Invest in what?
How to work together, the Arts Council's Catalyst Fund and art's contemporary economic infrastructure

Andrea Phillips

In 2012 Chisenhale Gallery, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire successfully bid for an Arts Council of England Catalyst grant to fund their collaboration, How to work together. The Catalyst scheme was set up at the behest of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport with National Lottery, ACE and DCMS money to encourage arts organisations to diversify their income streams and to cultivate and manage the development of private and corporate sponsorship. The scheme, which had two rounds and is running for three years, has the aim of enabling 'arts organisations with an underdeveloped fundraising model to increase capacity and expertise in this area and improve their resilience':

> In the long-term, organisations will be better able to embed new business models that increase and diversify their income to deliver great art for everyone.[1]

The three galleries received £210,000 between them, distributed across three years. Income was spent on supporting nine commissions (three for each gallery) as well as to pay for a Project Manager, who was also tasked with fundraising. The money bolstered galleries' previous fundraising strategies, which were developed to different scales and efficiencies in each institution.

Chisenhale, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire are all classified by the arts council as 'small-scale' institutions.[2] As such they have very few employees, and modes of operation afforded to larger institutions – with dedicated fundraising staff or a specific fundraising department – are unusual if not unrealistic; most people working for the organization are involved in fundraising, whether it be grant application-writing or talking to individual donors. The Directors of each organisation, as figureheads, take on a large percentage of this area of work, sometimes working up to 80% of their time on fundraising at certain moments in the annual cycle of production. Fundraising occurs across programmes, from exhibition to event, opening dinner costs to research trips, local education and international collaboration. Each institution has been in existence for over two decades (Chisenhale was founded in 1980, The Showroom in 1983 and Studio Voltaire in 1994) and each has diverse and more or less successful fundraising strategies.

---

[1] http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-funding/funding-programmes/catalyst-arts/ [accessed 23 07 15]

[2] AMA (Arts Marketing Association) specifies small-scale arts organizations as having 'ten staff or less' (http://www.a-m-a.co.uk/page.aspx?id=414). Sarah Thelwall in *Size Matters* defines the small-scale organizations that form Common Practice as 'with an average income of £250-300,000 per annum and dependence on core funding from Arts Council England of around 63 percent' (http://www.commonpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Common-Practice-London-Size-Matters.pdf).

Whilst historically galleries in the UK, including those involved in the HTWT project, have experimented with forms of financial survival, often relying on local support from artists, council initiatives, and in dialogue with the ACE as well as forms of cooperation and collaboration based on gifting and reciprocal cultures, cuts to state funding for the arts have enforced a radical shift in economic culture. The Catalyst fund's emphasis on business models understood in terms of heavily politically endorsed entrepreneurialism eradicates the previously heterogeneous field of financial survival within the arts, at the same time as forcefully reminding arts organisations that reliance on public funding is no longer possible. It is logical to surmise that the Catalyst grant both homogenises fundraising strategies across institutions ('business models' embedding the languages and processes of commercial enterprise) and imposes strict values upon a milieu in which a vast array of political, ethical and social practices and positions exists.

Arts organizations are thus in a complex position, caught between ACE's own uncomfortably shifting value system (from Keynesian state support for culture, itself a patrimonial form of civic culturization, and the newer form of patrimony now on offer in the form of inculcation: 'awareness of [fundraising from private sources, philanthropy and endowments] has only relatively recently gained traction within the English arts and cultural sector'[3]). Arts organisations now live with the reality of the future of cultural funding under the UK's recent and current political regime: the language of the cultural infrastructural service industry stipulates that there is no alternative to increased private investment if the 'sector' itself is to remain a viably coherent entity.

