The attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) since 1989 have been interpreted in large part as a cultural backlash by the moral Right against the political and cultural gains made by various social movements, most visibly gays and lesbians. This is a quite logical view, one that I myself adopted in my own account of the controversy nine years ago.\(^1\) More recently, Toby Miller has argued that the attacks on the NEA are a later extension of the political conservative Right’s strategies to destroy the Democrats generally, and more immediately to roll back the Great Society entitlement programs from as early as the Nixon years. As soon as Reagan took office, he and his coterie sought to reduce the leverage that the NEA and similar government institutions had made available to progressives. Their opposition to government support was a means, Miller argues, to cut the purse strings for leftist activity. Indeed, the Conservative Caucus’s banner, which it placed on its letterhead in the late 1970s, is to “defund the left.”\(^2\) There is no doubt that the attacks on the NEA by both the moral Right and the political conservative Right are in keeping with this antiprogressive ethos, yet I will argue that the change in government funding for the arts has less to do with this rightist shift than with a larger-scale structural change in U.S. culture. Indeed, culture is at the heart of this shift, even impelling it, although not primarily in keeping with the arguments made during the so-called culture wars. In what follows, I briefly trace the commonsensical view that ascribes the change to the moral and conservative Right and then outline the economic and utilitarian perspective that has become hegemonic, so much so that even “progressives” have found a way of making peace with it. I am referring here to the view that culture serves society, whether, for example, to help implement urban development projects or to solve social ills. Conservatives and progressives can find common ground in attacks on the presumed elitism of the world of art and culture. To the degree that this pragmatism reigns supreme, art and culture will be left with little legitimacy other than what is socially, politically, and even economically expedient.
The Moral Conservative Attack

The conservative attacks on the NEA since the summer of 1989, when Jesse Helms proposed a ban on public funding for “obscene and indecent art,” were clearly aimed at removing contestatory artists from the public sphere. Helms was reacting to exhibitions of sexually explicit and presumably blasphemous photographs by, respectively, Robert Mapplethorpe and Andrés Serrano, which were financed in part with NEA funds. After these two incidents, vigilant conservatives in Congress protested the funding of the so-called NEA Four in 1990—John Fleck, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, and Karen Finley. Objections to the first three revolved around their dissemination of a gay “attitude toward life”; and conservatives “took offense” at the latter’s “unspeakable acts.” Helms and other moral monitors like the New Criterion editor Hilton Kramer justified their attacks by arguing that in passing itself off as art, the political agenda of “social deviants” had illegitimately shielded itself in the armor of aesthetic autonomy. Eight years later, in the summer of 1997, many of these allegations were rehearsed anew when the House of Representatives voted to abolish the NEA. The endowment was saved, however, when the House-Senate conference committee deferred the NEA’s death sentence for another year, not without further reducing the budget and compromising the agency’s autonomy by putting congressional members on its decision-making committees. The $98 million allocated by Congress in 1998 is $1.5 million less than the 1997 allocation, and just over half (56 percent) of the $176 million allocated in 1992, the onset of the downward slide. I shall not belabor this story, for it is not the substance of my argument. It is merely the starting point of a narrative of government withdrawal from support of the arts. But, as I hope to argue, this is in several senses a false lead for what is really taking place. It is, more accurately, a restructuring of governmentality, giving rise to a new way to channel conduct and enable action; both this restructuring and channeling of conduct require new legitimation narratives for the arts and culture.

The Restructuring of Government

The defunding of the NEA is part of a larger restructuring of the relation between government, capital, and society. While the conservative attacks have without a doubt wreaked damage on the NEA, the restructuring that concerns me is part of a bipartisan consensus. The attacks facilitate the withdrawal of federal funding from the arts, in an analogous fashion to what has happened in social services, health insurance, and higher education, thus requiring these sectors to legitimate themselves in new ways. Art has been folded into culture more generally, and, as we shall see, culture is...
valorized insofar as it has an instrumental value. This observation does not imply that art or culture has ever had the transcendent humanist value that philosophers and culture critics have imputed to it since the eighteenth century. What I am tracking here is a change in legitimation narratives rather than ontological value. The current legitimation narrative does not necessarily situate art or culture’s value in the economic but in the social realm: they must serve a social purpose if they are to be recognized as worthy of support. The slashing of the NEA budget is, therefore, in itself insignificant. As we shall see, the NEA can pursue its mission without the same extent of government funding; new partnerships with the corporate sector will help infuse the entrepreneurial ethos characteristic of neoliberal capital.

