

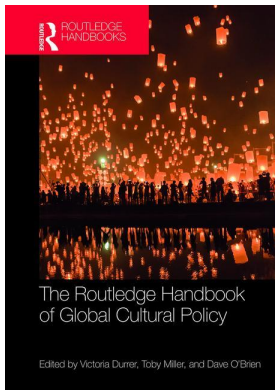
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### Sociology and cultural policy

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# Sociology and cultural policy

*David Wright*

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## **Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine the relations between sociology and cultural policy. Such an exercise requires some careful de-lineation, not least because, at a distance, these objects might both appear to be more 'solid' than they actually are close up. The chapter proceeds first with some brief working definitions of these terms. The story sketched here reflects the shared historical processes, from the nineteenth century onwards, and a shared geography, of Western Europe and North America, in which the discipline of sociology and the problem of culture for the modern state have been formed. While sociological analysis is increasingly post-national in its orientations, the problems of policy are almost inevitably located in specific territories. In exploring the relations between sociology and cultural policy below, I focus on the UK, where the development of the discipline of sociology was bound up, in the early twentieth century, with a changing conception of the role of academic knowledge and of culture in the practice of government. The discussion then moves to France, where the work of Pierre Bourdieu in the mid-twentieth century helps to bring a particular version of the problem of culture, produced through the techniques of social science, under the lens of 'modernising' governments in Europe. We return to the UK, via a brief sojourn to the United States, as the research infrastructure that might underpin sociological analysis of patterns of cultural participation continues to be refined and integrated into the practices of policymakers. Any attempt to identify the relations between these objects of analysis is likely to be partial and strategic. Accepting that other stories can be told from other national and regional perspectives, these examples are chosen to highlight particular moments of intersection between sociology and cultural policy that continue to resonate, rather than because of their universal applicability. The chapter concludes with some reflection on why, despite a brief flowering of the empirical techniques of gathering evidence about the cultural lives and practices of populations, if not the theoretical mode of analysing such evidence, sociological perspectives on culture might have become less useful to cultural policymakers in these places than they once were.

## Defining the terms of debate

Both sociology and cultural policy have histories that reveal much about the shifting intellectual landscape of the 'advanced' democracies of the global North, in which the development of academic disciplines and their institutional location on university teaching curricula are bound up with the development of the state itself. A working definition of *sociology* might emphasise a genealogy that incorporates specific, foundational, theoretical accounts and combines them with a set of methodological techniques that can be applied to help understand social life. The theoretical accounts would most likely include the range of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and North American thinkers (Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Mary Wollstonecraft, W. E. B. Du Bois, Georg Simmel, Auguste Comte, Gabriel Tarde, Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen, Beatrice Webb) who are credited, sometimes retrospectively, with defining and giving some shape to the concept of 'the social' through work that engaged with the emerging problems of modern, urban, industrial, patriarchal, market-oriented democracies. As Michael Burawoy describes it, the early manifestations of what we now call sociological modes of thinking were bound up with narratives of social reform and struggles for civil rights, such that sociology could imagine itself as an 'angel of history, searching for order in the broken fragments of modernity, seeking to salvage the promise of progress' (Burawoy, 2005: 5).

The methodological techniques applied to this significant task include the identification and production of social statistics of various forms, often in this formative period produced in direct relation to, and on behalf of, the emerging modern state and through such mechanisms as population censuses and, later, the sample survey. These techniques are shared with other social sciences developing in the same period, such as economics and psychology, and they can also be contrasted with and complemented by other methods, including ethnography, participant observation and interviewing, which also overlap with anthropology. Like these other social sciences, sociology privileges the observable, empirical world in making its claims to knowledge, and it is from some combination of these empirical ways of capturing the social world and the theoretical lenses through which it is examined that a disciplinary identity of sociology – the 'sociological imagination' of C. Wright Mills' (1959) definitive statement of professional intent – begins to emerge.

A working definition of *cultural policy* for this purpose might identify an intriguingly similar geographic and historical period in which civic and national institutions associated with various forms of cultural and artistic production begin to be established and in which the organisation and management of such institutions become a concern for the modern state, in regard to which forms of cultural expression should be displayed or preserved, whether a given population should or should not access them and how, if at all, such institutions are to be supported and financed. A more recent history, from the early to mid-twentieth century concerns the formation of specific ministries of culture, or equivalents, which are given responsibility for the strategic management of the various forms of cultural production within a particular national territory, e.g. through the re-distribution of some proportion of public funding or taxation. This more recent phenomenon is the culmination of older inter-relations between the ideals, and indeed anxieties, that governments have about artistic and symbolic forms of expression, democracy and self-realisation and their spread within and across the developing public spheres of modern nation states.