The Catalyst fund has had varying results for the organisations. On the one hand it has enabled them to produce a series of commissions in which they have been able to retain a certain autonomy of voice, or even to draw out the differences between the three galleries in keeping with each of their track records and socio-aesthetic determination within London's ecosystem of exhibition provision, at the same time as producing a 'Think Tank' (of which this essay is a part) which has to a certain extent brought together aesthetic relations between the three galleries. Normally, these three galleries would be in competition with each other for public and private funding. The HTWT project rhetorically poses a different set of relations – some of which have been fruitful in reality, others of which theatricalize forms of sharing within a competitive market. In producing the Think Tank, a strategically clever assortment of visions and ideological positions has been proposed, all of which, in effect, realistically demonstrate that working together, in this instance was, firstly, a tactical move on the part of the institutions to receive funding, secondly, a perhaps unexpected initiation of forms of albeit fleeting solidarity, and thirdly, at times an extremely difficult negotiation.

[3] BOP Consulting, Catalyst Evaluation Year One, Arts Council England, Final Report, 19 February 2015 http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/CatalystEvaluationYear1FinalReport.pdf p. 5 [accessed 23 07 15]

The Catalyst initiative worked in the following way: Catalyst funding was awarded in different 'tiers'. The first tier was endowment funding aiming to help institutions with successful track records to 'build endowments that will ultimately provide an annual income in the medium to long term' (18 arts organisations were granted £30,500,000 and endowments received are expected to be managed for a minimum of 25 years as a result of the grant).[4] The second tier, from which Chisenhale, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire received £210,000, was for 'Capacity building and match funding' in which organisations had to commit to 'rais[ing] their game' in fundraising but also to new programming, with funds raised by the organisations directed to artistic activity, and matched by catalyst money to develop the organisations' fund-raising capacity. 173 organisations received £30 million from ACE.[5] The third tier was given to consortia of organisations (Chisenhale, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire were unusual in applying as a consortia for tier 2) that had little fundraising experience to learn and embed skills through collaboration. 62 consortia made up of 217 organisations received £7 million. All tiers were competitive and each organisation received differing amounts depending on the rationale of their bid and, presumably, the confidence and status in which the Arts Council held them.

For Chisenhale, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire, as with all other successful applicants to tier two, the money was given with specific goals across the three years. In year one the £70,000 was given to build capacity and build up resources (this included employing a HTWT Project Manager to work across all three organisations). In year two the £70,000 had to be match funded at a 1:1 ratio, and in year three the final £70,000 had to be matched at a 1.5:1 ratio (i.e., they had to raise £105k of match funding from private sources in order to release ACE's £70k).

The three galleries raised the entire match funding necessary from a variety of existent and new sponsors, including Jerwood Charitable Foundation, Bloomberg, Cockayne, Outset Contemporary Art Fund as well as individual donors. As individual galleries they also raised significant funds from individual donors for the nine HTWT exhibitions – thus raising the requisite total sum. HTWT project manager Victoria Lupton said:

> [W]e did relatively well with securing donations from foundations. Where we had difficulties was with corporates and individuals. We spent a lot of time approaching at least 30 businesses, including a long time spent researching and arranging meetings with technology companies, banks and other financial corporations. Ultimately, we were successful in securing a partnership with Bloomberg, which turned into a fruitful and productive relationship, but Bloomberg's arts philanthropy scheme is very well-developed and ambitious – it is not a 'new' corporate arts sponsor. We had hoped to be able to attract support from the types of technology or financial companies that are not usually involved with arts projects - but this proved difficult. The companies were not generally responsive, and even where they

[4] Ibid., p.5
[5] Ibid., p. 6

> were, it proved difficult (not to say entirely impossible/fantastical) to persuade them of the value of partnering with our organisations. Our feeling is that even with the added impact of the 3 organisations working together and providing a higher profile for donations, the organisations still wanted big buildings, access to higher profile events and other benefits that larger cultural organisations are able to provide.[6]