At its peak, the NEA budget amounted to no more that 66¢ per person (for a budget of $176 million), and, at its current level, 36¢ per person (for a budget of $98 million). Much is made of the comparison with Western European countries, where government ministries or secretariats provide the arts with a median of $40 per person. But it is misleading to compare NEA funding with the budgets of Western European ministries because overall support for the arts in the United States, including private donations, has maintained a substantial $10 billion per year in the 1990s, more or less the equivalent of the $40 per person in Europe.

What is different is the symbolic message sent to artists and the public. The conservative attack makes it seem as if the change is primarily a partisan, ideological one, leveled against obscenity or a “gay attitude toward life.” But the change goes deeper, to the very fabric of what is understood by public culture and democracy. The budget cuts and the likely elimination of the NEA are meant to head off the possibility of an official cultural policy that focuses on democratization. Indeed, the change forecloses the purpose of the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, which has called for a national reflection on American creativity, on the premise that “a healthy cultural life is vital to a democratic society.” Unlike European or Latin American countries, the United States does not have a cultural policy, a point that was made in a government position paper at UNESCO’s 1969 Monaco Round on Cultural Policies. Statements taken from the legislation that established or amended the NEA and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) are the closest thing to a policy. For example, Public Law 89–209, which established the NEA and NEH in 1965, states that “while no government can call a great artist or scholar into existence, it is necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to help create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry, but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent.”

This statement is significantly reversed by congressional action on
the NEA since 1989, not only with regard to the endowment’s budget but also with respect to the premise of artistic autonomy, the “freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry” sounded thirty-four years ago. The struggle to reauthorize the NEA in 1997 resulted in a Pyrrhic victory, surrendering to Congress a say on how funds are distributed and direct representation on the committee that decides which organizations will receive awards. Indeed, the NEA had already distanced itself from “controversial avant-garde projects” as part of its legitimation strategy under “difficult circumstances.”

The NEA and the NEH would extend this “world-wide Marshall plan in the field of ideas” to the conflict-ridden terrain of 1960s America. The targets of this troubleshooting were many, among them opposition to the Vietnam War by artists, intellectuals, and scholars. Like the antipoverty programs of the 1960s, the NEA and NEH were conceived, among other reasons, to “strengthen the connections between the Administration and the intellectual community.” This recommendation was made, aptly, by Arthur Schlesinger Jr., whose The Vital Center had been a major influence a generation before in guiding the intellectual Left in a rightward direction, to a liberal center that reconciled individualism and society in the “freedom” inherent in “American culture.”

Also like the antipoverty programs, the NEA was aimed at channeling the demands of a conflictive society, divided by race, ethnicity, and gender, onto the terrain of culture. From the 1960s to the 1980s the NEA took a series of initiatives to democratize the arts: the 1968 initiative to develop inner-city arts in the wake of the riots throughout the decade; the

The Governmental Management of Social Problems

The Cold War partly explains the championing of “artistic freedom” in 1965 and its abandonment in the 1990s. The creation of the NEA and the NEH can be considered the denouement of a tale that begins in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when postwar intellectuals during the Truman administration fashioned a cultural program that would legitimize the United States’ leadership role in the world, pitting artistic and scholarly freedom, as embodied in the new abstract art and in the rapidly expanding higher education system, against the totalitarianism embodied in the command industrial and cultural economies of the Soviet bloc. Indeed, the very connection between world economic and political leadership, on the one hand, and cultural leadership, on the other, is built into Public Law 89–209: “The world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon the worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation’s high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit.”

