all over.’ Aside from a number of exhibits in the United States and the Far East of the Russian Republic, in the four years he has been in Israel, Bunkov has had four individual exhibits, and participated in six group exhibits. Sponsored by patrons, he was also chosen to exhibit at the Tel Aviv Painters and Sculptors Association (interview, Winter 2004).

19. Alexander (Sasha) Okun teaches at Bezalel and is Chair of the Association of Painters and Sculptors in Jerusalem (interview, Winter 2004, Jerusalem).

20. In one of the largest cities in Israel, Ramat Gan, Ellie Lavie, Director of Arts and Museums, including the Zetlin Museum of Russian Art, noted the increase in some events, including music. He mentioned that these attracted so many people that the Theater of Ramat Gan was used to provide places for visitors, which typically included children as well as adults (interview, Winter 2004).

21. Their reaction to the work of younger Israeli artists may be more extreme. ‘Many young artists here think modern art has to be political – they just depict the poor, persecuted Arab and the mean Israeli – rather than being concerned with developing artistic values.’ ‘Russian art has an academic basis; then we go on to modernism. Some Israeli artists combine styles before really learning the fundamentals’ (interviews, Winter 2004).

22. Comments of one Israeli involved in the project.
23. The CASE Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in Jersey City had a number of exhibits of Russian artists; most recently they did an exhibit of the work of Russian women artists.

24. Students from the Rhode Island School of Design made the same observation while on a study trip in the Soviet Union in 1984. But then and now, there were differences in evaluating the more ‘technically’ prepared art and less appreciation for the actual work that was produced. This is not surprising because the artists have been shaped by different priorities in their educational experiences in the arts.

25. Sergeev (1997) also notes that most people outside of Russia are not aware that the New Academy of Fine Arts ‘consists of several rooms in a communal flat in need of serious repair . . . and that the first intake of students consisted of young enthusiasts of rave culture and the squatters’ movement . . .’ (p. 63).

26. To take one example of increasing state interest in the visual arts, Vladimir Putin met twice with Mikhail Chemiakin who had to leave the Soviet Union in 1971. During one of these conversations, he gave support for a new arts institute in St Petersburg (Bohlen, 2001).

27. However, Neizvestny sees himself as part of two worlds of art. He is engaged in as well as critical of some developments in the United States. When he returned to Russia in 1989, he was received with enthusiasm, contracts for work, and honors. He met Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin. At the same time, he is somewhat uncomfortable with the newly rich entrepreneurs involved in culture and the older bureaucrats in Russian art institutions supportive of traditional positions with respect to the arts (personal conversations with Ernst Neizvestny, 2001).

28. Chemiakin is doing designs for the Kirov’s Nutcracker, which has been performed in Russia and will be performed in Washington, DC.


31. Not all the artists were able to retain their apartments after emigration.

32. Susan Tumarkin Goodman noted the example of Grisha Bruskin to illustrate this point – a Russian artist who has been able to become a successful artist (rather than a ‘Russian’ artist) in the United States. His work has been exhibited at the Marlborough Gallery in New York.

33. Though the émigrés do not necessarily understand some of the contemporary manifestations in the Russian art.
In the preceding chapters we have looked at what happens in the art worlds of different countries as a consequence of state action and arts policies. Art is socially and economically embedded, and the state plays a significant role in all of the countries we examined. At the same time, many artists have done work that did not respond to economic incentives or comply with political expectations, even when incentives and sanctions were most intense. Our results, then, argue against an idealist conception of art as internally shaped as well as against a view of socio-economic and political determinism. In this chapter, we build on the case studies to provide an overview of key issues with respect to visual art and the state, and to suggest some broader conclusions about the relationship between the arts and the state.

Key comparative issues from the cases

To start, we review the case studies to suggest what stands out comparatively. The point is not to summarize the chapters once more but to identify what is characteristic of the art worlds in the different political and economic systems we have studied and what is illuminating for comparative reflections on the relation between art and the state.

In the United States, the defining feature of public support for the arts is the primacy of indirect funding through the tax deductibility of gifts to arts organizations and the exemption of most arts institutions from property, sales, and other taxes. This means that the tastes and decisions of individual and corporate donors as well as those of the executives of artistic institutions are subsidized by the overall tax fund. Indirect support strengthens the influence of elite views of art, though this is virtually invisible.
Direct state funding of the arts exists in the United States as well, at the federal, state, and local levels. In recent years, however, direct funding of artists has been severely curtailed at the national level, and the role of artists and arts professionals on the advisory panels that disburse the funds of the National Endowment for the Arts has been reduced. Both of these developments spring from the politicization of the arts, especially the attention of right-wing politicians to populist concerns and the objections of vocal minorities.

The contrast between open direct funding and the less visible indirect public support for the arts is instructive. Decisions involving direct support are more exposed to political objections and competing pressures, while the indirectly subsidized actions of individual and corporate sponsors and art managers are more shielded against such ‘interference’. This does not, of course, mean that private and indirectly state-supported funding for the arts are neutral in their impact on artistic developments.

