

**NEWSTATESMAN**

**The New Statesman Arts Lecture**  
**Arts in the core script – writing**  
**ourselves in**

**by Peter Hewitt**  
**Chief executive**  
**Arts Council England**

**12 July 2006**

**The Commonwealth Club**  
**25 Northumberland Avenue**  
**London**



**Photograph by Piers Allardyce**

Peter Hewitt was appointed chief executive of the Arts Council of England in March 1998. He led a major overhaul of the organisation including a merger with the ten previously independent regional arts boards.

Peter's career in the arts began in 1976 at Inter-Action in Kentish Town, London. He was arts officer at North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council for six years before joining Northern Arts in 1982. He was made chief executive of Northern Arts in 1992 and held this post for five years. He then had a year in the NHS as corporate affairs director of Tees Health Authority.

Peter is a graduate of Leeds University where he gained both a BA and an MA. Other than a wide-ranging love of the arts, Peter is a keen cyclist and an avid supporter of Middlesbrough FC.

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## The arts need to be recognised both for the inherent personal value they deliver for citizens and for their contribution to other public agendas, such as education, health, home affairs, foreign policy and the economy

Next month sees Arts Council England's 60th birthday. We will be marking that anniversary with a series of activities through the autumn that will celebrate the many achievements of those who, over that 60-year period, have made this country the great artistic nation that it is now. These achievements reflect the Arts Council's enduring twin principles of excellence and access.

But tonight I want to look forward, not back. The best tribute to the work of the Arts Council over the last 60 years is the state of the arts at the moment.

It is my belief that, today, the arts are richer, more plentiful and more vibrant than at any time in that 60-year period. The words "golden age" are sometimes used too easily but I am convinced that, in the future, that is how these years will be seen. Hopefully this will be the beginning of a golden era and not a brief moment of glory.

This is not going to be one of those speeches where a chief executive bemoans the state of their industry or sector and paints a picture of a grim present and an apocalyptic future.

Quite the reverse, my observations this evening are all about building on success but not in a complacent way. The best time to ask searching and fundamental questions is when you are on a high. That's what I am going to do.

In June 1998, shortly after I joined the Arts Council, the prime minister, in a meeting with various senior figures from the arts world, said, "We must write arts into our core script."

You could say that, as chief executive of Arts Council England, getting the arts into the core script is a pretty good summary of my job. That is, to get as many people as possible to see the arts as fundamental and central to a healthy, creative and exciting modern-day nation. It is to contribute to a process where the arts are an appreciated and embedded part of everyday life and therefore are fully recognised by the government as an unquestionable

core responsibility for the long term. The arts need to be recognised both for the inherent personal value they deliver for citizens and for their contribution to other public agendas, such as education, health, home affairs, foreign policy and the economy.

This evening, I want to ask whether, eight years on, the arts are part of the core script of this country or not and, if not, what might need to happen in future in order to make them so. I also want to question what we mean by "core script" and whose responsibility it is among government, the Arts Council and the arts community more widely, to write it.

As the 32 countries that participated in the World Cup came together and then dispersed, I reflected on whether the arts would be part of their countries' core scripts.

A recent edition of the world music magazine, *Songlines*, contains a piece describing 50 indigenous musical rhythms of the world – from Axe of Brazil, to Marrabenta of Mozambique, to Juju of Nigeria, to Township Jive of South Africa and to Zouk of Guadeloupe. All these rhythms are ones that are deeply embedded in the consciousness and almost daily rituals of those countries.

If people who are involved in the arts in this country really want to be part of this nation's core script and to build on the fantastic achievements of the last 60 years, I suggest that we might now need to better reflect our own contemporary cultural rhythms, not just musical rhythms.

The Arts Council and the arts community has changed and adapted continuously over the decades but perhaps it is now time to set ourselves new challenges. Perhaps we need to create a different kind of value for audiences and participants, to further question some of what we do to better reflect the current cultural interests of the people of this country.

