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Stanley Katz

Certainly the major event that has influenced all of our [American] playwriting, directing, acting and audiences—the whole theatre we have now—was the visit of the Moscow Art Theater [to New York] in 1924, when suddenly we discovered Stanislavski. From that came the American Laboratory Theater and the work of Boleslavsky, and from that the Group, and from the Group, the Actors' Studio and other manifestations—a very simplified version of history, but nevertheless fairly accurate.

Alan Schneider in Joseph F. McCrindle, ed.,
Behind the Scenes

Most history is “very simplified.” The question is what we mean by “fairly accurate.” Schneider went on to suggest that “if the political situation had not been such that the Berliner Ensemble was prevented from coming over here, the whole situation would have been different. If the Berliner Ensemble were to come here tomorrow, or had come here then [in the 1950s], our whole orientation would be toward theatricality rather than reality.” One wonders? But the interesting assumption director Schneider makes is that international cultural exchange makes a decisive difference: Moscow Art came, Berliner Ensemble did not, thus realism in American theatre.

Whether or not one's history is thus simplified, most current observers of the performing arts share the assumption that cultural transfer is essential to the international development of performing art, or, even more simply, that art is international. I share the premise, though I am not professionally qualified to demonstrate it.

Contemporary observers also agree that international exchange in the performing arts is now endangered; most attribute the crisis to a failure of United States' arts policy. The argument runs that vigorous artistic exchange in the post-World War II period, almost entirely financed by European governments, led to a flourishing of the performing arts and, especially, to the burgeoning of American artistic talent abroad. The importation of American performers to post-war Europe created a market for American artists, exposed Europeans to new American performing styles, and, to a lesser extent, opened the American market to the best-known European performers. Direct state grants and festival sponsorship enabled Americans, often ignored at home, both to survive and to find a receptive environment for their art. Americans responded, when at all, through the efforts of a handful of entrepreneurs of the Sol Hurok type, who imported sure-fire crowd pleasers from Europe. As the demographic and financial imbalance continued, so the argument goes, Europeans became impatient with American reticence and now, with the European financial situation and political turn to the right, European government sponsorship of artistic exchanges seems likely to wither. The situation is only exacerbated by stirrings of European cultural nationalism.

If the assumptions of cultural internationalism are correct, then, artists and lovers of the performing arts confront a crisis situation. As Martha Coigny (Director of American ITI) has said, "As a U.S. citizen I would like to be known in the world by the culture of my country. I am not. . . . We have to find ways to share our arts with the same generosity that characterizes us as a people. Somehow, those of us who consider the arts a necessary human nourishment must begin to insist that our need be met." ("Yankee, Stay Home?!", *PAJ* 18). The task of this essay is to show how difficult the challenge is, and, in particular, how intimately the potential answers are related to American conceptions of "generosity."

In order to develop the historical dimension of international cultural exchange, it is necessary to set the problem in the context of traditional American public policy formulation. I want to argue that the United States does have a set of public policies with relation to culture, but that it does not have a single policy. Furthermore, many of these "public" policies are created in the so-called "private" sector and display important regional variation. Finally, insofar as we do have a general policy or attitude toward culture, it is in fact the result of the push and pull of a multitude of conflicting public and private policies, most of which were never specifically intended to impact upon the arts. All of this sets Americans apart from Europeans, for whom at least a plausible claim of national cultural policy might be made.

National Government and Social Policy

I would like to begin with a very short course in American government, for much of the history of current public policy is hard to understand without

an appreciation of the modernity of national social policy—that is, policy set by the federal government in Washington, D.C. The fact is that for most of our history, the United States was more nearly a loose confederation of nearly-sovereign elements than anything resembling a European nation-state. The growing use of the term “public policy” to describe programs planned, supported, and administered in Washington conceals one of the most profound social revolutions in American history. Under the original Constitution, social policy was clearly one of the “reserved powers” of the 13 states, and it was not until the twentieth century that the national government began to wrest the power to create such policy from the states.