Leaving aside the hierarchical and infantilizing relation between endowments and start-ups pursued in this scheme by the ACE (in that larger organisations were granted endowment funds to pursue larger private patronage deals whilst smaller were deemed to need 'capacity building'), Heritage Lottery Fund and DCMS, the success and the take-up of grants offered by the Catalyst Fund presupposes a national ecology of arts organisations resigned to a fate of decreasing public funding and increased pressure to privatize their institutional finances. Feeling the necessity to learn and improve one's capabilities of asking for money from corporations and individuals, gallery directors and gallery staff face the inevitability of the privatization of their careers and those of the artists they wish to support. ACE grants are still available in various forms, but in order to receive, for example, a National Portfolio Organisation three-year grant, an institution and its staff must prove that its focus is on financial sustainability along with artistic excellence. This echoes other sectors, including charity and higher education, and marks a clear line drawn between a Statist approach to funding and an approach that boldly precipitates the withdrawal of the State from the cultural sector in favour of cultural industrial entrepreneurialism. This has not only aesthetic effects (though not necessarily those diagnosed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the mid-1940s), but effects that are both psychic and political.[7]

Given the title of the consortium, 'How to work together', how exactly did and can forms of collaboration and cooperation be both developed and valued within funding structures such as Catalyst in ways that are more than pragmatic? The sharing of information for fundraising as well as belt-tightening exercises through collaborative cost-cutting is one thing (and certainly sharing costs is a regular form of institutional collaboration within the arts), but what is actually meant by 'working together' and what are its effects and results? Given the immensely competitive nature of arts funding, arts selection and display (all reciprocally linked through the primordial and evental focus on individuated artistic production), it is hardly expected that directors will 'share their contacts'. So what is shared and what type of work is done together in fact?

---

[6] Victoria Lupton email to author 24 07 15

[7] In their essay 'The Cultural Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' Adorno and Horkheimer diagnosed the industrialisation of culture as eroding the elite pleasure of artistic contemplation in favour of popularism. Here the issue is different: elite pleasure in contemplation is maintained and even inflated through funding structures like Catalyst at the expense of distributive, non-competitive levels of everyday experience with and in the arts. See Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M. Dialectic of Enlightenment (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2002).

An event organized for the HTWT think tank and held at Bloomberg in March 2015 provided a forum for setting such questions into a wider context. Moderated by artist and curator Ben Vickers, the talks by campaigner and former broker Brett Scott, architect Indy Johar, writer and academic Mercedes Bunz and curator Helen Kaplinsky focused on what is currently understood as the sharing economy and its technological, political and social shape. 'The Sharing Economy', a term used in a variety of scenarios and most familiarly understood in terms of sharing tech platforms as well as structures enabled by these such as Airbnb and Uber, brings two ideas together in an uncomfortable fashion for many who suppose that art's mission (and especially state funded art) is to share aesthetic experience freely without recourse to economic thinking.[8] However simplistic such an idea still seems, this ghost of artistic freedom from financialisation still haunts many invested in the arts, including many who work for its institutions (indeed it is rhetorically promoted still by many institutions).

Johar, like all on the panel, was concerned about the political romanticism of sharing. 'We are sharing ourselves to serfdom rather than citizenship.' He related the sharing economy to the structure of corporations (which as he pointed out are relatively new in their historical formation). 'Uber is not a corporation but a global institution, yet we are giving them the rights of a corporation.' The same is true for Twitter – 'Twitter is a pseudo-monopoly but we try to imagine them as corporates'. Johar's emphasis is on the relatively homogenized structure of institutions we learn to accept and work within and under, often (as in the arts) in the name of sharing. 'Sharing is interdependency – it requires structural development.'[9]

The current arts infrastructure promotes the sharing economy but in a paradoxical or schizophrenic form: It is at once interested in the founding of aesthetic experience for 'all', and in a foundational shift towards privatisation that necessitates the individuated, competitive and specifically shaped 'ask' for a financial contribution, be it from corporates or individuals. As Lupton points out, HTWT's limited success in attracting new tech money and large corporate funding was, at least in part, to do with the lack of specific return such investors might get, along with the low profile of the organisations seeking sponsorship. As quoted in the ACE report on the Catalyst Fund, Ewan Hunter, Chief Executive of the Hunter Foundation outlined what he is

---

[8] This idea of free expression by artists for the benefit of all has been embedded within UK culture since the mid-twentieth century through its historical and contemporary funding regime, as well as through the legacy of the liberal arts patronage that preceded this, in which patronage was regularly secured for the benefit of allowing institutions to open their doors for free. The Sharing Economy challenges the concept of top down financial structures through its proposition of entrepreneurial lateral platforms of gathering and distributing monetised and quasi-monetised data. While it is therefore a challenge to those in the arts that believe they have a right to State funding, it does so on the automatic premise that peer to peer privatisation is the solution.