The United Kingdom has a long tradition of maintaining the national heritage. Direct state funding of the arts can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century, or still earlier, and was formalized with the establishment of the Arts Council of Great Britain after World War II. While notable state funding remains, the current financial difficulties of art institutions are a result of radical funding cutbacks, which started in the 1980s. Furthermore, Thatcherite policies of privatization in many public industries were applied to the arts, which are now expected to adhere to the tenets of ‘enterprise culture’. This means, among other things, an emphasis on performance indicators that measure the arts with a monetary yardstick.

Arts institutions are also expected to raise funds from private sources. Tax incentives have been put into place to encourage private donations, but there is less readiness for private giving on the part of individuals, as compared with the United States. And while some large corporations actively fund the arts, corporate philanthropy is in short supply. Some debate, particularly with respect to lottery proceeds, exists over whether public funds should be used for an elite taste, that is, the arts (rather than sport, for example); however, public opinion is more supportive of the arts than in the United States. This can be seen, for instance, in the recent government decision to require all state and locally funded museums to be open to all, free of charge.

The differences between the United Kingdom and the United States underline the importance of traditions. Once certain patterns are firmly established they tend to persist, and new patterns cannot be realized
quickly just because they are deemed desirable. Private giving does not come forth simply because new tax incentives are legislated. And direct support for the arts and elite preferences can, once established, survive populist attacks even in a context of privatization as the currently dominant public policy.

Norway and Sweden are characterized by generous public funding of the arts as part of the welfare state. The state and civil society work in partnership in implementing arts policy, with artists’ associations playing a significant role. The generosity of the state is strengthened, though also complicated, by decentralization. The state also acts to cultivate audiences for artworks and performances. It is notable that in the Scandinavian countries, elite and popular views and tastes coexist with relatively little friction.

How do these two countries evade the political tensions that in other cases are associated with direct public support for the art? We suggest several factors that seem relevant here. Three stand out in particular: the fact that support for artists is part of the overall social provisions of the welfare state, the complementary interaction of state agency and civil society organizations, and the generous support for both popular and elite cultural interests. Norway and Sweden are not high-deference countries (though they may differ from each other slightly); but they are both characterized by high levels of trust, a trust that includes a sense of being well governed (Fuchs et al., 1995; Inglehart, 1997). The growing role of experts, which is irksome to some artists, seems to fit with the overall patterns of state administration and monitoring. Efforts at audience development may somewhat narrow the gap between elite and popular cultural interests. At the same time, state funding is on occasion combined with measures of accountability which have, however, a somewhat different meaning than similar measures in the United Kingdom as they are not embedded in the ideological context of an imposed ‘enterprise culture’.

The US, the UK and the Scandinavian states demonstrate a range of arts funding from stingy and privatized, through modest and privatizing, to generous state support in a context of political democracy. The Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic represent the far end of the spectrum of support, both in terms of munificence and in the attempt to control. In these two state socialist countries, state funding was associated with artistic constraints; but with significant variations over time both in the USSR and in the GDR.

Initially, at the time of the Revolution, the most prominent art in the USSR represented modernist innovation. This was quickly curtailed in
a complex process that involved struggle among different factions and the use of positional advantage in politics and administration. The process ended in state-imposed constraints that favored socialist realism. Socialist realism presented politically sanctioned images; at the same time, it offered them in a style that suited popular tastes. Correspondingly, both in the Soviet Union and in the GDR efforts were made to bring new audiences to the experience of culture and art.

The official position of art later became the foil for innovations against the official grain. ‘Unofficial art’, which was barely tolerated, had a special resonance precisely because of this. The idea that art fulfills a public mission was embraced both by official and by most unofficial artists. The unofficial art world was supported by artists’ memories of the early revolutionary developments and by perceptions of art in foreign countries, another reminder of the important role of tradition and historical memory.

Comparing different countries is one and perhaps the most obvious way of studying the interrelation between state policies and art worlds. In addition, we sought to highlight the importance of state systems by following what happens to artists when systems dramatically change or when artists move from one system to another.

At reunification, East German artists suddenly were confronted with a dramatic political and economic transformation of their lives. They lost a public position that was both supportive and constraining. They gained autonomy, but had to make a living in an open market; and most faced greater austerity. Many deplored what they saw as the irrelevance of the arts in public life, and the loss of status this implied for their calling. Again, the persistent survival of past conceptions of art, especially notions of the public mission of art, is important for many East German artists.

As artists migrate across system boundaries, they become acutely aware of the differences between the systems, and the advantages and disadvantages of each. The experience of the Soviet émigré artists was in some respects similar to that of East German artists who went through the changes that occurred over time in Germany. They treasured some aspects of the system they left behind in Russia, in particular, the solidity of training and again – in a complicated sense – the public role of art, shared in different ways by official and unofficial art. In the second, post-1989 migration, Russian émigré artists had fewer constraints in post-communist Russia; nevertheless, they were still struck by persistent differences between Russia and the United States.
Reflections on art worlds and states

The visual arts exist in a vast variety of forms, with manifold intentions, uses, and effects. Art may answer to conventional tastes, offer pleasing images, and ornament private and public life. At the other extreme it may express marginal experiences and do so in a way as to upset the viewer – ‘shocking the bourgeois’. Its intentions may be personal and private or it may formulate messages of a commercial, moral, or political kind; and these messages may express mainstream ideas or dissent. In style, art may incarnate and respond to established traditions, or it may seek radical innovation and uniqueness; in contemporary high art, the uniqueness and originality of artworks are indeed greatly valued. It is useful to remember this variety of forms and purposes. It makes clear that single-dimensional arguments of state effects (or of any other single factor) on art are untenable.