In some respects, the peculiarly American aspects of the problem of regionalism versus nationalism offer us the best historical point of departure. The major political debates of the first century of American government centered on the issue of the power of the federal government to control national policy. The hard-fought battles which ultimately produced a measure of agreement on such issues as banking, currency, and the tariff also produced a Civil War which abolished slavery. Underneath what we now acknowledge as the limited success of such national crusades, however, as the commitment to government which began at home—in state legislatures, in traditional county and town systems, and in the growing urban governments. The compromises which followed the Civil War affirmed the limitations of the federal government where the making of policy was concerned, but most of all in the formulation of policy on social issues. This was an important affirmation for the South in particular where “social issues” meant not only the treatment of Negroes but the whole problem of poverty in what was, in effect, an under-industrialized and recently defeated colony with relatively little industry. State and local governments were perceived as independent entities pursuing locally determined “public” aims different from those pursued by other “publics” in other communities and regions. The term “public” itself was loosely applied, stretched to include the interests of business and professional groups whose concern with the health and well-being of the community, as well as its moral and charitable needs, could be defined by many different organizations and associations which no one would have called governmental.

Awareness of the need for some kind of national institutions and procedures for influencing the quality of the lives of all citizens came basically from two sources, one quite traditional and the other quite new. The older of the two, the charitable and religious beliefs and institutions which had served as the organizational base for national, educational, and social reform since the Jacksonian era, no longer appeared to be effective, even though for many the benevolent motive remained unchanged. The Civil War had taught a lot of lessons, among them the divisiveness of denominational interests and transience of religious enthusiasm. At the same time, however, the growing consciousness of the needs of the technological revolution underway had led some entrepreneurs and managers engaged in the building of national industry in the nineteenth century to see a new range of na-

tional needs in education, in scientific research, and in the relation of the two to human welfare more generally.

What made the combination of charity and technology unique in American society was the tradition of federalism—the unwillingness of Americans to give their national government the authority to set national standards of social well-being, let alone to enforce them. Part of the problem lay in the diversity of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups which had been affected dramatically by the successive waves of late nineteenth-century immigration and the unprecedented rapid expansion and settlement of the western lands. The traditional American idea of equality did not reflect a national standard according to which communities could measure the quality of education, medical care, treatment of the aged or the unemployed, even from neighborhood to neighborhood in the growing cities, let alone from state to state. For better or for worse, federalism in the nineteenth century had become a way of making pluralism palatable by confining unresolvable differences and accepting them.

From the vantage point of historical distance, one can see the problem more clearly than it was perceived at the time. Among a national elite of modern industrial reformers, a growing consciousness of the desirability of national programs of social welfare collided with a general political culture which would not accept a national government bent on such reform. It was a culture which would have been threatened down to its partisan and regional roots by any attempt to create a nationally unified conception of social policy. Not until the New Deal would the federal government move into areas dominated by private philanthropy and local government, and then only in a very limited form engendered by the Great Depression and accomplished by emergency measures that many believed would not become permanent. Even Americans who looked upon the social programs of the New Deal as the origins of the American welfare state still accepted the fact that solutions to such national problems as compensation for unemployed, the children of the poor, or the indigent and disabled elderly (not to mention emergency employment of artists) would vary widely according to the resources provided by state and local governments as much as by regional traditions.

Federal financial support was always deemed to be supplementary, encouraging rather than controlling state and local policies. Private organizations supported by associations of well-to-do citizens and religious groups worked jointly with agencies managed by local communities and bore the major responsibility for dealing with the condition of those unable to care for themselves. Such institutions as the numerous Charity Organizations Societies, the Associated Charities of Boston, the United Hebrew Charities of Philadelphia and New York are obvious late nineteenth-century examples of the phenomenon, forerunners of the modern Community Chest-United Way approach to local, private provisions for welfare needs. Schools run by various local committees and boards would continue to hold a widely differ-

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ing range of powers to tax citizens within their jurisdictions and to distribute educational services, the quality of which depended largely on the willingness and financial ability of citizens to supply the necessary funds. Wealthier communities would educate their children differently from less wealthy communities, while ethnic and racial distinctions would play their traditional role in determining balances of equality. Needless to say, control of culture from music to museums (and especially including higher education) was quintessentially a local affair in the nineteenth century.