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establishment of the Expansion Arts program in 1971 to give institutional sanction to more “populist” arts practices, again mainly in inner cities; the distribution in 1974 of $901,000 by Expansion Arts, most of it for activities located in minority-group areas; and the move in 1977 to provide direct financing of storefront and church arts programs serving inner-city children, particularly in the area of crafts.\textsuperscript{15}

Government thus sought to use subsidies for cultural activism as a way of channeling the expression of opposition. Johnson’s Great Society was a complex mechanism for crisis management: to deal with the deterioration of social control unleashed by migration to the cities and unemployment among blacks and other racial minorities; and to shape and direct African Americans as an electoral constituency in urban centers, especially in the North, as Republicans made inroads among whites in the South. The federal strategy in the cities involved the creation of various service programs for the inner cities: youth development under the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act; community center attention to mental illness under the Community Mental Health Centers Act; community action programs under Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act (the antipoverty program); urban renewal programs under Title I of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act and the Neighborhood Service Program. These programs elevated “poverty” to public prominence, governmentalizing its management as Democrats sought quite deliberately to empower blacks. Bypassing local governments, they made it possible for black activists “to staff and control many of these agencies, much as Italians or Irish or Jews controlled municipal departments.” The new intermediaries between the national government, the communities, and the private social agencies, many of whom were selected from the cadre of civil rights activists and other “young minority-group spokesmen,” were drawn into an “intricate mesh of interactive effects.” As directors of local agencies, even those activists who initially used federal money for their own purposes were ultimately brought into the fold.\textsuperscript{16}

By the late 1960s, it was evident that a true empowerment of the urban, racialized poor was headed off by the very mechanisms that made organization possible. According to Brian Wallis, the swift institutionalization of “alternative art spaces” under the Nixon administration followed a similar route.\textsuperscript{17} He argues that as alternative spaces were drawn into the funding policies, some of which even sought to “empower” them in ways not unlike the Nixon administration’s dealings with an entrepreneurially defined Black Power, those who worked in these spaces were shaped subjectively by their own practices as they conformed to the measures and procedures of applications and meeting eligibility. It might be said that the NEA brought alternativity into the fold as it created the means for its empowerment.

\textit{The Privatization of Culture}
Big government was necessary, on the one hand, to wage the Cold War, enabling the development of the requisite technology and surveillance not only to fight off communism as an ideology but also and more importantly to consolidate the hegemony of American capitalism. On the other hand, big government was also necessary to quell social disorder, or, better yet, to channel its expression. Different parts of this strategy converged in the university. R. C. Lewontin has argued that in the United States, unlike in Japan or Europe, only war or a major economic crisis can legitimize the state’s intervention. These alone carry the force that can overcome “American antistate ideology.” The Cold War thus “became the instrumentality of a vital national economic policy” (“CW,” 7), shaping policy and institutional practices. This is evidenced in the growth of the university and its increasing receipt of federal and state subsidies. Basic research, which is not profitable in the short term expected by corporations, was located in the universities. According to Lewontin, “the problem for innovation then was to produce a large body of scientifically trained experts with an orientation toward research as a career, and to provide those research workers with libraries, laboratories, technical assistants, equipment, expendable supplies, and channels for communication of preliminary results” (“CW,” 8). The competitiveness of the market could not have sustained a similar general location for research. As in the NEA and NEH, a peer review system for selecting grant sites was instituted, virtually putting in the hands of researchers the control over government subsidies (“CW,” 9). Of course, the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) budget was ten times greater than that of the endowments. Nevertheless, both the endowments and the NSF promoted “freedom,” a necessary ideologeme in the war against communism.