We need to think how it is that we can engage better with that public in order to ensure that we really are fully meeting those twin aspirations that

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# **We will only be successful if we articulate a fresh and new account of the arts, of how the arts are connected to the people of this nation today and how important they are to our national life**

are excellence and access to the fullest potential.

If money alone was the measure of being in the government's core script, you could argue that we are a good way there already. The current UK government has responded extremely positively to the arts in financial terms. Since 1997, Arts Council England has enjoyed a 64 per cent increase in real terms. Brave decisions, such as the abolition of museum charges, have been taken.

Yet, despite this, I know of few people who would claim with conviction and certainty that the arts are now in the core script.

The culture minister himself, David Lammy, has spoken of a failure to achieve what he calls "a settlement" of this nature between government, the Arts Council, the arts community and the public.

Has this always been the case? Is this an issue specific to England? The answers are probably "yes" to the first question and "no" to the second.

There have been moments here, and elsewhere, when the arts have enjoyed a special profile but I think this has, more often than not, been the result of the inspirational leadership of particular individuals, such as in the UK, under Jenny Lee in the 1960s; in France under Jack Lang in the 1980s; in Ken Livingston's GLC London in the 1980s; in Ireland under Michael D Higgins in the 1990s.

It is my guess that, when we look back in future years, Chris Smith and Tessa Jowell will also be added to that list.

But these moments of inspirational individual leadership and profile for the arts prove the rule that individuals, not governments, were responsible for such moments of recognition.

In some countries or states, the head of government carries the cultural portfolio. For example, Helen Clark, the current prime minister of New Zealand, does. There are a number of Australian state premiers who have done likewise, mostly in recognition of the significance of culture to the economy and to the creative industries. However, even in those cases,

such titular responsibility does not, as far as I can see, necessarily deliver genuine, deep, broadly based senior government engagement. Culture in these cases enjoys a degree of protection but is it actively embraced? I think not.

So what might culture as core script within government look like? It would be where the prime minister and other senior cabinet ministers referred with ease, in major speeches and statements, to the contribution that culture can make. Occasionally these people would make speeches on the subject of culture itself.

Culture would be referred to naturally in the same breath as education, health, trade, and diplomacy. New UK policy initiatives – on educational reform, sustainability, asylum, foreign policies and the respect agenda would incorporate arts and culture as a matter of course.

Manifestos would give more space than a sentence or two to culture, recognising that there is economic poverty and there is poverty of aspiration – and the arts have a part to play in addressing both. In short, culture would become part of the fabric of everyday political life.

It would be easy for the arts community and the Arts Council to lay blame at the government's door for this failure to truly accommodate and embody the value of culture – easy but wrong.

Instead, we should ask why this should be the case. I believe that the Arts Council, and people who are working in the arts, have got to take more responsibility.

Yes, some of it is down to government; however, it is no good just waiting for government. I strongly believe that we must take the initiative and write ourselves into the public's core script. But we will only be successful in that if we articulate a fresh and new account of the arts, of how the arts are connected to the people of this nation today and how important they are to our national life.

If we can do that, then being part of the

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government's core script will surely follow.

I believe that, in many respects, this government recognises the value of the arts – to our image in the world, to our competitiveness in a global economy, to the discussion about a new British identity, and to creating well-nourished and cohesive places in which people want to live.

Last month, Gordon Brown, at a No 11 event launching a programme to develop leaders in the cultural sector, spoke warmly and convincingly about the importance of the arts and creative industries.

In March, the prime minister spoke equally emphatically about the importance of literature in addressing literacy and employability. At the Labour Party Conference that followed shortly after 9/11, the prime minister, in deeply reflective mood, referred to “the joy of art and culture and the stretching of imagination and horizons”.

At a general level, the public too seems to appreciate the arts. Research shows that 79 per cent of people in this country are in support of public funding of the arts. Eighty-two per cent of British people want to have a museum or art gallery in their town or city. Ninety-seven per cent of adults in England believe that all schoolchildren should have the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument or participate in other arts activities. More people take part in the arts than vote.