This working definition of cultural policy itself depends on a working definition of *culture*. In the developing history of cultural policy, such a definition can be initially associated

with those cultural forms that are becoming institutionalised in the civic spaces of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and North America, such as fine art, sculpture, orchestral forms of music, opera, theatre, literature and poetry. The establishment of these forms and the venues in which they are cultivated, performed and exhibited can be seen as part of a process of the formation of distinctive *national* identities, which have been of interest to sociologists (e.g. Anderson, 1991). The creation and management of such identities through the circulation of national cultural forms is one imperative of developing cultural policies to establish the legitimacy of modern states over their territories (Alasuutari, 2001; Parkhurst Clarke, 1987), to sustain national identities in the context of supra-national pressures (Robins, 2007) and, more recently, to promote the nation on a global cultural stage (Kwon and Kim, 2014; Minnaert, 2014). In their more recent iterations, questions of cultural policy also variously take account of a widened conception of culture, including commercial culture; they have come to incorporate concern with all aspects of the symbolic life of a nation. This includes national and international debates about film, broadcasting, the regulation and management of intellectual property, the strategic definition of and public support for ‘the creative industries’. In early-twenty-first-century UK, the field even incorporates a concern with questions of national technical infrastructure inasmuch as the British Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for the implementation of government policies relating to the maintenance of the UK’s broadband Internet network. In this latter version, cultural policy perhaps completes a journey from being a distinct set of concerns about a relatively discrete set of special cultural ‘things’, towards being implicated in a far more dispersed set of social and economic processes.

If sociology’s early project was to explain and moderate the forces of modernity and the shifting relations among people in new urban contexts, new forms of workplace and new forms of family life, then questions of ‘culture’ can be understood as part of this project, too. Durkheim’s *The Elementary Form of Religious Life* (2001[1912]) and Simmel’s reflections on fashion (1997 [1905]), for example, both emphasise the symbolic aspects of social life and the importance of meaning-making to the maintenance of social relations in modernity. A more specific sociological concern with the restricted definition of culture as associated with cultural policy – meaning initially ‘the arts’ and latterly the cultural and media industries – is a more recent development. The elisions and collisions created by the general ‘cultural turn’ within the social sciences create, by the end of the twentieth century and early twenty-first, a variegated set of research territories including a distinct sociology of artistic forms (e.g. Wolff, 1993; Zolberg, 1990) and a somewhat antagonistic distinction between a ‘sociology of culture’ – in which cultural forms and practices are the focus of analysis – and ‘cultural sociology’ – where ‘cultural’ describes an approach privileging the symbolic in analysing a wider range of social phenomena (see Inglis (2016) for useful summary discussion of what is at stake in these territorial battles). A more restricted focus on culture as an object of analysis itself also became difficult to sustain in the light of the rise of Cultural Studies towards the end of the twentieth century, itself an accommodation between sociology and literary studies. This approach’s influential insistence on the relations between culture and everyday life drew concerted attention to forms of cultural production and consumption that went beyond the legitimated, institutionalised forms that had been the preserve of the state or its variously constituted elites. The project to identify and explore the ideologies of popular cultural forms as sites of domination, resistance and symbolic expression of identity, especially for previously marginalised groups, plays a significant role in re-shaping the sociological imagination for the late twentieth century (e.g. Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Hebdige, 1979).

This brief historical story at least indicates that the barriers around sociology and cultural policy are rather porous. With this proviso in mind, the chapter now goes on to discuss in more detail how and why questions of culture have been important to the development of the discipline of sociology, first with a particular focus on the UK and then with some discussion of how sociology has helped to bring the problem of culture into being for cultural policy, with a focus on France.