Until the endowments ran into political problems in the late 1980s, their awards were largely protected by the concept of artistic freedom. Analogously, the basic research promoted by the NSF was “free” from the profit-oriented ethos of corporations. Over the long term, however, it was expected to contribute to the economy. The cost was thus socialized under the control of entrepreneurial professors who had relative autonomy from ideological control. Similarly, the institutionalization of the arts-granting process—making artists conceive of themselves, indeed, justify themselves as professionals vis-à-vis arts administrations—was disseminated through a vast capillary network of arts administrations, linked to the NEA either through block grants to the fifty arts councils or other forms of support for the other organizations. These decisions were perceived as relatively free from both government mandate and market crite-
ria. The mechanism of this freedom was the peer review panel, which as of 1989 Congress began to rein in and control through congressional oversight. The reauthorization of the NEA in 1997 was approved with the condition that Congress have a say in NEA decisions.\textsuperscript{19}

From the 1960s on, the reference to war enabled the socialization of art, as it did welfarist policies. Since socialization of such goods and services as health care and even education runs against significant political forces, the mobilization of freedom and resources necessary to wage the Cold War became the means to overcome this “ideological antipathy” to state intervention. Indeed, to this day, many government policies have been cast in the rhetoric of war: the “‘war’ on cancer,” the “‘war’ on disease,” the “‘war’ on poverty,” the “‘war on crime,” the “‘war on drugs.” (“\textit{CW},” 23).

In the context of the Cold War, academics achieved “institutional governance” (“\textit{CW},” 28). They thus oversaw the expansion of the university to accommodate the baby boom, which supplied the labor needs of the Cold War economy. Science researchers set the model of the entrepreneurial professor, who “no longer worked \textit{for} universities, but \textit{in} universities” (“\textit{CW},” 29). Something like this model was adopted in the social sciences and the humanities, as star professors became “free agents” in the 1980s. Part of the reason for the extension of the work conditions enjoyed by science researchers to humanities and social science professors (small teaching loads, funds for research, and so on), has had to do with the eschewal of a discrepancy between the two sectors of the academy. The terms of employment established in the sciences were extended to the other faculties through governance. According to Lewontin, “increases in the collective power of faculty governance that have resulted from the financial power of individual recipients of research money have . . . gone disproportionately to humanists and social scientists because of the social organization of scientific work” (“\textit{CW},” 30).\textsuperscript{20}

The corporatization of the university as the Cold War wound down in the 1980s necessarily included overriding faculty governance and dismantling the arrangement described above. Government slashed defense-related research in the universities, leading to restructuring and a new partnership with the corporate sector. What we are seeing at the end of the 1990s is a corporatization of the university, from trustees to administration to curriculum decisions. Part of this corporatization is the restructuring of graduate education, especially in the humanities. One example is the cheap labor provided by part-time instructors and teaching assistants, which will most likely be formalized by establishing non-tenure-bearing positions for the teaching of composition and rhetoric and foreign languages. In some cases, these instructors will be housed in special centers administratively separate from English and foreign language departments.
The 1990s have ushered in new academic and cultural legitimation narratives. Significantly, the arts and humanities play a role in the legitimation of post–Cold War society. Both in the university and in the cultural sector, the so-called culture wars have delegitimized the place of a presumably “disinterested” culture in society. On the one hand, conservatives and many liberals have sought to cut arts budgets over the apparent demotion of high culture. Or they have attempted to reinstate the classics, fearful that Shakespeare will no longer be taught. In the process, they have raised the ire of critics who condemn these gatekeeping practices. The debates have often lapsed into reciprocal condemnations of “special interest,” thus emptying out the “intrinsic” value argued to be the province of art when the NEA was instituted. On the other hand, universities and arts organizations have increasingly resorted to a pragmatic defense of the humanities and culture. They characterize the arts as tools that enhance employability in the academic setting, junior partners to the science faculties where profitable intellectual property is produced. On the