[9] Indy Johar, http://howtoworktogether.org/think-tank/the-sharing-economy-a-post-mortem-a-panel-discussion-hosted-by-bloomberg/ [All quotes from the Bloomberg discussion can be found here.]

looking for in order to sponsor: 'We are more commercially, more KPI focused in our approach; we invest and want to see a return – an impact.'[10]

The arts sector is, in this way, following rather than leading in corporatized sharing economy ideas – and is beginning to have those ideas imposed upon it through both ideology and necessity (witness the amount of crowdfunding campaigns regularly advertised by smaller arts organizations in the UK). Detailed work needs to be done on the specific differences between sharing as a mode of developing aesthetically and socially ambitious and inventive community projects, for example, and the sharing economy. The history of artistic work that proposes radical forms of cooperation, such as the Temporary Custodians project discussed by Kaplinsky in the HTWT Bloomberg discussion (see below), differs profoundly from the type of tech start-ups founded on peer-to-peer shareware development that excite and inspire the Arts Council and their own funders. The difference is not necessarily always methodological; it is in fact economically ideological. Whilst it is important to point out that the HTWT participants do not claim to be either using or identifying with 'the sharing economy' as it is commonly understood, observing the Catalyst fund through the process of the How to work together project, it becomes apparent that the arts field in general and the small-scale arts sector in particular is caught between these two forms of sharing. The danger is that artists' commissions are supported to articulate cooperative forms of sharing whilst the organizations that commission them do not incorporate the forms of interdependency that Johar names within their strictures, but instead pursue ACE-led demands to corporatize sharing.

Chisenhale Gallery, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire, despite their misgivings about achieving sponsorship from outside what they consider to be their normal circle of patrons, are extremely well positioned and networked, are based in London, and have access to and experience of approaching and working with both sponsorship organisations and high net worth individuals. Many of their colleagues in regional parts of the UK and in other parts of the world are neither able to benefit from state arts funding nor from a developed structure of philanthropy for the small-scale arts.

Like Johar, Kaplinsky challenges some fundamental social and institutional structures through Temporary Custodians, a collaboration between her and artist Maurice Carlin.[11] In the project what she calls the 'arrogance of institutional commissioning' is recalibrated through the practice of developing artworks themselves as forms of shareware, wherein responsibility for the commissioning of an object in relation to its life-system is established – where cultures of collecting are understood as part of

---

[10] This quote is set against one from Omar Al-Qattan, Chairman of the A M Qattan Foundation, whose point of view is admittedly very rarely expressed by funders: 'We tend to be quite relaxed about M&E. Soft impacts are difficult to evaluate. How do we know how a child has been impacted by the establishment of a library or a museum in his city?' http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/CatalystEvaluationYear1FinalReport.pdf op. cit. p.13

[11] See, for example, https://twitter.com/tempcustodians and http://www.transmediale.de/content/temporarycustodians-a-proposition-for-ecological-collections-management.

an ecology of making, showing, recycling, redeveloping and moving objects through a lifespan of different uses and functions. Impacting directly upon the privatised culture of commissioning, and its relation to sponsorship (with one name attached to one object), this not only challenges the stasis of the architecture of galleries and museums, in which a work is either on display or in storage, but the fiscal and social economy of the artwork itself.

This paradox of the sharing economy demonstrated by the HTWT panel discussion at Bloomberg brings to the fore a series of profound questions that need to be demanded of the arts and its compliance with current funding structures. The first question is directly related to the content of arts provision and its contradictory relation to the financial structures that put it on display. So often arts institutions commission artworks that call for radical forms of collaboration and communing, but fund these through private patronage and promote them through and as an individuated core. This raises acute political issues concerning the ontological foundation of the artwork as privatised property in its contradictory modality of presumptive sharing. Here the content of the work – that might propose alternative and decapitalised forms working together – sits in parenthetical relation to its property state, a state which consistently coalesces around the artwork despite the artist or curator making a non-privatising demand (this is of course related to much broader infrastructural concerns regarding the art world, including those of education and esteem, value and production).

