

# The Lottery in Babylon

Leigh French

THE LONG GONE and almost forgotten Government pledge that Lottery funding would not become a replacement for 'public funding' of the arts has been, to the surprise of everyone, one with little credibility. Yet again used as another semantic toy in the game of systematic privatisation.

Arts institutions' moral indignations to the Lottery also appear to have died away. The scene having shifted from one where few wanted to mention they might actually be interested in 'cash' from such a 'public' source, to a tacit acceptance of the situation.

For many arts organisations there appears to be no realistic alternative to ensure immediate and long term survival than an application for Lottery funding. While this may demonstrate the only position tenable for some in the present cultural climate, for others it exposes past 'condemnations' of the Lottery as more a reflex of liberal guilt than any actual political stance.

This being the situation, 'dramatic' changes to the Lottery guidelines, for funding whom and what, have recently taken place. The Government appears to have acknowledged restricting Lottery funding to building works, for want of a better description, isn't very 'productive' if those institutions cannot then afford to run. In spite of the very large number of arts organisations and practices the previous criteria excluded, the recent Lottery funding changes take another step towards the eventual replacement of 'public funding' by a covinous, project assessment based system with a growing core of private facilitators and consultancy agencies. This is publicised as bringing about an apparent democratisation of the funds!

The Arts Council of England (ACE) started its receipt of Lottery applications under its new guidelines 'Arts for Everyone' on 6 January 1997. The Scottish Arts Council (SAC) launched its 'National Lottery New Directions Guidelines' Roadshow in February 1997. Comparison of the two new sets of guidelines and application forms reveals the SAC's excessive regulations. The level of bureaucracy presented is alienating to any potential applicant, especially to those not familiar with the internal structures and workings of the SAC. It could be suggested that there was an attempt to make visible some such workings, to orientate potential applicants. But, the guidelines fail to encourage greater involvement in the arts and endear the SAC to a broader cross section of 'public'. On the contrary, they illustrate a rigid replication of the specific forms of cultural division that already exist within the SAC. Perhaps access to a broader spectrum of 'tastes' was not the SAC's intention at application level.

The 'Arts for Everyone' document openly declares that for every £1 billion spent on Lottery tickets the arts receive £51 million, £41 million being spent in England. By contrast the SAC's 'National Lottery New Directions Guidelines' coyly mentions that it is responsible for distributing 8.9% of the money available for the Arts, working out at around £4.5 million. Not surprisingly then, a somewhat more positive front is presented by the ACE's 'Arts for Everyone' document, incorporating a wide ranging list of cultural interests as part of its cover design, an attempt at encouraging participation from 'all' communities. The ACE also has an express system for grants under £5,000, "...designed to get smaller-scale initiatives started fast. Minimum fuss, minimum bureaucracy, maximum opportunity." How they will operate in practice, we wait to see.

I recognise the difficulty in attempting to 'legislate' for a multiplicity of projects in any one such document, especially following on from the high expectations raised by the ACE and with less funding to distribute. However, the SAC's new guidelines seem to primarily concern themselves with a performance, venue, agent affair. While this may well be representative of the interests of the individuals who carried out the research for the document, this is not always the method by which a diversity of cultural forms, from a plurality of constituencies, function.

Receiving more attention than in the recent past, a large portion of the SAC's 'National Lottery New Directions Guidelines' is taken up with the sector of Arts Education. This is distributed throughout the document, posited under a number of 'pro-active' terms, encouragement, development, engagement, involvement, access, participation, awareness, outreach. The SAC's relationship with a broader public is presented as an arbitrary distribution of 'gifts', whereas these terms of association too often disguise the imposition of a unified culture. From the tone of the document the desired role of 'Education' and 'Access', far from being discursive, appears to be that of legitimising the hegemony of a particular definition of culture.

In both England and Scotland individuals cannot directly apply for Lottery grants, having to do so through a 'constituted' organisation. This *could* mean many things. One fear in Scotland is that, in reality, it will mean through those bodies already 'consecrated' by the SAC. This has been the climate encouraged to date. The SAC bestowing its sanction on those who satisfy their requirements, "...on the chosen who're themselves chosen by their ability to respond to its call."<sup>1</sup> So appearing "given", those advising on and processing the applications will deal with the same individuals they regularly deal with. The institutions involved effectively operating as a buffer cum filter system, part of a 'naturalised' cultural administrative system with an internalised orthodoxy. What then is actually meant by broadening the scope of 'funding'?

Lottery funding could be regarded as a 'much needed' drip feed supplement for these institutions, particularly in light of the present Scottish Office funding crisis. Funding is also required for new arts projects under development. For example, the Dundee Arts Centre, presently under construction, with circa £60,000 earmarked for two salaries, poses an extra strain on the existing finite financial resources.

The various moral questions and contradictions surrounding the public funding of the arts, in all its incarnations past and future, continue to predominate. Particularly in the clamour of political uncertainty surrounding the forthcoming general election. Whether the SAC's 'National Lottery New Directions Guidelines' were the creation of complacency or conspiracy, the way in which it appears to operate seems to benefit only certain approaches and certain institutions. One underlying question asks, how much of it depends on personal relationships with an (allegedly) objective body that appears to have little accountability? We must now examine ways in which larger institutions can act, not just as 'agents' potentially replicating a narrow curatorial system, but ways in which they can participate in a broader, supporting structure for a plurality of constituencies today.

1. Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: Signs of the Times Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, edited by Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris

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# Editorial

HELLO AND WELCOME to **Variant 2**. For new readers let us introduce ourselves. What you have in your hands is an independently produced 'art' magazine, which is distributed free in the UK and abroad. We take art to mean culture and how culture is formed, **Variant** makes a contribution to this through the work of our writers. **Variant** is not run by the Arts Council or a district council; this gives the magazine more freedom of expression: the freedom to criticise is something which is dying out in the UK. **Variant** is produced by a small group of individuals with the support of the artistic community. We feel that **Variant** can also be appreciated by a broader public. All of the contributors are individuals working in the visual arts. The writing in the magazine is 'critical'; we see this as meaning that it should function as a forum for writers to document, report, explore, analyse and express their ideas and arguments. We welcome contributions and also criticisms of the magazine itself from our readers.

## New Directions?

At a time when the Scottish Arts Council introduces New Directions, many community arts organisations are facing drastic cuts in both their capital and revenue funding. The break up of local government has split funding bases, leaving our future dependent on the short termist whims of central government.

Recreation, Social Work and Education departments face large cuts as the new councils come to terms with the limited purse given them by Government. Teachers, Social Workers and Community Workers are being forced to take voluntary redundancies as part of the 'streamlining' of our council services. But what of the arts amongst all this? As an Arts and Disability Development organisation, Artlink faces an uncertain future. Over the past ten years it has built up an unrivalled body of knowledge and expertise in work for and with people with disabilities. It has sought to develop new and innovative approaches within its arts provision. Funding of project activity has always been problematic but it appears even more difficult to see how we can work effectively within even tighter constraints. Access to cultural expression is a right. How can wider access to the arts be realised and new developments sustained if its only support is time limited and therefore restrictive? The future? Does anyone fancy a bit of basket weaving or face painting perhaps?

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