**Partnership and Entrepreneurial Pragmatism**

The corporatization of higher education, that is, its increasing instrumentalization, is paralleled by the increasing rhetoric of utility and relevance in arts and cultural policy. When compared to the justifications of expanding funding for the arts and higher education in the 1960s, it becomes evident that the 1990s have ushered in new academic and cultural legitimation narratives. Significantly, the arts and humanities play a role in the legitimation of post–Cold War society. Both in the university and in the cultural sector, the so-called culture wars have delegitimized the place of a presumably “disinterested” culture in society. On the one hand, conservatives and many liberals have sought to cut arts budgets over the apparent demotion of high culture. Or they have attempted to reinstate the classics, fearful that Shakespeare will no longer be taught. In the process, they have raised the ire of critics who condemn these gatekeeping practices. The debates have often lapsed into reciprocal condemnations of “special interest,” thus emptying out the “intrinsic” value argued to be the province of art when the NEA was instituted. On the other hand, universities and arts organizations have increasingly resorted to a pragmatic defense of the humanities and culture. They characterize the arts as tools that enhance employability in the academic setting, junior partners to the science faculties where profitable intellectual property is produced. On the
other hand, in the cultural sector, the arts become part of a social service rationale or of economic development plans for communities, thus justifying subvention by corporations and foundations. In fact, the new legitimation discourse encourages partnerships between government, business, and the third or nonprofit sector. This shift from government to a partnership is a way of resituating the management of the social squarely within civil society. As Foucault has argued, “civil society is the concrete ensemble within which these abstract points, economic men, need to be positioned in order to be made adequately.”

Neoliberalism, then, reintroduces the expectation that “institutions of assistance” will be situated within civil society rather than in government. A recent report on the state of the arts, *American Canvas*, characterizes this new pragmatism as the “need to ‘translate’ the value of the arts into more general civic, social, and educational terms” so that they can be more convincing to the public and elected officials. This pragmatic legitimation is made even more forcefully toward the end of the report:

No longer restricted solely to the sanctioned arenas of culture, the arts would be literally suffused throughout the civic structure, finding a home in a variety of community service and economic development activities—from youth programs and crime prevention to job training and race relations—from the traditional aesthetic functions of the arts. This extended role for culture can also be seen in the many new partners that arts organizations have taken on in recent years, with school districts, parks and recreation departments, convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, and a host of social welfare agencies all serving to highlight the utilitarian aspects of the arts in contemporary society. (127–28)

**Culture as Social Service**

I have established an analogy between the academic and culture sectors; there are, of course, significant differences. The growth of the university is one of the ways in which the state has indirectly subsidized the economy. This is not the case with the arts and culture, although, as I will explain, even this function—fueling the economy—is now being touted as a significant legitimation for subsidizing the arts. The end of the Cold War brought a public demand, especially by conservative forces, for a reduction in state expenditure. Opposition to continued high levels of state support for education and other social services, including the arts, is the ideological strategy to produce a different “contract” with America. That the Democrats have largely capitulated is a demonstration of the force of this strategy, which potentially creates a problem for state support of the
economy. The trick is how to reduce expenditures and at the same time maintain the level of state intervention for the stability of capitalism. The easy route has been to attack the powerless by eliminating entitlements and redistributive programs that benefit marginalized groups. This move to reduce state expenditures, which might seem like a death knell for the nonprofit arts, is actually their condition of continued possibility. The arts and culture sector is now claiming that it can solve America’s problems: enhance education, salve racial strife, help reverse urban blight through cultural tourism, create jobs, reduce crime, and perhaps even make a profit. This reorientation of the arts is being brought about by arts administrators. Much as in classic cases of governmentality, in which there is a total subordination of technicians to administrators, artists are being channeled to manage the social. And just as the academy has turned to “managerial professionals” who bridge traditional liberal professions and corporate middle management in the business of producing students, research, outreach, institutional development, and so on, so also has the arts and culture sector burgeoned into an enormous network of arts administrators who mediate between funding sources, on the one hand, and artists and/or communities, on the other. Like their counterparts in the university and the business world, they must produce and distribute the producers of art and culture.