The point is that the emergence of the federal government as the controlling presence in the management of national public policy is a remarkably recent phenomenon. While in many aspects of social policy, most particularly those relating to relief, we can date the origins of a national, governmentally created public policy as a product of the New Deal, for most of us the enormous range of federal public responsibility for policy is really a phenomenon of the Johnson years of the 1960s. The Reagan reaction against "big government" is, from this point of view, really an attempt to set the clock back twenty years rather than a century. It plays upon and corresponds to the localist elite sentiments which characterized the formulation of public policy in the United States prior to 1964.

Culture and Public Policy

From the point of view of culture, the process is particularly difficult to disentangle and explicate. While localist sentiment made federal intrusion into the major areas of social policy unpalatable to most Americans, the twin pressures of reform politics and economic necessity achieved grudging acceptance of the need for, if not the desirability of, federal and governmental solutions to certain social problems. But this was almost never the case with culture, and it is not hard to understand why. The cynical might say that society requires bread to feed hungry mouths, but that it does not require theatre, music and dance. There is some truth in this position, but it ignores the less obvious fact that Americans have defined themselves locally and regionally until fairly recently, and they have been fundamentally committed to the notion that culture in a republic is the product of voluntary patrons and societies, though animated by civic pride and civic duty.

A clear case in point is artistic policy in America. Setting aside the short-

lived Work Projects Administration (WPA) program in the arts in the 1930s, this situation of dispersed policy in the arts began to be transformed only by the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965. For the first time, significant sums of tax-based federal funds were available for expenditure at the state and local level in the arts. The situation any intelligent observer might have anticipated then came about: on the one hand, local artists and artistic groups eagerly competed for the newly available money, and, on the other hand, artists and philanthropists complained that national policy concerns ought not to guide the distribution of the newly available funds. The message was clear: "Give us the funds and we will determine what to do with them"; or, at best, permit the National Council of the Arts to determine the use of the funds without intervention from politicians and bureaucrats. The question was seldom asked, however, why the federal government should behave in such a way? Should federal tax monies be returned to individuals for local expenditure without undergoing distribution through ordinary political and bureaucratic channels? Is NEA a properly democratic method of allocating federal funds? Can culture really maintain above politics once the federal government intervenes?

From a practitioner point of view, what we do not have is what exists in some of our European counterpart societies—a governmental ministry of culture which sets explicit policies for art, ranging from the determination of subsidies for particular companies to the financing of artistic education for artists, and in some cases extending even to the determination of the actual works of art to be performed. We have all heard about the number of local opera companies in Germany or the centralization of artistic policy-making in France, but whatever one thinks of the German opera or French theatre, the centralized solutions are not currently possible in American political culture. We prefer to do these things locally and privately, just as we have preferred to locate social reform locally. We think of them as exclusively private and artistic in their origins, even in the face of evidence that since the early seventies at least, cultural policies are affected not only by the private patron and the private philanthropic sector, but also by a congeries of local and national governmental policies. American pluralism and regionalism create a constant pressure for the decentralization of cultural public policy which increasingly runs athwart steadily mounting demands for nationalization of cultural policy. How long will it take for the implementation of the nationalizing pressures beyond bureaucratic and legislative manifestos is impossible to guess.

The Case of Exchange in Performing Arts

The international exchange of performing arts groups is a characteristic example of arts policy formulation in the United States. We must recognize that we have arts policies, and that they are contingent rather than accidental. Arts policies result from a series of policy decisions at the local, state, and national levels, even though many of these decisions do not immediately concern the arts. Martha Coigney, like many others, has lamented the un-

willingness of the federal government to promote exchange of theatrical groups—“ . . . our government has not made any significant contribution to moving American theatre work out of the country.”

The great cost has been borne by the artists themselves, by foreign government and by foreign theatres. American theatre has moved when at all by the grace of foreign aid, and the foreign aid is getting tired—not tired of participating, but certainly tired of picking up the whole tab.