### **The sociology of culture and cultural policy in the twentieth century**

If questions of ‘culture’ were always implicit in the development of the discipline of sociology and its commitment to explaining modernity, the emergence of more identifiable ‘sociology of culture’ was bound up with specific anxieties about mass society and mass culture and their consequences. Such anxieties begin in the late nineteenth century as adult suffrage, universal models of education and the possibility of industrially produced symbolic forms became increasingly cemented. They are deepened in post-war Europe and the US, when sociological work emerges focussing on the products of the cultural industries (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944) and the potential influence of ‘mass’ forms of broadcasting and entertainment on social life (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948). In the UK, in this period, these concerns were part of a general re-alignment in which the rise of the social sciences, as a specific aid to the workings of the modern state, was itself a direct challenge to the primacy of the kinds of knowledge that emerged from the arts and humanities, i.e. from those forms of academic knowledge that had previously held the primary responsibility for understanding ‘culture’ in its more restricted sense. In his account of the *cultural* significance of the rise and spread of social scientific forms of knowledge across the twentieth century, Savage (2010) identifies a fissure within the British elites of the post-war years between a more traditional ‘aristocratic’ intellectual for whom authority was a product of family and social networks, but legitimised through humanistic forms of education, and a more technically oriented intellectual concerned with the gathering and analysis of evidence to identify and address social problems. The difference between these two ‘sides’ is perhaps felt most acutely in relation to questions of culture where the relative value or worth of cultural artefacts was assumed to rest with established artists, writers and their largely elite scholars and audiences who had neither reason nor inclination to test or question their judgement about such matters or to recognise that forms of cultural life outside this purview had anything substantive or valuable to contribute to national life, beyond keeping ‘the masses’ entertained or distracted. It is a difference that is evident in higher education at the time in the relative presence of chairs in social sciences and the arts in British universities in 1939, as revealed by the Clapham report. Only five percent were in the still nascent social sciences (covering sociology, economics, psychology and a range of cognate disciplines) compared to 42 percent in the arts and humanities – and 27 percent in the natural sciences (Savage, 2010: 120).

The story of British intellectual life in the post-war period is arguably of a slow shift in dominance from the former kind of intellectual to the latter, at least in terms of their relative influence over the workings of the modern state. The tensions between the positions can be neatly embodied, in the story of British cultural policy at least, by the figure of the economist John Maynard Keynes who was both a co-architect of the post-World War II global economic order and a major proponent of the value of public investment in the arts and culture, culminating in his role in the establishment of the British Arts Council (Upchurch, 2004, 2011). Keynes represents both the rise of the technocratic social scientist at the heart of government, and, through his association with the influential Bloomsbury group of writers and

intellectuals, retains an association with a more gentlemanly and ‘aristocratic’ conception of culture as a set of things of intrinsic value. Keynes’s own interest was arguably to *preserve* this conception of culture in the light of the rise of mass forms of society, with the modernist intellectuals of the Bloomsbury group more usually exhibiting deep ambivalence towards, and occasional outright loathing of, the masses themselves (Carey, 1992) and deep scepticism of their ability to appreciate culture.

As well as the kinds of theoretical perspectives and methodological tools outlined in sketching a distinct sociological approach, disciplines also need places, institutions and people in order to establish themselves. In Savage’s account, the growing influence of the social sciences in the UK – including sociology – is nurtured and sustained away from the traditional centres of humanistic, aristocratic forms of knowledge (the universities of Oxford and Cambridge) in newer institutions, including the LSE, Kent and Manchester, with expansionist ambitions that reflected the widening access to higher education in the mid-twentieth century and in which new forms of technical, social science knowledge could be encouraged in people from a wider range of backgrounds. These forms of knowledge were self-consciously promoted as an explicit challenge to the legitimacy of inherited forms of authority, and possessors of these ‘progressive technical identities’ (Savage, 2010: 85) conceptualised themselves as an alternative to the aristocratic modernist establishment, able to apply the tools of social science to the problems of national life. This included attention to the lived experience of the population and the collection of evidence of various kinds, through censuses, surveys and initiatives such as the Mass Observation program of diary-keeping, in which the everyday lives and cultural practices of the broader population could be captured and analysed. This principle of attention to empirically identifying the thoughts, behaviours and activities of a population, rather than assuming to know what is best for them – the call to ‘make things transparent, to refuse myth, to tell it how it really is and to understand ordinary lives’ (Savage, 2010: 90) – is central to the cultural influence of the rise of the social sciences in general. The particular contribution of sociology, which becomes more formally established as an academic discipline in the UK in the 1950s, and reaches particular prominence in the 1960s, is to conceptualise the population as more than ‘just’ economic agents, knowledge of whom could be valuable in shaping a new kind of government and a new kind of inclusive national story. In this period sociology became, as Steve Fuller describes it, ‘the science of and for the welfare state, the political rubric under which society travelled’ (2006: 17), and we can perhaps see how sociologically inspired research into urban life, family life, the workplace or understanding patterns of health and illness could be directly useful to policymakers concerned with managing complex societies. Sociologists in this period could have imagined themselves as part of a progressive, democratising project in which the evidence emerging from the identification and measurement of the life experiences of the population was brought directly into the process of governing.