So let's look at what the government and the arts sector together have achieved since Labour came to power in 1997.

As I have already mentioned, government has provided a sustained increase in funding. One result is that many arts organisations have been restored to at least a precarious kind of financial stability. At the same time, funding for individual artists has doubled.

Based on that stability, the arts community has, in many respects, responded spectacularly well.

We can rightly boast that there has been a remarkable renaissance in theatre, boosted by £25m especially for that sector; that seven of the ten top

visitor attractions in the country are publicly funded museums and galleries; that our national museums and galleries are now worth £2bn a year and our theatre industry is worth £2.6bn a year.

Museums, galleries, concert halls, theatre, arts centres, dance centres, literature centres and thousands of other buildings and facilities as well as public art, large and small, have completely transformed the accessibility and quality of experience for arts and culture throughout the country.

Music contributes nearly £5bn to the economy – £1.3bn in export earnings.

Attendance at national museums and galleries is up 75 per cent – that's five million people – as a result of the abolition of museum charges.

And British talent leads the world. Witness the National Theatre sweeping six Tony Awards with Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*, last month (the first play ever to have done that).

Let's look at the iconic new buildings that have come into being in recent years. Tate Modern has acted as a powerful catalyst for a vibrant new contemporary visual arts scene in the UK, a wonderful addition to London's architectural landscape, as well as a new place to meet and move that is seen by young people as being cool.

Riverscapes have been reborn, none more graphically than in Salford with the Imperial War Museum and the Lowry and now, most likely, the BBC development; or the Gateshead Newcastle miracle, where the urban dereliction of 20 years ago has been supplanted with the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Sage Gateshead, the Millennium Bridge, the new Live Theatre, the Centre for the Children's Book and all the rest.

But it hasn't all been about buildings. What about the Sultan's Elephant, brought to this country by Artichoke Productions?

One million people saw the French theatre company Royale de Luxe bring its 40-ton, 40ft-high

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## I sometimes think great artistic experiences are a bit like elephants. Very difficult to describe but you certainly know when you come across one

Sultan's Elephant to the very heart of London.

For four days it ambled in Pall Mall, snorted and sprayed in Trafalgar Square, roared in Piccadilly, peed in the Mall, danced in the Haymarket and slept in Horse Guards Parade, below the very window where the prime minister, it so happened, was conducting his latest reshuffle. Why didn't any cartoonist see the potential of that?

Polly Toynbee described the experience as a "miraculous, memorable-for-a-lifetime happening" and by Lyn Gardner as "nothing less than an artistic occupation of a city and the reclamation of the streets by the people". For once it wasn't a sombre state occasion, it wasn't a triumphalist "we won and they lost" sporting celebration. It was the kind of experience that meant awestruck, joyous faces wreathed in smiles, strangers talking to strangers in ways they never dreamed they could and, in many cases, tears of incredulity.

I don't know how you assess the true value of occasions like that. It felt like an iconic, transformational moment for the arts in this country. It created a unique kind of conviviality, extraordinary conviviality in its original sense.

I have since found myself trying to describe it to those who weren't there and failing miserably, people looking at me in puzzled incomprehension, because, like many such experiences, they are, in many senses, indescribable. I sometimes think great artistic experiences are a bit like elephants. Very difficult to describe but you certainly know when you come across one.

So, all in all, we are talking a very big success story. However, if that is the case, what is it that keeps arts and culture off the centre of the public and political radar screen?

There are some well-rehearsed factors. We know, for example, that the word "arts" can carry elitist associations for some people. We know that, in the past, some artistic interest groups have carefully – and unhelpfully – protected their own interests

against the demands of more popular forms of cultural activity.