She goes on to inquire the sources of American unwillingness to participate at the government level: “Money? Yankee isolationism? The last of the Puritan ethic?” Her conclusion seems to be “cultural poverty” and “lack of commitment” to the arts in the United States. More fundamentally, Ms. Coigney argues for an entitlement for the arts: “There doesn’t need to be a second excuse for the arts to be supported—they are a primary right of the people who live here.” (Coigney, *PAJ* 18)

Theatre may be a primary right (although it would be interesting to hear David Stockman’s reaction to the assertion), but federal support of theatre has not been a central public policy since the days of the New Deal. Support from the National Endowment for the Arts is virtually the only direct federal support, and NEA funds are almost exclusively reserved for domestic arts programs. We are not talking about rights, but about alternative public policy choices.

Why has there been so little support from the United States government for the import of European performing arts troupes or the export of American artists? Perhaps the prior question ought to be, what have been the financial sources for existing exchanges?

On the one hand, the answer is easy—European governments. Given the financial structure of most European arts programs, the state assumes the lead role. A recent article in *The Economist* (Simon Jenkins, 17 November 1984, p. 2) estimates central and local public spending on the arts as follows:

Sweden	1980-81	\$32.27 per capita
France	1982	\$29.32 " "
Austria	1980	\$24.19 " "
West Germany	1981	\$20.50 " "
United Kingdom	1981-82	\$ 7.54 " "

(converted from sterling at \$1.30)

If tax deductible contributions to arts organizations are included in the accounting, the United States would place well below West Germany, at \$13.00 per capita, but nearly twice the British per capita figure. The continental countries thus spend substantial proportions of their national

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budgets on the arts, though this figure is currently declining almost everywhere. Only the Thatcher government lags behind the United States. And, of course, these continental state funds are precisely what have funded most American groups performing in Europe (as well as many of the westward exports).

There have been a few U.S. federal subsidies to international exchange, but most of them appear to have come in the form of education exchanges through the Fulbright program, which has been responsible for sending so many young (and a few older) American creative artists abroad. Most of the sources have been from the private sector, and until recently mainly philanthropic—foundations, individual gifts, and corporate philanthropic patronage. This mix of public and private financial support is characteristic of the sources of domestic performing arts programs, though of course the total available for foreign performance is a very small part of the entire U.S. arts budget.

The flip side of the complaint that the U.S. government does not support the performing arts is, of course, that the American private sector does support the arts to a degree unparalleled in the world. Admittedly, the case in the U.K. is the least favorable of the European examples, but Simon Jenkins's analysis is that the arts in Britain would do better to rely upon support of the private sector than upon the Treasury:

. . . London's museums and opera companies would receive higher contributions revenue and higher income overall, were the bulk of their grants switched to tax reliefs to donors. The success of corporate sponsorship and membership fund-raising by the unsubsidised Royal Academy and Glyndebourne strongly suggests there is in Britain a large sleeping constituency of private individual support for the arts, waiting to be roused. (Jenkins, p. 16)

Jenkins may well be carried away by what he perceives to be the success of the Metropolitan Opera and City Center from a purely financial point of view, and of course the great defect of private, institutionally-based funding is its inflexibility. No group of public planners can reallocate such funds to other purposes, such as the subsidization of touring European opera companies, in the way that government grant-makers theoretically might do. For better or worse, however, it is the American way.

The American way has particularly serious disadvantages from the point of

view of international exchanges. Funding for all but the largest organizations is unpredictable, and dependent upon the annual vagaries of public taste—for this reason it is also peculiarly inhospitable to innovative artistic efforts, thus affecting avant-garde programming and the prospects of new or experimental companies. Institutionally-based funding, based on ticket sales, individual memberships, foundations and corporate support (with occasional help from local and even federal government), is primarily directed toward service to local communities. Even the recent (27 November 1984) Philip Morris grant to the Joffrey Ballet is for its *national* tour. It is hard to use such support for international touring perhaps excepting orchestras, for whom touring may have a direct relation to record sales, and it is virtually unavailable for the support of incoming foreign performers. American arts policy, like American social policy, is locally-oriented, tied closely to the private sector, and therefore market-oriented.