In the UK, the apparently fading aristocratic mode of governing was perhaps most stubbornly attached to questions of culture – even though such questions are precisely defined by the rather opaque, taken-for-granted and unexamined forms of authority that were the target of the technical-democratising project of the social sciences. In his short history of the rise of community art – itself a movement that attempted to challenge elite notions of art and culture – Owen Kelly describes the disquiet expressed, as late as 1976, by Lord Gibson, chair of the Arts Council, at the notion that, because the finer arts had traditionally been enjoyed by a select group of the population, public funding entailed a pressure to make artistic producers more accountable to or accessible by the wider public. He expresses scepticism that there is a “cultural dynamism” in the people that will emerge if only they

can be liberated from the cultural values hitherto accepted by an elite' and outright hostility to 'one European "cultural expert"', who referred to such values as 'the "cultural colonialism of the middle-classes"' (Gibson, quoted in Kelly, 1984: 21). Neither Kelly nor Gibson reveals precisely who this parenthesised expert is, but it is a notion that resonates most strongly with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose contribution provides a key moment in the relations between sociology and cultural policy as it was emerging in the same period in France.

### A useful sociology?

Bourdieu's sociological analysis of European museum attendance, conducted with Alain Darbel, was published in France in 1969. This study, *The Love of Art*, employed the established empirical techniques of sociology, based around survey-interviews, with audiences at a range of art museums across Europe (including France, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain) and used the statistical analysis, and other forms of observation and measurement (including length of time of visit and qualitative analysis of the language used to describe the visit) to examine how the experiences of museum visitors were socially patterned. With the application of these techniques to this subject, the study provides a significant set of methodological and theoretical templates for subsequent relations between sociology and cultural policy, focussed upon the policy 'problem' of cultural inequality, i.e. the differential engagement of the populace of a particular country or territory with its public cultural resources. Laurie Haniquet (this volume) gives a fuller discussion of the theoretical and empirical construction of this problem in Bourdieu's work. For my purposes here, Bourdieu embodies a particular moment in the overlapping histories of sociology and cultural policymaking in that his emergence as the predominant sociologist of culture of the late twentieth century began in the 1960s and was given momentum and impetus through a research programme directly connected with the apparatus of the French state.

As Ahearne (2004) and Dubois (2011) relate, the late 1950s and early 1960s, i.e. the same period in which sociology was establishing itself as an influential social science discipline in the UK, was a key period in the formation of modern cultural policy in France, culminating in the formation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs under the leadership of the novelist Andre Malraux in 1959. As in the UK, this is a period characterised by an increased concern with *modernisation*, and the possibility of corraling and applying various emerging forms of technical and scientific expertise to achieve that modernisation. While in the UK the field of culture remained rather insulated from these imperatives, in France, the aspiration to modernise extended to questions of culture and meant that, according to a key civil servant in the Ministry of Culture, 'Cultural policy must no longer be commanded by aesthetic and moral motives but must be conceived on the basis of objective data and be scientifically based on social needs' (quoted in Dubois, 2011: 496). The Ministry's funding of the project that eventually becomes *The Love of Art* reflects this impetus.

There was, then, a mutually reinforcing rationale for a relationship between sociology and matters of cultural policy in this period in France. On the one hand was a state, similar to that previously identified in the UK, increasingly influenced by technocratic concerns with evidence, and on the other was a discipline's attempt to cement its status as a science through the application of its techniques and technologies of data gathering and analysis. Social scientific forms of knowledge were used as a 'mode of legitimation' (Dubois, 2011: 496) for policy initiatives, while, 'state commissioned research was a means to promote a renewed sociology which, having gained social and scientific legitimacy thanks to support outside academia, could subsequently assert its position in the academic field' (Dubois,