Becker (1982) introduced the conception of ‘art worlds’ in order to highlight the corresponding complexity of the social incarnation of art. Art worlds include artists and viewers, buyers and sellers, artists’ associations and art institutions of various kinds. In art institutions, the public and private spheres intertwine, as these can encompass public, private or quasi-independent art museums, art academies, culture departments of government, and also schools and colleges with their instruction in and positions for art. Art worlds also include artistic and art-related traditions, historical memory, and the complex symbolic repertory on which both artists and those who respond to their work draw.

In all of the countries we studied, the state is deeply involved in art. States provide a crucial context for the creation of art and its reception. They offer direct and indirect funding, and play a role in education, which helps create audiences for the arts. The market alone prevails nowhere. Conversely, markets and quasi-market mechanisms play a role in all the art worlds we examined. The choices made by individuals and groups can be influenced; choice can be encouraged, it can sometimes be suppressed, but it can never be fully eliminated. And even with maximum involvement of the state, the response of audiences has consequences for art production, not only for its material base, but also for the attention and respect it receives, and for encouragement and motivation.

Market-dominated systems and state-dominated systems represent two poles of the analysis, and the contrasts, in the 1950s, between the United States and the Soviet Union were stark indeed. But there are features that must not be overlooked even in this contrast: the involvement of the state in the United States, especially through tax law, and the persistence
of individual choice and some artistic autonomy even in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist Soviet Union, in Official and especially Unofficial art.

Furthermore, states and markets share a major influence on the world of art. Both favor traditional, figurative, and non-innovative art (possibly including abstract art, provided it does not challenge the viewer). The reason: both favor popular tastes. That popular tastes define the impact of the market is plausible enough. Innovative artworks are valued in the avant-garde market; but this market is too small to support the numbers of artists working in innovative styles, and it is subject to fads and fashions as well. Sophisticated buyers aside, most individual consumers as well as purchasers of commercial art and of art for hotels, boardrooms or waiting rooms will opt for conventional pleasing images. That states follow a similar inclination is perhaps less obvious, but the reason is clear on reflection. States that are responsive to their societies will seek to satisfy with their policies – including their art policies – broad constituencies. Even authoritarian and totalitarian systems are interested in popular opinion and will reach for the popular symbolic vocabulary. If we disregard the political or non-political character of the message, we find similarities of style in Soviet realism, in art exhibits in Greenwich Village or Santa Fe, as well as in the street sculptures of Manhattan.

Yet states affect art worlds in much more complex ways than this generalization suggests. The manifold complexity of art and its social embodiment has its counterpart in a multiplicity of state interests and involvements in the arts. What are the sources and origins of these interests?

In the spring of 1982, Jurek Becker, a dissident writer from the GDR, discussed his – relatively privileged – situation in the rooms of an Oxford don. ‘I do not know’, he said, ‘why the authorities are so much concerned with what we write’. It was a rhetorical question he did not find necessary to answer. Why indeed, given the overwhelming power of that government at the time? We may ask the same question even more insistently when it comes to the visual arts. Why should the control of the mass media, of large-scale art production, and of the visible public display of art not have been sufficient to treat the visual arts with benign neglect?

A glance into history may help us understand the sources of state concerns with the visual arts, concerns of control as well as patronage and public service. ‘Making an image’ of potentates and kings is as old as the history of organized rule. The other age-old context of art production is, of course, religion. And until the late nineteenth century, rulers have sought to link their authority to that of religion.
From the nineteenth century onward, European states have changed profoundly. They became larger, offered more services, responded to increasingly ‘mobilized’ societies, and sought to define their citizenry as a national political community. These developments expanded the interest of states and political elites in the arts tremendously and in most variegated ways. A large part of this interest found expression in the expanding educational system. Here pragmatic interests in industrial development supported drawing instruction in schools as well as advanced studies in art and design, while general instruction and textbooks reflected a broader concern with cultivating the national heritage.

Some strands of the arts came to symbolize orientations that were of interest to elites concerned with national unity and with the cultural underpinnings of their political struggles. Cultivation of ethnic folk culture versus the advance of an international style, loving treatment of tradition versus advocacy of modernist tradition and a break with the past, harmonious depictions of social life versus stirring representations of social ills or the suffering in war – these are only a few examples of the ways in which artistic developments became relevant to political elites. Later, authoritarian and totalitarian movements that were bent on radically transforming culture and society took an even more intense interest. Ironically, their intense concern magnified the impact of art at odds with their intentions, which in turn increased the political concern.

Nineteenth-century Europe has seen another ensemble of developments that is of great importance for our discussion. We think of the very significant advances in the relative independence and autonomy of different institutional spheres. The most prominent of these is perhaps the consolidation of the autonomy of academic inquiry. Without the protection of scientific work against interference from vested interests and political concerns, the modern development of science and technology is inconceivable. Another striking example is the growing relative autonomy of economic decision-making in capitalist countries which, however, was much less clear-cut than academic autonomy and much more often subject to government intervention.