I am not arguing that this is all smoke and mirrors, an opportunistic rush into the vacuum left by the retreating state. The state has not disappeared but has only reoriented its modus operandi. The state, in fact, has encouraged the partnerships between government, the corporate sector, the nonprofits, and civil society. Perhaps privatization is not the accurate term for this process. Privatization proper assumes that the state no longer directly manages what was once a state enterprise, say a utility. The notion of partnership, however, blurs the boundaries between the private and the public, a composite arrangement already foreshadowed in the nonprofit corporation, which is simultaneously private and public. This argument, by the way, is substantially different from the notion that culture is being commercialized. This latter notion holds that products of creativity are essentially commodities, and that their appeal is rooted in the fetishistic character of the commodity, enhanced exponentially by the electronic media. What I am describing here, however, does not operate so much at the level of desire, which the commodity fetishism debate presumes to oscillate between autonomy and cathexis to capital. The emphasis in post–Cold War culture is on the character of the public good, which is no longer to be defined either by the state or civil society. It is now negotiated or partnered in the triangle of government, the corporate sector, and civil society. It makes no sense to speak of public and private, for they have been pried open to each other in this triangulation.

George Yúdice
The Formation of the Arts and Culture Sector

In an insightful essay, John Kreidler attributes the creation of the nonprofit arts sector to the Ford Foundation’s initiatives.27 The “arts grant,” he notes, was invented by W. McNeil Lowry, vice president for arts at the Ford Foundation (1957–1976), as “a vehicle for the long-term advancement of individual nonprofit arts organizations, as well as a means for the strategic development of the entire nonprofit arts sector.” The arts grant was seen as leveraged investment rather than charity. Until the Ford Foundation’s initiative, almost all cultural philanthropy had been vested in individuals. During Lowry’s tenure, the foundation invested more than $400 million in arts to fiscally revitalize nongovernmental organizations; to decentralize nongovernmental organizations beyond New York City; to create arts service organizations (e.g., the Theater Communications Group); and to enhance conservatories and visual arts schools. Ford saw itself as catalyst rather than perpetual funder. To this end, Ford invented the concept of the matching grant, a tactic to recruit new donors and to establish a pattern of long-term support spread across many sources. This is what Kreidler means by leverage in his title.

Before this Ford era, only the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Mellon Foundations had entered arts philanthropy. With Ford, the idea of the matching grant spread throughout various funding sectors, including big government. Johnson’s War on Poverty, for example, required matching funds from state and local governments. Ford was also instrumental in the creation of the NEA in 1965, under Johnson’s presidency. According to Kreidler, NEA initiatives like “treasury funds, state block grants, and Challenge and Advancement programs owe much to the Ford strategy of leverage, decentralization and institutional expansion.” Prior to 1965, only four states had arts funding agencies. With the stimulus of NEA block grants, all states created arts agencies by 1980. And eventually almost four thousand local arts councils were created (one-fourth of which were tied to local government and the other three-quarters as nongovernmental organizations). Two other philanthropic branches grew out of Ford initiatives: foundation and corporate support. Foundations acquired specialized staff to formulate funding strategies and analyze grant applications. By the end of the Ford era, aggregate arts funding from foundations would surpass $1 billion per year, over three times the aggregate budgets of state and national government arts agencies. Corporate arts funding started later, spearheaded by Exxon, Dayton Huston, Philip Morris, and AT&T; it has been more concerned with marketing strategies than strategic development of the arts. But corporate funding was the fastest-growing sector of arts funding in the 1980s. The effect of the Ford model was to channel high art organizations into a nonprofit model rather than the proprietary model characteristic of the pre-Ford era. Ford’s strategy
has been quite successful. In the pre-Ford era there were only twenty to thirty arts organizations in the San Francisco Bay area. By the 1980s, there were over one thousand nonprofit organizations.