Government itself has sometimes been off the pace, sticking to old-fashioned and non-inclusive definitions of what constitutes culture. Street theatre, carnival – and that means the Sultan's Elephant and its like – at present do not count towards government targets. Extraordinary I know, but true.

Maybe in this country, the Arts Council and the arts community could have done better in articulating more clearly to government the broader relevance of the arts to government agendas, indeed the all-pervasiveness of the arts.

The arts are not just on the stage, the concert platform or the gallery wall but they play a crucial part in our built environment, in the hospital and the primary care centre, in our schools, in our youth justice system and in many other corners of public and private life.

I recently met a captain of industry who told me his favourite theatres in London were the Almeida Theatre and the Donmar Warehouse, neither of which, he proudly told me, receives a penny of public funding. Well, not a penny apart from £1.4m a year. How could it be that he is not aware of that? It has to be, in part, our failure.

While Gordon Brown now clearly understands the significance of the creative industries, how much connection have we helped the government make between the subsidised theatre and West End, Broadway or Hollywood success?

Have we proved the extent to which the subsidised arts feed the commercial music and publishing industries?

So, the Arts Council and the arts community could have explained themselves better. We could have demonstrated the breadth of their achievement better. However, there is more to this than issues of communication and advocacy. There are two, more important factors.

First, there is what feels like a long-standing

**The Sultan's  
Elephant, a  
performance by  
Royal de Luxe in the  
streets of London.  
Photograph by  
Sophie Laslett,  
courtesy of Arts  
Council England**



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## The point is that this country would be an infinitely more dangerous, ill-informed and intolerant place without artists and arts organisations from the full range of our diverse cultures interacting in these ways

political prejudice – an assumption that the arts are somehow vote losers, or certainly not vote winners. To be honest this puzzles me.

Rationally, as I said earlier, the vast majority of the public support government funding of arts and culture. I know of no instances where a direct association with an arts or cultural event or initiative has had any manifestly negative impact on a subsequent electoral outcome. Even the highly controversial Angel of the North – which, at its inception, was used for overt party political purposes in local elections – soon had Alan Shearer’s shirt draped over it. So surely, art should now be seen as a potential vote winner.

But, actually, I think that there may be something more profound going on here.

The arts are about releasing the imagination, about finding ways to understand our deepest feelings and motivations, about making sense of our most personal instincts and behaviours. The arts are about freedom, about unlocking creativity in ways that can produce unpredictable, sometimes shocking, results. The arts are, by nature, ground shifting and often disruptive.

The arts can be discomfiting and even dangerous. Most importantly of all, the arts are, in a sense, uncontrollable and defy control.

I believe that every venture into the arts, whether it is starting to read or write a novel, giving oneself up to, or participating in, a theatrical experience, making or contemplating a piece of craft or sculpture, or indeed just experiencing the Sultan’s Elephant, requires a small act of courage and bravery as we admit to the possibility of something unexpected happening and something changing in oneself for ever.

The arts – and this is where we are fundamentally different from sport – are actually quite scary and this fear can bring about all kinds of reactions and evasions.

The commonly articulated view is that the arts are

for “other people”. People’s tendency is to elevate the arts to something that, supposedly, can only be done or understood by an informed elite. This is the “I can’t draw, I can’t paint, I can’t sing” syndrome. In my view these are convenient ways of distancing oneself from the arts and the disturbing power of creativity; in other words, about remaining firmly in control.

And, of course, being in control is something that politicians of all stripes are very keen on. Maybe part of governments’ reticence to articulate the power of the arts and creativity reflects an inherent unease with things that they perceive as out of their direct control. It is a kind of fear of artistic creativity and what it might unleash.

And, like individuals, governments have their own distraction techniques. Their determination, it seems, is sometimes to place more than proportionate emphasis on the arts’ relevance to social agendas. They place an overemphasis on quantification and measurability. These are both convenient ways of boxing off, and somehow managing, the potentially uncontrollable.