The Multiplicity of Public Policies

But it is easy to ignore the extent to which government is nevertheless a part of the policy process. The traditional policy of tax exemption for contributions to non-profit organizations is the most obvious case. The taxes forgone for such contributions, called “tax expenditures” by the economists, are at least an incentive and quite possibly a significant government subsidy to arts companies. The same may be said for property tax exemptions in municipalities, urban renewal programs such as the one which helped to make Lincoln Center possible, and other government programs with non-artist ends, such as the CETA program which ostensibly aimed at reducing unemployment. The American way is thus a complex mix of public (local, state and federal) and private (individual and corporate) policies.

1. Government Policy

In considering government policy, it is obvious that there are relatively few areas of direct state or federal cultural policy making. I have already spoken of the NEA (and I could mention its state analogues, the Arts Councils), but such examples of direct and intentional government policy making are few. More often, governmental policies which have a critical impact on cultural decision making are indirect and unintended, whether they emanate from legislation, judicial action, or the executive branch. The most obvious general area is perhaps tax policy, for it must be clear to all of us that the structure of taxation has an immediate effect on the financing and therefore the policy making of cultural organizations.

What would the situation be, for instance, without state and federal deductions for charitable contributions and, indeed, without the whole structure of our legal system of inheritance? So much of our cultural activity is predicated upon philanthropic principles that it is hard for us to imagine a system which does not run on some combination of the market and philan-

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thropy, despite European examples to the contrary. But of course we need not have charitable deductions, and in fact some current proposals for tax reform envisage the possibility of doing without them. The current Regan tax simplification would penalize charitable giving severely.

State and federal policy with respect to education, to name another obvious area, clearly has a great deal to do with the training of young artists and with the employment of mature artists. The federal government has played an increasing role in creating a national educational policy going back to the National Defense Act of 1965, but states and localities have nevertheless always been more centrally important in education. Certain federal policies designed for more general purposes have occasionally had a dramatic impact on culture—the Depression-era WPA is only the most obvious example, but others could be cited. In the United States we have a wide variety of governmental policies which have an obvious relationship to the cultural life of this country, even though we have no ministry of culture and even though we have no cultural policy as understood by European standards.

2. Private Sector Policy: Corporate

The private sector provides a similar picture of a complex, interlocking, and sometimes conflicting set of policies with respect to culture. Consider first the commercial side of the private sector. The market itself is of course a powerful force in culture, whether we are talking about setting the agenda for symphony programming or helping to create the “New York Style” in painting. Print and electronic media are essential to the welfare of artistic institutions and individual artists, and I do not suppose that any of us would want to deny that these institutions are driven by considerations which are not in the first instance aesthetic. The commercial entertainment industry itself, through the pressure of competition and the setting of public tastes, provides an important part of the environment in which cultural institutions must operate, and it surely impacts upon their decision making. Likewise, from the other side of the bargaining table, the organization of labor and the development of a labor agenda have also transformed the context of the arts. One need only look at the budgets of symphony orchestras before and after the onset of the unionization of classical musicians to see what a determining effect labor power has had upon musical life in the United

States. I suppose that these policies and influences are self-evident, but we sometimes take them for granted.

Even more obvious, though less understood, is the impact of the private not-for-profit sector. We are accustomed to recognize the importance of patrons in the development of cultural policy, but of course patronage, like so much else in American life, has now also corporate forms. That is to say that much of the finance and decision making in cultural life now comes via foundations and corporations, just as it traditionally came from individuals, churches and voluntary organizations. The private patron is still the largest source of support, but the funding of artistic activity has been substantially driven by the policies of non-profit organizations. And so, perhaps more important, have the education of artists and their sustenance throughout artistic careers. Decisions, for instance, about the nature and finance of musical conservatories have had the greatest relevance to the production of the great numbers of competent instrumentalists currently available for America's burgeoning orchestral sector. What Philip Morris or Exxon, qua corporate philanthropists, want to support in the way of art shows, dramatic television series, or Egyptian archeology is likely to have a very big influence over what is available to the modern public. Doing well by doing good is an old American tradition.