The second concerns institutional infrastructure and the necessity to enact within it radical change. The sharing economy is perhaps good for patronage networking, for instagram presence, and co-commissioning costs, but not so available for all the workers in an institution. In the context of How to work together this might be a useful question to ask of the galleries that are involved. How is a sharing of work possible under current funding conditions? Given the necessity to construct a hierarchical institutional format with not for profit charity status and a Board of Trustees necessary in order to receive public funding, entailing particular financial reporting and structuring and regulation over organizational behavior as a result of this, all arts organisations that are not run privately are locked into modes of behaviour and perception that are antithetical to communitarian concepts of sharing. More critically, arts institutions form an ideal structuring of the contradictions inherent in concepts of share; they enact the paradox of global idealisations of sharing as thematics whilst cohering to neoliberalism's ethos of residualising the communitarian in favour of individual (and self-exploitative) profiteering.

The third concerns the privilege of sharing. Johar talks about the need to think through forms of unionising the global network, suggesting that we take seriously who gets to share and where they are. His demand is that we enter an infrastructural project that is long and not particularly glamorous. I would add to this that the long, slow development of reformatted arts institutions based on strenuous cooperative models, learning from histories of institution building outside art, is imperative if we are to escape our contradictory politics; instead of critiquing the sharing economy, arts institutions should be set up as non-exploitative alternatives that are not reliant on the circuits of money that establish the privatising culture that currently exists in the core of these institutions themselves.

Which brings me to the UK funding structure. The UK funding structure is at the core of the many contradictions that arise from these questions. Born of the Keynesian state in the 1940s, and redolent of benevolent patrimony from its initiation, it now grapples slowly with the neoliberal revolution, and cannot keep up with new, sleek and rapidly corporatised worlds of working together. It is heavily threatened by the DCMS and at every budget suffers, as it is unable to defend itself against those simple questions that are lobbied by the media (why should the arts be funded at all?). The visual arts are particularly bad at defending their right to exist and grovel under the terms of networked and privatised participation that are hooked around them in order to justify continued support. The Catalyst fund is precisely this; an invention by a desperate group of civil servants to justify their grant through the promotion of entrepreneurial skills and methodologies within the arts. The form the Catalyst fund takes is to reward those that succeed in raising private money on the basis of these individual director-entrepreneurs' personal achievements and successes (as it is away from the generic funding system and towards the individual donor that the worker's body must direct itself). Many arts workers will recognise the subjective incorporation of work into his or her body and belief, as well as the prioritization of the care of the artwork above all else. The absolutist connection between care of the self, care of the organisation, and care of art is here enforced. However, this demand on the bodies of arts workers to individuate and produce competitive forms of agency, aspiration and self-appreciation should not just be rejected, according to Michel Feher, but repurposed:

> In terms of discursive strategy, neoliberalism can boast two major successes: its promoters have made it legitimate to want to care for oneself while presenting themselves as the champion of personal responsibility (in so far as their policies identify self appreciation with self-reliance). Their leftist opponents, by contrast, are accused of making people feel unduly guilty (by implying that the desire to value oneself is mere egoism) and, at the same time, of fostering complacency and irresponsibility (by allowing people to rely on social benefits rather than on personal effort and by making self-appreciating citizens pay for those who have squandered their human capital). Thus it may be for that for the Left, challenging neoliberal modes of self-appreciation, rather than rejecting the framework of the neoliberal condition, is not only a sound tactical move. More decisively, it may be a way of warding off its current melancholy by means of recentering the domain of the enviable and the desirable – of raising, from its perspective, the question of what constitutes an appreciable life.[12]

Feher's thesis is that the Left has long failed to promote an adequate response to neoliberal values and structures. Drawing on Marx and Foucault he points to the fact that 'for free laborers to think of their labor power as a commodity, they must be