So, let’s pause and take stock. I put to you first that, despite our many successes, we have not succeeded in getting into the nation’s and the government’s core script. That is partly because we have not done as well as we might in articulating our value to citizens in general and governments in particular.

But it is also partly because there are more powerful underlying currents of anxiety and fear at play about just what the arts and creativity may unlock, issues to do with personal, institutional and social control, which governments will always find problematic.

However, there is a further crucial issue. A recent major survey of attendance and participation levels in the arts, *Taking Part*, shows high levels of overall engagement. Seventy-six per cent of adults in England attend or participate in the arts.

The same survey shows, as expected, that it is the financially better-off people that attend more – 81 per cent of adults who work at managerial level,

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compared to 52 per cent at lower, supervisory levels.

Interestingly, variations by ethnicity are much less marked than variations by socio-economic class.

Most striking are the things that act as barriers to attendance and participation. Among those who do not attend, factors such as “not really interested” and “difficult to find time” are far, far more prominent than issues of cost, transport, or knowing about things that are available.

That, I think, brings us to a much bigger question, that of relevance, of the central question: “Whose art is it?” What would actually interest the “not really interested”?

Very often the “not really interested” are, in fact, very interested but don’t know they are. Because people are schooled to think of the arts only as what you get at the theatre or see on a gallery wall, they don’t even know they are participating in the arts when it’s happening to them. So, of course, when asked if they “go to” or “do” the arts they say they don’t. There’s a problem with the terminology and we put the question wrongly so, in fact, the figures are wrong, badly wrong.

For the next few minutes I want to change tack and look at the part that the arts can play in responding to some of the challenges we all share in society, saying a few words in turn about the arts and migration; our “sense of place”; the environment; technological change, and globalisation.

I’ll then go on to talk about how we might connect, listen and respond better to the value that the public places on culture, maybe, in part, a different kind of culture, in future.

Obviously we live in a time of massive human displacement and migration. The UK is more diverse than most countries in the world. London stands as a powerful symbol of a multicultural UK. The UK won the Olympics partly because of its diversity. The Arts Council sees the UK’s diversity as an enormous artistic asset.

However, we saw what happened with the play

*Bezhti*, where elements of the Sikh community effectively stormed and terminated a theatrical production, found to be an offensive representation of the Sikh faith, at the Birmingham Rep. We have been through 7/7 and are experiencing a rise in Islamaphobia.

The arts contribution to issues of diversity and difference are threefold.

First, multiplicity of cultural experience simply enriches our lives.

Second, the arts contribute to cohesion, healing, mutual recognition and conviviality between different faiths and ethnicities in communities.

Third, the arts provide a medium through which the current debate about identity, and Britishness as part of that, can be explored. The arts provide a space in which difference, mutual respect and the beauty of otherness can all be considered.

There are numerous examples. The National Theatre and the Tricycle Theatre have mounted productions that dealt with issues of diversity, faith, and migration with uncompromising honesty: Stephen Lawrence, Guantanamo and David Hare’s Iraq play *Stuff Happens*.

In Oldham, Peshkar productions is one of the very few agencies in town to attract participants from all of its highly segregated ethnic communities to theatre activities.

Following *Bezhti*, the Arts Council, with the Commission for Racial Equality, has staged national debates with leaders of faith communities to enhance mutual understanding and appreciation. Our work with the theatre industry has tackled institutional racism head on, radically improving the range and scope of black theatre and attracting new black audiences.

I could go on and list many more examples but the point is that this country would be an infinitely more dangerous, ill-informed and intolerant place without artists and arts organisations from the full range of our diverse cultures interacting in these ways. The

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## **We have all seen communities built with soul and those built without soul. You don't have to look particularly hard to see the difference. Water is essential to survival. Culture is essential to living**

UK would be an infinitely less rich and exciting place to live without diversity in the arts. The continuous debate about our identity would be hugely impoverished were we not able to look at it through a series of artistic prisms.