2011: 495). These conditions also proved especially fertile for Pierre Bourdieu in his own attempts to mark a distinct place for himself in the French intellectual field. The use and application of the methods of social science were important in this task. While his early work is more closely associated with the techniques of ethnography, based on fieldwork in Algeria, and most usually identified as anthropological in its orientation, upon his return to France in the late 1950s, Bourdieu embarked on a series of works that drew explicitly on survey questionnaires, beginning with *The Inheritors* (1979), but including *The Love of Art* (1991) and culminating in his most enduring work, *Distinction* (1984). As Robbins describes it, in this formative period, ‘he was opting for self-presentation in terms of social and cultural anthropology or sociology so as to present himself as a scientist rather than a speculative philosopher.’ (Robbins, 2005: 22) The use of these forms of empirical quantitative methods was not without controversy, given that this was also a period in which such evidence, with its strong associations with the mechanisms of the state, was beginning to be critiqued. For Bourdieu, though, these methods were precisely the basis upon which he could construct his sociology in contrast to the abstract philosophical theorising that dominated French intellectual life and build up the discipline’s self-belief that it was rigorous in its claim-making. One consequence of a commitment to such forms of evidence, as described by Lebaron (2009), was the use of its ‘scientific’ authority, more usually attached to economic explanations for social life, to generate convincing counter-explanations, which could be taken equally seriously.

The combination of these impulses – from policymakers for evidence, from social scientists for official recognition and from Bourdieu himself for a place in the intellectual landscape – perhaps explains the on-going significance of *The Love of Art* in setting the terms of the relations between sociology and cultural policy. It also gives some indication as to why, at least for Bourdieu, such relations proved untenable. If the aim of applying the technologies of contemporary social science to the operation of cultural policy through the support of empirical research like *The Love of Art* was to re-shape cultural policy towards a more modern, accountable, democratic mode and away from an aesthetic, moral one, then the evidence presented by Bourdieu could indeed have been useful. The establishment of statistical relationships between social groups and the extent and nature of their attendance of museums seems likely to be a productive basis for initiatives that alter or shape the nature of exhibits or venues to make them more attractive to broadened audiences – and indeed this approach proves remarkably resilient, as we shall see. Bourdieu’s interpretation of this evidence, though, and his more nuanced engagement with the nature of the museum audience generated a different set of solutions.

For Dubois, Bourdieu’s interpretation of the ‘problem’ of accessing culture comes down to four interlocking points. First, the ability to choose whether to visit a museum or not is determined by previously acquired dispositions; second, the appreciation of art in the museum depends on codes that, again, are acquired elsewhere; third, the meanings of works of art are not always self-evident or obvious; fourth, the cultural institutions themselves are potentially intimidating spaces for a significant portion of the population. The last two points reflect what Bourdieu later refers to as the ‘cult of the work of art’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 53) and the belief in its charismatic power. The former two points imply that solutions to the problems of cultural institutions do not lie with the institutions themselves but in other spheres such as the family or school. Both positions challenged the very legitimacy of the Ministry of Culture itself. Moreover they ‘de-sacralised’ legitimate culture, making Bourdieu’s intervention problematic for those individuals, institutions and policymakers most invested in maintaining the special place ascribed to culture in social life.



While under Malraux cultural policy was explicitly evoked as a means of using the arts to re-invigorate the kind of social ties and bonds associated with religious life for a modern, secular society, the Ministry and the cultural institutions themselves were to remain guardians of the faith and therefore complicit in maintaining art's charismatic ideology. For Bourdieu, a democratic cultural policy really demanded that this ideology be revealed, subverted and even over-turned. More pragmatically, but no less damning, was the implication that the cultural institutions, and the Ministry, were actually rather marginal to the problem of cultural inequality, at least compared to the equivalent department for education with responsibility for the position of various forms of culture on curricula and for how the codes of appreciation were taught and learned. This made Bourdieu's findings something of anathema to a new Ministry at a time in which it was trying to establish and legitimise its role within government.

Although this experience raised questions for Bourdieu about the potential relations between an objective 'science' of sociology and the pragmatic demands of policymakers, Swartz (2004) reveals it did not end these relations, as Bourdieu was involved in producing two reports on the role and future of education in France under the socialist Mitterrand government of the 1980s. Bourdieu's interventions can be seen, in retrospect, to have done much to help define the field of the sociology of culture and to have set the terms of the problem of cultural policy inasmuch as it is focussed on questions of cultural 'inequality'. The coincidence of forces (the forming of a ministry, the development of a discipline, the pressures of the academy) which underpins these interventions, though, also reflects a high water mark in direct relationships between sociology and cultural policy that has prefaced a more general parting of the ways. In the years since the *Love of Art* and especially *Distinction* sociology, certainly in Europe and North America, became *more* interested in culture, especially as informed by the popularity and influence of Cultural Studies. Direct dialogue between sociologists and policymakers though has become relatively rare.