In the world of art we find similar developments, though they were much weaker than the institutional insulation of scientific research from outside interference and do not compare even to the mixed experience of autonomous economic decision-making in the private economy. Nevertheless, the parallel is striking. Based on earlier developments in the division of labor that gave artists an authority
similar to that of the crafts, a romantic conception emerged that saw the artist as an individual endowed with a peculiar mystique and power of creation. In all of the countries studied, this romantic vision of the artist – especially that component of the idea that focuses on the autonomy of art and the ideal of artistic freedom – had and has a quite strong appeal. In each country, artists and their supporters believe that artists should be free to express themselves without constraints.

This idea, with its roots in the Renaissance, blossomed fully in Paris in the nineteenth century. Renaissance artists were heavily dependent on, and directed by, their patrons. Similarly, artists active in Paris during the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries were required to submit to the dictates of the French Academy in terms of both style and subject matter. As our case studies make clear, today’s artists are largely free from this kind of direct interference in their work, though art is not, and never can be, completely autonomous (see Bourdieu, 1992, 1993). East German artists in the former GDR and Soviet artists in the former USSR were more strictly, if not absolutely, controlled. We will return to the issue of state control and artistic autonomy later, a theme that dominates discussion of art and the state precisely because of the background development of the ideal of autonomy for the arts. It seemed useful to sketch this broad change in cultural presuppositions before we go into details of state policies and responses within the art worlds.

**Varieties of art policy**

Major differences in the arts policy of states can be traced back to their long-term trajectory of development. States and their policy inclinations often exhibit what has recently come to be known as ‘path-dependent’ development (Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2000, 2004; Toepler and Zimmer, 2002). Once crystallized, certain propensities prevail for a long time, often in the midst of other changes, though radical breaks occur as well. Among the countries studied, consensus-oriented social and cultural policies seem to have prevailed in Scandinavia and Germany in contrast with a great deal of tolerance for contestation in the United States and Britain, which often seems related to a lesser concern with class inequality. A related but analytically distinct dimension concerns the deference to the views of social and cultural elites, stronger in the United Kingdom and Germany as well as, perhaps, in Russia, but weaker in Scandinavia and especially the United States, where popular
tastes and opinions have wider and more autonomous sway. The relative roles of state and market define a third dimension of fairly stable public policy. And the contrast between politically democratic and authoritarian or totalitarian systems constitutes yet a fourth dimension that is clearly relevant.

The differences in the overall character of the nexus between states and the arts that set different countries apart seem to follow these firmly anchored inclinations of public policy. To put it differently, the context states provide for the creation of art is a function of what type of state a nation has and of the particular type of state–society relationship that prevails in each country. Democratic corporatist states, as opposed to say liberal states, are involved in more aspects of public life in general, and this shapes their greater involvement in the arts as well. Arts policy here is not only generous but seeks to be inclusive, though different patterns of deference to and concern with elite and popular tastes separate Germany from Norway and Sweden. Great Britain and the United States have a tradition of a laissez-faire, anti-statist orientation, which has informed their use of arms-length funding arrangements, though both countries also engage in direct funding. The two countries differ in their concern with the national heritage of art and in the deference for dominant elite tastes. In Britain, we have observed the use of quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations) such as the arts councils that rely on panels of arts professionals rather than agents of the state to decide what art deserves support at the national level; furthermore, the central government passed enabling legislation (as opposed to legal requirements) for local council provision of arts funding. Scandinavia, post-war Germany, Britain, and the United States share robust democratic institutions that constrain attempts to shape and control artistic creation in any direct way. To this we find a contrast in the authoritarian and – earlier – totalitarian political systems of the Soviet Union and the GDR. Here attempts to shape and control the art world, reaching a peak with the imposed near-uniformity of socialist realism during Stalin’s rule, were joined to a concern for responding to as well as influencing popular tastes, social egalitarianism, a comprehensive though austere welfare state, and a centralized command economy. While the Scandinavian countries share some features with the East European communist societies, they differ not only in their political constitutions and in the role of market exchange in the economy; they also never engaged in radical attempts to transform society in the image of social, political, and cultural ideas.2
Reliance on the market

The usual contrast between market and state obscures what is clear in a comparative perspective: reliance on the market is a major aspect of arts policy. Few may think of the fact that most contemporary artists rely on the marketplace for their income as an issue in state support of the arts. The role of the market has been taken for granted and is, indeed, institutionalized widely in western societies. However, our case studies show that the degree to which artists are reliant on the market for income varies with, and is shaped by, state policy. The explicit recourse to the language of ‘enterprise culture’ in the policy turn in the United Kingdom makes it clear as well that the state plays a key role here.

That the role of the market in the art world is shaped by policy considerations is also evident in much of the popular and elite discourse directed against generous state support. Often, great art is expected to be created without resources and to be recognized (thus financially supported) instantaneously. Unsuccessful artists, this argument suggests, must have lacked vision or talent to begin with. In a caricature of the romantic conception of the artist, a more extreme opinion holds that the arts flourish under adversity and that support not earned on the market stymies innovation. The edge needed to produce great art is eliminated when artists become too comfortable (see Marquis, 1995). This shades over into the belief of many ordinary people that artists who rely on the welfare system are, with other welfare recipients, leeches on society. The arguments for shielding the arts to some extent from the market similarly put the market into the broader policy context, pointing out that a country’s artistic heritage and the nurturing of artistic innovation are collective goods that the simple working of the market will fail to create and protect. Taken together with the justifications of non-market supports, these arguments suggest that it is reasonable to treat decisions about the role of the market as an aspect of art policy.