Take our sense of place and sustainability. A million new homes will be built in south-east England in the next decade. In future years, more and more people will live in cities.

Recently, John Prescott was asked whether consideration had been given to water supply for such communities. Good question, but I would have asked a further question about “cultural supply” to go with the water. We have all seen communities built with soul and those built without soul. You don't have to look particularly hard to see the difference. Water is essential to survival. Culture is essential to living.

We have, in fact, been successful in convincing government that arts and culture need to be at the very heart of their thinking as they plan and build these new communities.

We have shown that artists are crucial to design. We have persuaded government that artists are invaluable to imaginative processes of consultation with local people. We have discovered that people, by and large, want cultural facilities near where they live, for all members of their families, and that artists add a sense of place to the neighbourhoods they live in.

The fact that arts and culture generate conviviality and conviviality makes for well-being and health and happiness and militates against anti-social behaviour, vandalism, and violence. Therefore, investment in the arts and creativity is a good investment that will deliver, over time, a return many times greater than its original cost.

Take climate change and the environment. It has been predicted that, within three generations, the sea level could rise by a metre. Three billion people – half the current global population – will not have enough water. Over one million plants and animals could become extinct in the lifetime of our children as a

result of man-made climate change. Last year, hurricane Katrina gave us a vivid illustration of what may become commonplace – extreme weather, the mass displacement of peoples, food shortages, disease and social division. All this took place in the great cultural capital of New Orleans.

Artists are already gathering around this agenda. The Royal Society of Arts is developing a major arts and ecology programme. The Cape Farewell project has taken many distinguished artists – Ian McEwan, Rachel Whiteread, Siobhan Davies, Antony Gormley and others – to the high Arctic to see for themselves just what is beginning to unfold.

And, of course, artists will naturally gravitate towards the environmental debate as it gathers further momentum.

However, I believe that they have a part to play, not only through what they will say in their art, but through the key role they can play in discussions with leading scientists and policy-makers. We will all benefit if artists are given more space in key discussion forums, where matters of the environment are under discussion in coming years.

This is because artists, by nature, bring unexpected and unanticipated questioning and perspectives to such debates. They bring a different kind of challenge and unique forms of observation.

This explains why artists are now increasingly engaged in workplace settings, where they play a key role in resolving conflict and unlocking creativity. The very thing that makes them potentially threatening, their creativity, can make a powerful contribution in conversations outside their customary milieu, not least in relating to this, the biggest of all issues, environment.

Take the pace of technological change. Let's not exaggerate here but we are in the midst of a revolution. I was born long before the first computer and when I talk about MP3s, My Space, YouTube, wikis or Skype, it never sounds quite right. It is as if I am talking a second language – which I am because,

**Photographer Kevin Clifford received a Grants for the arts award for Dancescapes, a project that involved photographing dancers in south-west landscapes. Shown here is Jane Mason who is part of Dance South West's Associate Artists scheme, also funded by Grants for the arts**



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## The arts have a fundamental role to play in workforce development and training for our current and future creative industries

after all, I am a technology immigrant.

The young people in my family are native speakers of technology language. Doing their homework involves sitting at a computer with five different windows open on the screen, a CD burning and simultaneously Skypeing a friend in the Virgin Islands. This is a world both more alone and vastly more connected than ever before. This is a world where self-scheduling, self-editing, self-creation is the norm and, at the same time, where opportunities for collaboration are exponentially multiplied. It is a world that offers a whole new universe for artists, with vastly expanded opportunities for collaboration and production as well as for distribution.

Think about the learning opportunities and challenges. I was taught to learn in a linear way. So were most of you. As Baroness Susan Greenfield has pointed out, the brain of the technology native needs to work in a completely different way. It doesn't move in an orderly fashion from a to b to c but has to deal with multiple sensory stimuli, to find connections and patterns and linkages and has to extract core meaning from a mass of information.