Notable exceptions to this include the role of Richard A. Peterson and in the US and Tak Wing Chan and John Goldthorpe in the UK, contributions that both engage directly and critically with Bourdieu's applicability beyond France. A key figure in the development of the sociology of culture in the US, especially in relation to the 'production of culture perspective' (Peterson, 1976), and one of the co-founders of the ASA's sociology of culture section in 1986, Peterson joined the research division of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the primary policy body with responsibility for federal funding of the arts, in 1979. There he was directly involved in the production of a national survey instrument on cultural participation, the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). He undertook this work in the light of abiding caution over research enterprises that 'focus on the manipulation of people's tastes, attitudes and behaviour' (quoted in Santoro, 2008: 50), and with a specific aim of helping those who were interested in increasing participation in the arts, as opposed to aiding market researchers. The analysis of findings from this instrument was used as the basis for Peterson, together with a range of collaborators (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Peterson and Simkus, 1992), to develop the concept of the 'cultural omnivore' based on the empirical discovery of the relatively wide-ranging musical taste preferences of educated professionals, contrasted with the less varied 'univorous' tastes of the relatively less affluent with fewer educational qualifications. This concept – conceptualised as something of a challenge to the kinds of relationships identified by Bourdieu in the France of the 1960s and 1970s – emerges as one of the most significant in the sociology of culture in the early twenty-first century. Its growth and spread (see Peterson, 2005; Wright, 2016) also reflects the bringing of culture under the lens of modern government, inasmuch as that can be seen

in the development of equivalent forms of survey to the SPPA in other territories as measurements of cultural participation are seen as worthwhile indicators of national policy success.

A similar relationship occurs in the UK with the work of John Goldthorpe (himself a key figure in the establishment of the technical identity of the sociologist in Savage's account) and his work with Tak Wing Chan examining the UK Arts Council's *Taking Part* survey and its predecessors (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005, 2007a,b). This work, undertaken in a significant period in the recent history of UK cultural policy to be discussed below, used findings from surveys about participation in arts and cultural activities to engage directly with policy debates about cultural participation but also to contribute to the scholarly debates instigated by Richard Peterson about the omnivore. In relation to the latter, Chan and Goldthorpe's analysis points to some tentative support for the omnivore thesis, in that, as they describe, 'higher status, higher educational qualifications and a higher income all increase individuals' chances of being an omnivore rather than a univore' (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005: 208). Work from this project (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007a) also raised direct challenges for policy in questioning the extent, given that non-participation in the arts was common across social strata, that such 'self-exclusion' from the arts should be conceptualised as a policy concern at all. Later work emerging from the direct collaboration with policymakers includes the 2008 report *From Indifference to Enthusiasm* (Bunting et al., 2008), which found some 84 percent of the surveyed population of the UK engaged with little or no publicly funded arts activity and that education and social status were strong influences on the likelihood of participation. Qualitative work integrated into this analysis also identified strong barriers to participation, including those that were practical (relating to caring responsibilities for potential participants' children and to geographical proximity to the UK's cultural offer, concentrated in cities, especially London) but also 'psychological', relating to discomfort or unfamiliarity with the spaces and settings in which the arts were exhibited and performed. If these latter points contain echoes of the kinds of findings that emerge from *The Love of Art*, then the conclusion that, 'there does not appear to be any evidence of a cultural elite that engages with 'high art' rather than popular culture' (Bunting et al., 2008: 62) resonates more with the omnivore thesis. Such findings also suggest that the 'problem' of access to culture is one that is solvable by cultural organisations themselves through, for example, improved marketing messages or information about 'dress codes or etiquette' (Bunting et al., 2008: 12). This latter point offers the starkest contrast with the insights of Bourdieu – although one that is in keeping with Goldthorpe's established and clearly articulated suspicion of the conceptual and empirical basis of this position (Goldthorpe, 2007).