Our cases show considerable variation across art policies in reliance on the market. It was minimized in the USSR and the GDR. In the Scandinavian cases, some artists receive a direct state subsidy, which mitigates financial pressures. However, artists in these countries may find it difficult to live on their state grant alone. In other countries, state support is far more sparse, forcing artists to rely on the market for income from their work.

Most contemporary artists, then, are subject to the whims of the marketplace. If they wish to be successful, they must negotiate exhibition support with dealerships (which can act as patrons, in both a positive
and negative sense) and in a broader sense, appeal to the marketplace. As the cases of the East German artists in the reunified Germany and the Russian artists in New York City make plain, the market system gives formal freedom, while at the same time being very tough on artists. It is experienced, in many ways, as inhumane. The failure of the state to continue supporting artists directly, coupled with ideologies that value the marketplace, serves to constrain artists’ work as it tosses them to the vagaries of public taste.

**Generosity of support**

The generosity of support for the arts varies considerably across the countries examined. Yet by themselves differences in the – difficult to ascertain – overall amount seem less important than the mode of support, whether it is direct or indirect in character, how it is dispensed, whether it is joined to direct attempts at influence, and which different goals are pursued with the funds made available.

**Direct and indirect support**

A key variable in state support of the arts is whether the state offers direct subsidies to artists and to arts institutions, or whether it encourages private support of the arts through tax incentives. The American case is an example, *par excellence*, of a political economy in which indirect support flourishes, though the American system features direct supports as well. Great Britain has, in recent years, moved a great deal toward the ‘American Model’, but has been less successful in encouraging private support from individuals, and only partially successful in encouraging support from corporations and businesses. Other European nations are more wary of the American model. In these countries, the arts are more highly valued; they are supported by a wider base of public opinion and seen as a public good, or even as an expression of national honor. Nevertheless, these countries have also cut arts support in recent years, as a consequence of financial austerity (Boorsma et al., 1998). Tax incentives for private giving may be lacking, however.

State systems providing direct support draw upon the political ideals that value the arts as a form of national expression. Since direct state funding draws on the general revenue of the country, financial support for the arts relies on all taxpayers, in proportion to their tax burden. In this way, direct support is as progressive, in a monetary sense, as the tax system in that country. Countries that rely on indirect support, especially the United States, implicitly favor the views of the more wealthy members of society, as these people are the ones who can take
advantage of the tax relief offered by such schemes. While some observers believe that the indirect system is more ‘democratic’, in that it allows taxpayers to express their opinions through giving, there is an elitist character to indirect support, as it reduces the general tax revenue of the country and funds are spent on the arts that might have otherwise been spent on education, health, welfare, the military, or other areas.

Direct funding is, other things being equal, more vulnerable to political ‘interference’ with art support and with the art created. Other things are, of course, not equal. The Scandinavian countries do not at all represent a softer version of the combination of support and control that was – with variation over time – characteristic of the USSR and the GDR. Strong traditions of democratic freedom, generous parallel funding of popular and elite cultural projects, and a system of decision-making and delivery that is relatively insulated from politics seems to account for the fact that direct funding in Scandinavia is far less associated with the politicization of subsidies, though there have been controversies as well. Conversely, it is interesting that the much less generous direct support in the United States has generated heated controversy and selective cutbacks, a consequence of the lesser legitimacy of direct support and of the deeper divisions in the cultural and moral outlook of different segments of American society.

**Diversity and decentralization**

Nations vary in how centralized funding is. Funding can occur at the national (federal) level, the state or Länder level, and at the local level. In addition, the existence of tax incentives, and the ease of their use, affects the level of private financing. These factors, together, indicate the diversity of available monetary support. The existence of a range of funding options, theoretically at least, reduces the constraints that are imposed by any single funder. In practice, funding at different levels of government may or may not share policy goals. A higher level of agreement among different types of government funders lessens the degree of freedom available to the art world in seeking state funding. The United States has the most diverse system of funding. The availability of alternative sources of funds (including private donors who draw indirectly on public monies through tax breaks) has allowed both artists and arts institutions in the United States some scope to finance challenging, innovative art, despite the federal government’s curtailment of NEA support for this type of art. Nevertheless, cutting-edge art is harder to underwrite than more popular, and populist, exhibitions. Some state and local funds, stemming from federal sources, are subject
to the same constraints as federal funds, and the federal, state, and local governments all face political pressures which reinforce popular tastes. The sharpest contrast to this American pattern of multiplicity of sources for funding were of course the art policies of the East European communist countries. Even apparently separate sources of funding – allocations through the art unions, patronage by communities, the national state, or publishing houses – were monitored and coordinated in an effort to support the currently dominant arts policy. The United Kingdom funds the arts at a national level and devolves funds to regional and local levels. Local councils support the arts as well, often independently. Changes in tax incentives in the United Kingdom have made private giving easier, but the culture of state involvement has meant that private giving remains low compared with the United States. Diversity of funding sources is greater in Germany than in Scandinavia, though it does not approach the diversity of American donors. In Norway, decentralization has been an important development that allows adjustments to conditions in different localities. Yet in both Norway and Sweden, friends of the arts are concerned that competing political and cultural groups at the local level may reduce support for the visual arts.