The arts, relying as they do on a mixture of verbal, visual, intuitive and lateral techniques, have an invaluable part to play in honing the cognitive and creative capacity of young technology natives (and indeed immigrants like me). This is a clear message coming from our Creative Partnerships project.

This takes me to globalisation and the place of the creative industries or the "weightless economy". The creative industries are growing in the UK by 6 per cent a year, more than any other sector and twice as fast as the overall economy. The knowledge-based creative economy will account for half the economy in ten years' time. Already our annual exports in cultural goods amount to £11.6bn, more than either China or the United States. But the threat of China and India is self-evident. What can the arts and cultural sector offer to the creative economy?

Well, they can offer our great cultural cities, one of

which, London, is one of the leading world cities – I would say *the* leading world city – in terms of its cultural offer, attracting highly skilled workforces from other countries into the UK.

In terms of rounded provision, large, middle and small scale, mainstream and alternative, straight and gay, London has more than Paris more than New York and more than Berlin or Barcelona. That's why this is the place to be.

And the arts have a fundamental role to play in workforce development and training for our current and future creative industries.

I have already touched on our schools. Our Youth Music project exposes children to music in their infant and early years. We have some of the best art colleges in the world. Together, our arts and creative industries are producing some of the world's leading designers, musicians, architects, theatre directors, software and computer game innovators, animators and visual artists. As mentioned earlier, the Chancellor has just launched a programme to develop a cadre of entrepreneurial cultural leaders.

Our subsidised theatres feed the West End. Our orchestras feed the music industry. Everywhere the distinctions are blurring between subsidised and commercial success and our future competitiveness is, in part, dependent on the contribution the public sector makes to education and to workforce development through its support of arts and culture.

So, in summary, if you want relevance, this is relevance writ large. The problem is that it is visible to me and, I hope, to many of you but it is completely invisible to many members of the public and too much of government. Our job is to ensure that the public and government better recognise this relevance and more readily acknowledge the special value the arts play at the heart of these critical global issues.

So, we need to tell the story more fully but it seems to me that we might go even further in order to achieve that broader public recognition of the relevance of the arts.

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I want to close today by sharing with you some thoughts about how we might ask a wider constituency of interests just what they feel the Arts Council, and the arts community more generally, should be and do in future to rightfully occupy part of our core script.

There have been several recent examples of people trying to find a new way of getting at this subject. Demos' John Holden, in *Capturing Cultural Value: how culture has become a tool of government policy*, lays out a new framework, incorporating instrumental value, institutional value and intrinsic value, arguing that all are needed.

By instrumental he means, for example, the impact of the arts on health. By institutional he means, for example, the value that Tate Modern delivers for its visitors. By intrinsic he means the inherent value of the art itself.

He suggests that governments have been resistant to intrinsic considerations, that the arts community has been resistant to instrumental considerations and that a blend of all is needed. I think this is a big advance on the old sterile polarities of excellence versus access, or instrumental versus intrinsic.

However, I don't completely go along with John Holden. I really don't understand what intrinsic value is, even less "art for art's sake". What do such terms mean? They seem to suggest that an artwork has value even if it is never seen, encountered or experienced by an audience.

Some people believe that to be the case. I do not.

For me, value arises only in the transaction between the artist and the audience or participant. This is always fundamentally personal even if, like the Sultan's Elephant, experienced communally with a million other people.

I would prefer to talk about personal value rather than intrinsic value and go one step further to argue that personal value has to lie at the heart of any attempt to evaluate what we do.

Instrumental value is not possible, or is certainly

lessened, if people do not first extract personal value. Institutional value is not possible unless numbers of people extract real personal value from a cultural institution. And, as John Holden argues, nobody ever took part in the arts and nobody ever will take part in the arts expressly to generate instrumental or institutional value.

Do people ever "go" or "do" to create more social cohesion, to contribute to the economy, to make an audience more diverse? Of course not. They "go" or "do" because they anticipate – tinged always with that healthy fear – that the arts will bring personal joy, insight, understanding, entertainment, challenge, reflection, disturbance, recognition, comfort, solace, or a hundred other human qualities.