These differing intersections between sociologists and policymakers reflect recurrent tensions in relations between academic forms of research with apparent commitments to disinterested 'discovery' or 'truth' and those forms of research that are more instrumental in nature and directly oriented towards and sympathetic with the pragmatic problems of policymakers. In the specific field of cultural policy studies, this was a debate played out productively in the 1990s between McGuigan (1996) and Bennett (1998) about the possibility of a pure, critical Cultural Studies. For McGuigan, suspicious of any direct engagement between the state and scholarship,

knowledge that is produced solely for official use and funded accordingly rarely questions the fundamental aims and objectives of the client organization. Under such conditions, it is very difficult for a policy-oriented research programme to observe the critical aims and responsibilities that have characterised a 'disinterested' cultural studies.

(McGuigan, 1996: 14)

Such a position, for Bennett, is unsustainable in a context in which culture itself is a site of government, and in which universities, and intellectuals working within them, are part of the state's own infrastructure. Recognition of this belies a distinction between critical and 'practical' or 'technically' oriented intellectuals and suggests that the former should directly engage with the latter rather than preserve their—somewhat mythical—status as 'disinterested'.

This division maps nicely onto a general divergence in the field of sociology identified by Michael Burawoy for whom early twenty-first-century sociology exists in public, policy, critical and professional forms. A policy-oriented sociology can 'provide solutions to problems that are presented to us, or to legitimate solutions that have already been reached' (Burawoy, 2004: 9). A critical sociology, by contrast, has to 'supply moral visions' (Burawoy, 2004: 16). Both are united by the principles of 'professional sociology' underpinned by commitments to the set of methods, epistemological assumptions and the inherited theoretical perspectives that define the discipline. The relative usefulness of sociological knowledge for cultural policy, or any policy for that matter, is always likely, in this light, to reflect the varying priorities of both sociologists and policymakers.

### **Sociology, reflexivity and the 'creative industries'**

The last decades of the twentieth century were a period in which the discipline of sociology and the technocratic states of the global North were both re-imagining the nature of social life. The oft-quoted assertion from former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that, 'there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families' (quoted in Fuller, 2006: 12) was likely to cause greater problems for those social scientists more invested in the 'social' bit of that label than economists or psychologists, for example, whose epistemological assumptions worked outwards from the level of individual actors or agents. At least the economic and political context of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, in which successive governments in the UK, Europe and the US attempted to re-draw the terms of the social contract and re-evaluate the role of government in managing it, meant that the 'science of the welfare state' became a less influential voice. The dominant economic and political philosophies of the day no longer looked to the kinds of solutions that sociology provided because the problems of policy had, so the story goes, moved beyond the provision of basic needs and services, the management of the economy and the construction of a coherent national cultural space in which these other goals could be located and achieved. Instead the body politic could be re-conceptualised as being made of individuals (and families) concerned with the creation of self-directed lifestyles in a consumer-led economy and a globalised world.

Sociology was complicit in this shift, given that influential sociological thinkers of this period, such as Anthony Giddens (1991) – himself a key figure in the development of the intellectual rationale for the Tony Blair-led Labour governments post 1997 – Ulrich Beck (1992) and Zygmunt Bauman (1990), were also concerned with re-imagining the texture of the social life, emphasising, in different ways, the relative decline of traditional social structures such as class and nation with the resulting possibility of new forms of 'reflexive' freedom in which individuals could potentially take control of and shape their own lives, rather than accept the roles that were assumed to be inevitable to earlier generations. Cultural Studies arrived at a similar point from a different direction, emphasising, in its re-appraisals of popular youth subcultures and inspired by an emancipatory identity politics, the ability of individuals to craft meaningful identities for themselves in spite of the conditions with which they were faced. Both the rise of the notion of 'reflexivity' and the attention to the everyday

forms of creative expression evident in Cultural Studies' accounts of the cultural world served to de-privilege – or to de-sacralise, to revisit Bourdieu's terminology – the position of the sociologist. In its place were empowered, self-aware individuals with less immediate need of the authority of experts to interpret their own life experiences.

If questions of culture came late to sociology, the selective application of sociological concepts and techniques also had a late flowering in UK policymaking – in ways that perhaps reflected the incorporation of these broader changes to the 'social' and their application to the 'problem' of cultural policy. The New Labour government post 1997 placed considerable emphasis on 'the creative industries' as potential drivers of economic growth in the emerging symbolic economy (Hewison, 2014). It also emphasised the importance of evidence in underpinning cultural policies, whether in terms of mapping the extent and measuring the success of these industries or in providing legitimation to the funding of its flagship policy of free admission to museums and galleries (see Hesmondhalgh et al. (2015) for a critical reappraisal of this direction in policymaking). This latter strand of cultural policy was strengthened by a new belief that culture – and especially 'the arts' could contribute to the resolution of a range of abiding social problems (from the integration of migrant communities, to improving health, to tackling crime) and indeed that the cultural sector *should* make such contributions in return for funding.