That British arts councils, the Norwegian awards committees, or German ministerial allocations are in different ways relatively insulated from single-minded supervision and from political-cultural demands adds another protection against uniformity. This seems more important than the particular ways in which this is achieved and is not negated by the occasional criticism of institutional change as noted in the discussions swirling around the increased role of art historical professionals in the Norwegian committees.

Support of artists and support of institutions
The case studies demonstrate that countries that support artists directly also support arts institutions, but the reverse is not necessarily so. The support of arts institutions certainly benefits those institutions, and indirectly, the artists they support. It also enhances the audiences’ experience of the arts, at least for those that attend. However, as Crane (1992) points out, arts institutions often act more conservatively than artistic networks. Moreover, the institutions that are supported by national governments tend to be the largest and most successful museums and arts centers – those that are already best positioned to survive in the absence of state funding. If a goal of state support is to encourage innovation and to protect the creation of artworks that might not be
supported in a market context, the support of arts institutions may be less successful in this regard than the direct support of artists (though some critics of the Scandinavian system of direct support suggest that state support does not necessarily encourage innovation).

As arts institutions face privatization in many countries, the effects on art remain to be seen. It is obvious, however, that time, money, and energy spent on fundraising is time, money, and energy not spent elsewhere. Fundraisers argue that fundraising adds value and that it pays more than it costs. This may be true, and in today’s world whether or not to fundraise is a moot point as arts organizations increasingly face funding cuts. Nevertheless, fundraising pressures take attention away from the art itself. Austerity also creates a climate of scarcity that is demoralizing to professionals in arts institutions and to artists, alike.

**Audience development**

All the states studied engage in one form or another of audience development. In some countries, this is more or less confined to the public education system. In others, it is part of a considered arts policy that includes adult education and sponsored exposure of people to art who would not otherwise view it. In the communist and social democratic countries, one goal of audience development was and is to narrow the gap between elite subcultures exposed to and concerned with art and popular worlds of experience that stand at a distance to high art, in part precisely because of the social gulf between these subcultures. These subcultural divisions have been attenuated in more recent times due to advances in general education and the spread of mass communication.

Quite clearly, these forms of art education, whether part of the regular school curriculum or purposeful projects of adult education, influence the standards and tastes people bring to their encounters with new artwork. In the GDR and the Soviet Union, these influences did not always reinforce the populist premises of socialist realism. Rather, varieties of high art (though not the most innovative art) played some role precisely because of the intention to ‘upgrade’ popular tastes and thus to narrow the gap between groups of higher and lower status.

In both the United Kingdom and the United States art education in schools is the most important form of audience development. In the United Kingdom, school groups often visit cultural organizations. In attracting school groups, museums and other arts organizations must be cognizant of the National Curriculum, and fit their offerings to it. In addition, the National Grid for Learning, a Blair government initiative,
aims to connect all schools, museums, and libraries together via the Internet to allow people from all walks of life, but particularly school children, to access a vast array of cultural resources from their homes and classrooms.

In the United States, primary and secondary education is controlled locally, and a significant variation exists across the country in terms of arts education. American funding programs for the arts, however, require an educational component in the grants application, and especially encourage projects that may attract large audiences. In this way, populist art is favored over more esoteric works (though funding does not exclusively go to popular projects).

Responses of the art world
A state’s arts policy cannot be fully understood without a consideration of its interaction with the multifaceted world of art. Many responses – and perhaps the most important ones – emerge in individual studios and in the minds of those who create art. Individuals may engage with the state or ignore it. Similarly, artists’ associations or unions, where they exist, can be more, or less, active.

In the Soviet Union and in the GDR, unions became for a time tools for a monolithic arts policy; but the picture became much more complex. In the last decade before the fall of communism, the art association of the GDR displayed significant independence (Rueschemeyer, 1991). The Scandinavian cases make clear that the existence of artists’ associations that wield political power can be of considerable benefit to artists in more routine and less critical circumstances. These associations can act as pressure groups to lobby governments and to engage in collective bargaining. Moreover, they can hold decision-making positions and play a role in distributing state funds.

Not all countries rely on artists’ associations. But in the United States, the diversity of funding possibilities prompts some cooperation among artists or between artists and artistic institutions. Certainly, the Congressional legislation that rescinded NEA funds and changed the terms of its existence galvanized the art world, resulting in collective action. It also convinced some individuals that, even in ‘free’ societies, an important public role for artists is that of the dissident. Individual artists have served on advisory panels for grants (in the United States) and on the boards of directors of art museums (in the United Kingdom), but in both countries, the role of artists in these capacities has been reduced and constrained in recent years.
Cultural policy in a globalizing world

The movement of people across the globe is one of the characteristics of our globalizing world, and another is the flow of culture and ideas (Appadurai, 1990). Our case studies saw evidence of globalization in the movement of many artists across national borders, and in the efforts of artists to adapt to the exposure to the international art world in their own country, most notably those artists who had been isolated from foreign art worlds.

