

The Arts, Them and Us: creating a more equitable system for subsidised culture, Liverpool 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014

**Justification anxiety and funding rationales: breaking free from defensive advocacy**

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## The problem of 'justification'...

*“There will never be enough money”.*

*“Choices will always have to be made, judgments-between”*

*(Richard Hoggart)*

# The arts, funding and the ‘justification anxiety’

Tom Nightingale on the BBC Newsnight comment web page:

“There are strong cases for publicly funding street lighting, hospitals, schools and many other goods and services. What is the value of arts beyond private enjoyment. I, and many others, enjoy fish and chips. Should chippies be subsidised? A bag of fish and chips beats the pants off anything either Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst ever produced”.

# 'Attachment' and 'Defensive instrumentalism'

## The promise of 'economic impact'

John Myerscough's report *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* (1988):

'Arguments based on [the arts'] intrinsic merits and educational value were losing their potency and freshness, and the economic dimension seemed to provide fresh justification for public spending on the arts'.

# The impact measurement fetish

According to the LGA's report *Driving Growth Through Local Government Investment in the Arts* (2013):

York Museum Trust “represents a ‘return on investment’ of around £10 of impact for every £1 invested by City of York Council”.

Socio-economic impact = An external form of validation and legitimacy.

But also a diversionary tactic

# Beyond advocacy: what role for academia?

## The Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value

- Challenging the myth of the neutrality of policy and the linear research-policy nexus it presupposes
- Pushing the debate beyond the obsession with funding (simile of the ecosystem)
- Feeding critical perspectives into policy debates + asking the awkward questions
- We are all implicated in the socially stratified way in which cultural value works, so this can only be a collaborative effort!

# Arts policy: inherently political

Can government expenditure on culture ever be truly justified as a rational public investment?

As Janet Wolff's reminds us...

“Understanding art as socially produced necessarily involves illuminating some of the ways in which various forms, genres, styles, etc. come to have value ascribed to them by certain groups in particular contexts” (1981, 7).

Cultural value is socially constructed, negotiated and contested