That is why the personal always needs to come first and, as discussed earlier, governments, of course, find "personal" difficult.

If it is essentially personal, we need to talk more about personalisation and bring it back to people. Many artists and arts organisations already recognise this and engaging with their audiences on this level is central to what so many have done and to what they continue to do.

The Sage Gateshead assembled throngs of people with a love for all kinds of music, music without hierarchies, folk equal to classical, and only then did they build those four walls and that amazing wavy roof. They built it around the public that they had already assembled. Contact Theatre in Manchester owes some of its success to an unpatronising sustained dialogue with young people, some of whom sit on its board and all of whom feel a sense of ownership of the organisation.

If we are truly to get ourselves into the core script of the future we need to learn lessons from those artists and arts organisations that are in dialogue with their public – the Sages and the Contacts of this world.

In developing a more confident and challenging vision of what a vibrant, more publicly accountable, 21st century arts ecology could and should look like,

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# The Arts Council itself needs to have the courage to enter into a new relationship with the public and place public dialogue, engagement and participation at the heart of what we do

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the Arts Council itself needs to have the courage to enter into a new relationship with the public and place public dialogue, engagement and participation at the heart of what we do.

I am fully aware that this will require us to address some big questions. It will require us to think afresh our notions of purpose, value and accountability. It will require us to creatively embrace some long-standing contradictions and tensions, between artistic excellence and public accountability, between producer and consumer interests, between preserving the canon and seeding the new. As an arts council, we need to engage all stakeholders, including the public, in the debates relating to these challenges and become more adept at connecting, conversing, listening and responding.

Such a genuine conversation with our public or publics – for there are many – has never happened. From time to time we speak to the artistic community, the suppliers of much of what is currently available to the public, but we don't do it enough or well enough. Neither do we speak systematically to all our other partners and stakeholders and certainly we have never spoken to members of the public, the public that pays for the Arts Council, about what it is that they value and how we might create more value in future.

It is time to do this. This autumn and winter we will talk extensively to artists and arts organisations, to local and national government, to our many other private and public sector partners but, most importantly, and maybe uniquely, to the public. We will talk to those who currently attend or participate in the arts and, crucially, to those who don't.

This programme of, consultation, research and debate – a kind of public value inquiry – will seek to understand how value is currently created for the public through the arts and what it would mean for the Arts Council and the organisations it funds to create greater value for the public. It will seek to understand how our aspirations about public

engagement can best be balanced with our ongoing commitments to quality, excellence, innovation and diversity in the arts.

Let me be absolutely clear. This is not a crude vote on the kind of art that should or should not be funded. Nor is it a public ballot on the purpose and activities of the Arts Council. We will continue to play our role as an expertise-led organisation that rightfully claims authority to set and negotiate possible future directions for the arts in England. But we are also an organisation that doesn't claim to have all the answers and recognises that many of the big issues we're trying to resolve won't have an easy or universally accepted solution.

By turning outwards, by encouraging all our stakeholders to join us in these debates, we expect to develop new forms of engagement, maybe some new priorities and a route map for how the Arts Council and the arts might need to be different in the medium to long term. We will consider carefully what we learn through this process and, by bringing our new knowledge together with 60 years of expertise and experience, will, I am sure, adapt and change as a result.

So, in conclusion, I put it to you that, if we really want to be part of the nation's core script, then we need to do much more than convince government of our value. We need to write ourselves into the core script of every citizen of this country.

We need a fresh account of our relevance and appeal. We need a much better understanding of how to engage the "not really interested". We need a new conversation about value – how it is created and whom it is created for.

Arts Council England and the broader arts community has got to take collective responsibility for taking this forward. Only by doing so, and continuing to do so on an ongoing basis, will we understand what it means to occupy a proper place in the core script of this country.

Thank you for your attention this evening.



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