The marketplace, as we have discussed, puts certain pressures on artists. It is possible that globalization intensifies the pernicious effects of markets. Indeed, Velthuis (2002a,b) argues that globalization in international art markets has increased competition, a factor which can be seen as ‘detrimental or corrosive’ to art and artists. Nevertheless, Velthuis suggests that art markets retain strong national and local components, and that the effects of a few powerful international dealers and auction houses can be overestimated. Although we did not explore the international markets, either auction houses or international dealerships, our cases do show the continuing importance of national and local markets. Despite the existence of an international art world, we have seen that Soviet artists in the United States are powerfully affected by assumptions embedded within the local culture of New York City, often to their detriment. Aesthetic ideas are frequently shared across international boundaries, as one might expect with globalization. However, as one might expect from Robertson’s (1995) work on ‘glocalization’, the case of the Russian artists shows that the global often remains rooted in the local.

Crane (2002) suggests that nation-states may use cultural policy as a strategy in a globalizing world. Her approach ‘focuses on the strategies used by nations, global cities, and cultural organizations to cope with, counter, or promote cultural globalization’ (p. 4). She suggests that these policies might enhance the preservation of national culture or heritage, or they might restrict the import of foreign cultural products, notably popular culture, and thereby protect local culture production. Our case studies have less to say about this latter aspect of cultural policy as our focus was on the fine arts, especially on visual artists and visual arts organizations. It is clear, however, that authoritarian regimes such as the Soviet Union and the former East Germany barred much of the international art world, both ideas and artworks, from their soil. Some countries, such as the United Kingdom, have instituted policies by which certain ‘national treasures’ must be offered first to inland museums before they can be sold to foreign interests. When such treasures are
artworks they tend to be those of old masters, rather than works of living artists.

The case studies showed that the cultural policies of many countries include the preservation in museums of artworks by contemporary national artists. Further, the particular ability of art museums to attract foreign and domestic tourists has been recognized in several countries. The practice of promoting national collections as a way of protecting national culture or enhancing national pride has existed for a long time and may stem from globalizing processes evident during the Industrial Revolution. The interests of governments in attracting tourists (and their spending money) is new, and is likely to be the result of the recent acceleration of globalization, with its attendant cultural tourism. With a focus on tourists, however, cultural policy is likely to encourage a marketplace logic (as tourist visits are a ‘performance indicator’ that can be readily operationalized, and as tourists are valued mainly for their financial contribution to local economies). A focus on tourism may also enhance what Hewison (1987) calls the ‘heritage arts’ – established, conventional, prestigious, historical – over experimental, confrontational, or even merely new, contemporary work.

**State control and artistic autonomy**

State control of artistic production is often thought of as the issue in state support of the arts. But the case studies present a complex picture. Arts controversies in the United States have lead Congress to implement policies explicitly meant to eliminate government funding for such works, and to control advisory panels more tightly. The Scandinavian countries, with the most freedom granted to artists, along with the highest level of support amongst our cases, are not free of controversy or conflict between artists’ desires and state policies. However, these play a comparatively minor role in Norway and Sweden.

The USSR and the GDR, especially during the Stalinist period, represent the extreme cases of state control of artistic production; but even here the simple model of totalitarian imposition hides significant complexities. It says little about the mechanisms through which control was imposed and later loosened; it eliminates positive aspects of these art worlds as experienced by the artists; and it overlooks that control can never be absolute, that the sources of autonomy cannot be completely eradicated.

In the early Soviet Union a complex pattern of infighting among different artistic orientations resulted, once art institutions became incorporated into the state realm, in the promotion of one or a few
different movements in the art world by specialized government elites. In the absence of institutional protection of artistic autonomy, the idea of ‘who pays the piper calls the tune’ became ideologically infused and turned into a system of imposed guidance and constraints. In both the USSR and the GDR, the eventual loosening of this system of control grew out of different non-conformist responses of individuals and small groups; eventually, different unions provided some sheltering, and in the GDR the main artists’ union came to see an electoral upheaval supporting greater openness.

Our studies also pointed out some advantages that artists experienced in even those systems that attempted explicit control of artistic content. For instance, both Soviet and East German artists appreciated the ability to focus on their artwork, without worrying about financial concerns. Soviet artists were proud of the skill level nurtured by their art schools. They also found the level of discourse about art and culture to be higher in the socialist context. Indeed, some Russian artists were supported within the official system, but did ‘unofficial’ work on the side. And female artists in the Soviet Union found the state system there to be less sexist than the western market one. The Soviet system has also fostered norms of artistic collaboration that are lacking in more individualized, western contexts. This is not to say that these artists found the explicit control in such ‘engineer’ states (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey, 1989) desirable, but it does add to a more nuanced picture.

In western democracies, artistic freedom is, to a great extent, a valued ideal. Nevertheless, state support can lead to de-facto control, as artists who are not supported, while not silenced, find their work much harder to pursue. This leads authors such as Dubin (1992) to argue that government policy on the arts in the United States promotes, in effect, censorship. Different segments of a populace vary in their ideas on aesthetics and the role the arts should play in both cultural and national life. This is particularly evident in the American situation, but is echoed in less moralistic and vocal terms both in the Scandinavian countries and in Great Britain. These differences can become politicized, as they have in the United States, and can stand in for issues larger than just artistic ones.