Sociological techniques and theories can be detected in relation to this strand of policymaking. First the empirical methods that sociology helped refine – including the survey and various forms of qualitative data-gathering – formed a major part of the infrastructure of 'evaluation' that underpinned work in the cultural sector, assessing the relative success of projects or events against criteria established by policymakers or funders (including diversity of the audience, as in the Chan and Goldthorpe/Arts Council research referred to above). Theoretically, the catch-all New Labour policy concept of 'social exclusion' draws on conceptual language that emerges from influential sociological studies of the multi-dimensional nature of late-twentieth-century poverty (Townshend, 1979), incorporating understanding of the roles of gender, ethnicity and disability in compounding the experience of poverty, even in contexts of what appeared to be, from a historical perspective, relative material comfort. The career of this problem in New Labour discourse, though, as Levitas (2005) explains, re-imagines it as one that can be solved through supporting individuals in their aspirations to make better choices – including the choice to participate in publicly funded forms of culture – rather than one that requires attention to the 'social' and its structures and arrangements in a more fundamental sense.

In relation to the more diffuse conception of the creative industries, the place of sociology is rather more ambiguous. While rhetorically at least this aspect of cultural policy has become more significant as these industries, widely defined, are conceptualised as strategically significant to economic success, sociological accounts are less welcome than other academic contributors to the formation of policy. This might reflect the dispersion of the profession of sociology itself, which has seen researchers trained in sociological ways of knowing and researching finding institutional locations away from dedicated departments. These might be in more generic applied social science or law or business schools or portmanteau research centres with specific interests in aspects of policy, such as urban regeneration, all of which exist in a more variegated inter-disciplinary academic field with significant competition for research funding. It might also reflect that despite – or perhaps because of – the critical reflexivity of the re-imagined social landscape, sociological accounts sound old-fashioned

in the apparently dynamic world of the cultural and media industries. For McRobbie this reflects the broader, entrenched political climate and its

successful discrediting of the political vocabulary associated with the left and with feminism including equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, workplace democracy, trade union representation etc. The only site for the dissemination of these values is actually the academy, the place of training or education of the creatives.

(McRobbie, 2016: 24)

Sociology itself, though, is a less welcome presence ‘on the guest list’ of official conversations within the creative industries and between these industries and policymakers.

Here, in conclusion, we hear an echo of the ‘moral’ mission of Burawoy’s critical sociology and indeed of the foundational aspiration to reform a ‘broken’ modernity that underpinned the early establishment of the discipline. We can also hear something of an admission of defeat, or at least a potential retreat, from the aspiration of a progressive sociology providing the evidence base for policy as an integral part of a democratising empirical mission such as that underpinning the discipline’s rise to prominence in the 1960s. Culture and cultural policy may have been quite marginal to that rise, but the specific tension between social scientific forms of knowledge and the kinds of authority they produce, and the forms of authority that, in Savage’s account, had previously attached to forms of aesthetic or literary knowledge, means the historical relationships between the development of the discipline and the development of the problem of cultural policy are revealing.

The experience of Bourdieu in France suggests sociology could be influential, at least in identifying the nature of policy problems if not in determining their solutions. Sociology does not speak with one voice, politically, but it can, as in the case of Bourdieu, come up with answers that are challenging and complex, albeit immediately impractical, for institutions concerned with the pragmatic process of governing. At the heart of this tension is sociology’s status as one of a range of academic disciplines – but also as one of a range of voices beyond the academy – that attempt the ambitious and frustrating task of identifying, explaining and reflecting on human experience itself. Other, sometimes louder, voices emerge from other social sciences, politics and the policymaking machinery of the modern state but also, significantly in term of this discussion, from artists, writers, film makers and other cultural producers themselves. There is, then, something of a complex matrix of perspectives and priorities in which sociology and the objects and makers of cultural policy are best seen as occasional collaborators and equally likely as competitors or even antagonists in understanding the role of culture in the social world.

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