[12] Michel Feher, 'Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspiration of Human Capital', Public Culture, 21:1 (Duke University Press, 2009), p. 41.

certain that they are not themselves commodities, which is to say that some aspects and regions of themselves remain inalienable, lest they end up entirely robbed of their selves.'[13] This inalienable part of the self is, in my argument, to be partially found in art; art can satisfy – or has long been proposed to satisfy – that part of the self that cannot be appropriated; cannot be shared: '[F]rom a liberal perspective, love, religion and culture cannot be reduced to a mere calculus of interests: they delineate an existential realm where human desires are not optimally managed through bargaining and the interplay of self-interested exchanges', says Feher.[14] The belief that artworks provide vehicles for the experience and expression of alienation has a long history in liberal thought, however, and such liberalism is the foundation of the Arts Council's particular brand of humanism: Thus the organisation is currently poised desperately between such humanism and its incorporation into the liberalism that Feher describes. For market economists and philosophers of contemporary politics this incorporation seems straightforward as the interchange of bodies between serfdom and free serfdom has been easily made. For the Arts Council the ghost of Keynes and another form of innate artistic creativity and freedom still haunts. Hence its slowness in the process of privatisation, and the clunkiness of the language it uses to describe its own, however uncomfortable, transformation.

But for Feher there is light at the end of the tunnel. For him, if we are 'subjects of interests' then we are able to invest in ourselves as those very subjects[15]:

> [I]f we take seriously the subjective apparatus of human capital, we can see that neoliberalism in fact treats people not as consumers but as producers, as entrepreneurs of themselves or, more precisely, as investors in themselves. […]
> Redefining the social subject as human capital (and defining human capital as a subject wishing to appreciate himself or herself), therefore, does serve the function of regaining the territory that the welfare state increasingly surrenders to the nonmarket sector in the name of reproducing an eager and functional free laborer.[16]

This is a different approach to that proposed by Indy Johar. If Johar suggests that we should understand the sharing economy at a structural rather than individual level, remarking on forms such as unionism which have historically struggled to provide the work and educational institutions to do this with and beyond technology (that which Boris Groys has called a 'U-turn against the pressure of upward mobility'[17]), Feher is proposing that the self should not be cast out in the romantic haze of past-Left debates but instead should be invested in using the tools of liberalism: precisely, ownership, investment, 'functional and free labour'. My response would be that

[13] ibid, p.29
[14] ibid., p.23
[15] ibid., p. 34
[16] Feher, ibid., p.30-34. In his most recent work, Feher has termed this type of investment 'Investee activism' (see http://investeeactivism.blogspot.co.uk and http://www.gold.ac.uk/visual-cultures/guest-lectures/ [accessed 27 07 15]).
[17] Boris Groys, 'On Art Activism', eflux Journal no. 56 (New York: eflux, 2014), p.13.

both approaches are necessary in a political restructuring of how we work together in the arts: we need to recast the role of the individual artist and curator as 'subjects of interests' and develop our subjecthoods in terms of desiring and chosen (rather than culturally enforced) forms of subjectivation, but we must do this within an infrastructure that is built cooperatively and pragmatically in favour of collective forms of equal production. This is how we should work together.

Finally to the Arts Council and its Catalyst fund once more. A simple question I would like to level: why is the ACE promoting such entrepreneurial gestures? One answer is obviously due to intense pressure from the recent and current governments of the UK. Another might be that the liberal humanism of the British arts heritage proposes no other way of working – and within it liberal privatisation is naturalised through the exchange and ownership of the art object. But what if the Arts Council was different? What if its employees, from CEO to junior staff member, thought of themselves as enlightened civil servants not caring as best they can for the arts but instead as political 'subjects of interests'? It is to these art workers we might have to initially turn in order to form structures of solidarity that emancipate our working lives from the false claims and enforcements of collaboration currently embedded within the UK's funding structure.

Selected by How to work together (a shared programme between Chisenhale Gallery, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire) for the Think Tank 2015-16, supported by Jerwood Charitable Foundation.