3. Private Sector Policy: Individual

It is harder to describe the behavior of individuals as one of policy making. The major patrons have had a clear impact on the maintenance and transformation of culture, but then so have volunteers and more modest individual donors. The same might be said for groups of individuals working through institutions ranging from libraries through civic associations. Voluntarism has indeed been a critical aspect of policy making in the United States, even if the coherence and independence of such groups have characteristically been exaggerated. And, finally, of course the artists themselves are the most important individuals involved. At least in the performing arts, however, it is very difficult to argue that most performing artists have been able individually to determine the conduct and texture of institutional culture in their own fields. Most artistic performance is driven by institutional imperatives, and not only by the imperative of finance. It is largely upon such institutions that the varieties of policy making on which I have tried to elaborate have had determining effect.

Conclusion

I am not a professional student of the arts. My field is rather the history of public policy in the United States and, in particular, the history of philanthropy. Nevertheless, it does seem clear to me as an avid consumer of the arts (especially music) that the dynamics of public policy formation in the United States apply to artistic policy as well as to those areas of social policy with which I am more familiar. The lessons, I would say, are really

four.

The first lesson is that to have no policy is to have a policy. That we do not have a national cultural policy, in other words, means that we have made a decision (this going far back in our history) to leave to private and local institutions the determination of the decisions most overtly affecting the creation and conduct of cultural institutions. Second, no public policy can be understood in isolation. We do not have a national cultural policy, but we have tax policies, urban renewal policies, immigration policies, and a number of other public and governmental policies which limit the ways in which cultural institutions can operate.

Third, if by policy we mean the creation of norms according to which action is determined, the public/private line is not very helpful in determining "public" policy. The norms which have operational significance for artists and cultural institutions derive equally from private and public sources, and it is a mistake to think of them as primarily governmentally derived. Indeed, in this country, private policy making has been predominant. At this point in our history, the interconnections between public and private are so complex and so intimate that it makes little sense to try to polarize our understanding of the policy-making process.

Finally, the increasing involvement of American cultural life with the overt process of public policy formulation has costs as well as benefits. While most of us are appreciative of the growing amounts of governmental funds which have been made available to American artists, we must recognize that the price tag for this "public" support is a swelling demand for public accountability. There is an inevitable tension between high culture and democracy, and as cultural policy moves from the domain of the private, the elite, and the artist to that of public and popular taste, there will almost certainly be impacts upon the artistic process itself. The one sure thing is that this tension will produce a wide variety of responses in our localistic culture, despite the best (worst?) efforts of federal government to achieve a more unified national policy.

What all this comes to is that Americans have a public policy toward international arts exchanges, or rather that we have a set of altogether uncoordinated and sometimes conflicting policies. The bottom line is that virtually no government funding is available, and that, for a variety of reasons, private funding is inconsistent and hard to come by. Government has turned its back on the problem both because our elected representatives have not considered it worth funding and (more important) because Americans assume the arts to be largely a private responsibility, at least in their international form; perhaps we should not be surprised that the arts fare no better than amateur sports. Performing artists thus might well be angry; it is not that they have been ignored, but that a public policy contrary to their interests has been arrived at.

The results of the 1984 election make it perfectly clear that new federal

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government policies more favorable to international artistic exchange are very unlikely. Given the budget crisis and the ideological stance of the Reagan administration, especially with its rhetoric of private support for activities previously supported by government, new expenditures in the arts are not likely to be made. Cuts in social programs, now due to be intensified, will put increasing pressure on private and corporate philanthropy to close some of the “social gap,” and if the threatened recession occurs, the total pie will be cut into ever smaller pieces.

Quite frankly, I do not foresee any short-range improvement in the situation and, if the forecasted European arts cutbacks come about, things are likely to deteriorate for performing artists. I can imagine only very partial and particularistic solutions on the American side. These would involve self-conscious decisions by both private foundations and corporations to fund small pieces of a private international exchange program. Certainly I do not have the experience necessary to make such choices, though I cannot imagine that they would not somehow single out young artists, newer groups, and experimental work for funding preference.

Lindy Zesch (of the Theatre Communications Group in New York) encouraged by the Olympic Arts Festival in Los Angeles during the summer of 1984, has argued that international performing arts exchanges are a “window to the world.”

We can create our own “cultural policy.” Ways can be found to import, export and exchange. Some of these ways will cost money—how will we pay? By making it urgent, important, essential.

The task is to make it essential, and for that we need both money and leadership. We should not imagine that government will act in our behalf.

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