Artists respond in a variety of ways to state policies and to market demand. They may embrace these influences without reserve; they may reject them and pursue their own path at a high price; they may split their production into distinct categories, work that conforms to political or market expectations and work that is personally valued art, thereby using income from the conforming production to support the creation
of personally meaningful work; they may pursue personally valued work while earning a living from a different job; some may be able to leave their country in search of a more supportive environment; and, finally, artists may become demoralized and exit from the art world. All of these responses can be found in any country, though the proportions will vary dramatically across different politically shaped art worlds. In all of them, the idea of artistic autonomy and the different supports for such autonomy play an important role. The idea of artistic autonomy can itself serve as a resource, in regard both to political guidance and control and to market demands.

What are some of the sources of artistic autonomy? We have sketched the historic emergence of the idea earlier. Its acceptance— or at least memory of it—shapes personal beliefs as well as norms about artistic integrity that may be shared within the art world and across the wider society. The degree to which artists are ‘supposed’ to be autonomous varies across cultures and economic environments and has changed over time.

Sources of an individual artist’s autonomy derive both from his or her personal beliefs and resources and from the social and cultural context. Personal commitment— a ‘calling’—is one element in most artists’ decision to pursue a career in art. Professional specialization throughout society may contribute to the artist’s autonomy, as many lay people refrain from judging works and artistic movements that they do not understand. Training and other art institutions nourish professional identity. They may thus offer support for artistic autonomy, while they can also become channels of influence and constraints.

Historical memories (e.g. ‘so-and-so was not recognized either while alive’) and international perspectives (e.g. Soviet artists’ perceptions that exciting, innovative art was being produced in other countries where artists were more autonomous) can serve as a collective resource for autonomy as these are shared not only among artists but also across a broad spectrum of society.

One element in the creation of an ideology of artistic autonomy, recognized in variable degrees, is the mystique and power of creation. The mystique of art is not only highly valued by artists and the art world, of course, but it is also widely shared in society (even by people who are opposed to state support of the arts and who, in general, do not like contemporary works).6 We should reiterate, however, what we sketched out earlier: The autonomy of art is—across the cases we studied—not as strongly secured as the autonomy of other spheres, such as religion, academic research and teaching and, in market economies, private business.
Once again: States, markets and art worlds

State policies, including those that encourage reliance on the marketplace, profoundly affect the context of artistic production and the role art plays in the life of a country. The involvement of modern states in the art worlds of their countries is extremely complex and multifarious. And the consequences may be surprising. That direct funding of the arts may ease the politicization of state support, while indirect funding favors elite interests and tastes; that both political uses of art and policies of marketization tend to reinforce popular tastes and standards; that policies to develop a broader audience for art may, depending on how they are implemented, reinforce pressures for conformity or make popular appreciation more sophisticated; that the public role of art in politically directed art worlds appeals to many artists and creates a heightened awareness for nuances of symbolic dissent – these are only a few of the unanticipated consequences of different aspects of arts policy.

A common theme in discussions of ‘art and the state’ is the role that states play in buffering artists and arts institutions from the pressures of the marketplace. Many observers suggest that art is too important to be left to the whims of private finance and individual consumers. Nevertheless, our research suggests that the state is not so easily separated from the market, as state policies may do as much to encourage market involvement in the arts as they do to insulate artists from it. Further, state support relies on a national consensus that supporting artistic expression is valuable, a view that is contested in some western democracies. It can be withdrawn as political fashion changes. And state support often requires artists to conform, whether implicitly or explicitly, to the aesthetic and political predilections of policy makers.

A contrasting theme in discussions of ‘art and the state’ invokes this specter of state control and – as an antidote – the prescription of radically removing the state from the world of art and leaving the arts to the sphere of private choice alone, in other words, to the market. Implicitly, this prescription appeals to the romantic conception of the artist and the associated idea of artistic autonomy. Yet our studies show that a policy of leaving the arts entirely to market choice is not one used anywhere. Further, political control is not inevitably linked with state support for the arts. It did prevail in the historical past and it was pervasive in the communist countries of eastern Europe. Even in these countries, however, it did not hold absolute sway and was loosened for internal reasons even before the collapse of communism. Nevertheless, state actions necessarily reflect the nature of the political regimes that institute
them. While absolute control of artistic expression is impossible, so too is absolute freedom from any kind of constraint.

State involvement with the arts varies with the overall character of individual nation-states and their relationship to civil society. But in all modern states, artistic heritage and artistic innovation are public goods that do not fare well if left to private choice only.

Notes


2. We prefer this attempt to relate arts policy to relatively stable overall policy inclinations in different countries to approaches that create typologies of arts policy such as those offered by Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey (1989). While their typology reflects partly the same considerations we have advanced, their categories stand between pure types and a system of classification, and they offer little by way of a causal background. Based on the means with which a state funds art and the degree to which the state actively shapes the culture it supports, they distinguish (1) a facilitator state using primarily tax policies, (2) a patron state dispensing funds through quasi-independent institutions, (3) an architect state that relies on centralized ministries to support art, and (4) an engineer state which promotes art that fulfills political purposes and suppresses the rest. All the countries we studied exhibit features that fit more than one of these categories.


6. This does not, of course, deny the existence of ‘hacks’ and opportunists who draw on the ideology of artistic autonomy to justify low quality or uninteresting works.
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