As in the case of the university, the burgeoning infrastructure of the arts was due to government money and foundation money; it was also due to the emergence in the 1960s of a huge generation of artists, technicians, and administrators driven not by funding or economic gain but rather by an interest in producing art, a result of the expansion of higher education in the 1950s and 1960s. They founded many arts organizations, not so much because of their interest in the market but because they had the training and the desire. This happened at a time of significant shifts in societal values, a peak in economic prosperity, the arrival of the massive baby-boom generation on American college campuses, the momentary ascendancy of liberal arts education, and a marked increase in leisure time. This new generation was large, mostly white, and affluent, and it contributed to the creation of nongovernmental organizations and arts audiences. It provided the labor supply for the massive expansion of the entire nonprofit sector of health, environmental, educational, and social service organizations that received foundation and expanded government funding. The expansion of “free expression” and the complementary change in attitudes toward public service were in tension and in tandem with the Cold War investment in an American premium on freedom versus communist repression. Economic prosperity and the expansion of liberal arts education also created a large public of arts consumers. It is important to emphasize that culture consumers were highly educated, a narrow band of society. In contrast, most of the public obtained its art and entertainment from commercial sources.

As I argue earlier, the changes in the 1980s find both the university and arts sectors overgrown in the eyes of neoliberals. In the culture sector, the lion’s share of profits were in the entertainment industry, where the masses of consumers obtained their cultural fare. Further impacting the economy of the sprawling nonprofit culture sector was a stagnation in the institutional money supply. Until the later 1990s, it was thought in the federal and state government sectors, as well as in foundations, that “seed funding” would bring about leverage; the NEA constantly refers to an eleven to one multiplier effect for each NEA dollar, and impact studies were commissioned to prove this. But this model rests on an untenable projection of an unlimited growth of resources. Kreidler likens it to a chain letter. The point is that we have entered a new historical period in which the crisis facing the arts sector, and the university system, I would add, cannot be temporarily weathered by more of the same measures. At first it seemed like cuts in funding since the 1980s were a temporary aberration of the economy. Now it is evident that there has been an epochal
shift. But the economy is only one factor. Just as important is the change in the public. Here is where the changes in higher education have repercussions in the arts and culture sector: the shift toward business and science, with a concomitant veering away from social values and public service; the downgrading of the humanities; and the tendency toward the symbolic (and not necessarily economic) valorization of sectors other than the white middle class.

As Kreidler explains, “a significant portion of the veteran generation that founded the Ford Era organizations is departing, and it is not being adequately replaced by a new generation of discounted labor.” The new generation of arts organization labor supply is smaller, in part because fewer students major in the liberal arts, and also because, within the current economy, the newer generation looks out for better job security and is less willing to discount its labor. The crisis of nonprofit organizations is also due in part to this slippage in public demand for the certain traditional nonprofit services. Hence the systematic linkage of the arts and culture sector with the nonprofit social services sector. Legitimation of art and culture veered from a rhetoric that drew on the humanistic tenet that they provide uplift, a safe haven for freedom or inner vision, and it underwent a transference based on the subtext of utilitarianism and entrepreneurialism, as advocated in American Canvas. The privatization or partnership of education and art with corporate culture is quite consistent with Gingrich’s emphasis on employment skills (as in his Contract with America).

**The Bureaucratization of Utilitarian Culture**

Skilling is a major aspect of the arts touted by American Canvas. In one section, a report by the Arts and Education Commission is quoted as saying that the arts should be

part of [students’] preparation for productive work [insofar as they] help . . . build the specific workplace skills needed to ensure their own employability and their ability to make a solid economic contribution to their communities and the nation. The arts teach and enhance such skills as the ability to manage resources, interpersonal skills of cooperation and teamwork, the ability to acquire and use information and to master different types of symbol systems, and the skills required to use a variety of technologies. (100)

The report goes so far as to suggest that the arts can be as tough as the times require, inculcating in students a cognitive “muscularity,” that
is, “wir[ing] children’s brains for successful learning” (102). The arts, moreover, will teach self-esteem (103) and tolerance for differences (109). Aware that he may have gone too far in this utilitarian direction, the author of the report apologetically points out that this approach may be “understandable in these difficult, distrustful times” and cautions that it can “ultimately subvert the very meaning of art” (111). Curiously, this 200-page report has virtually nothing to say about art practice itself or its meaningfulness. It is taken for granted, if considered at all. Although the author sounds such cautions as the one just mentioned, he nevertheless concentrates his efforts on the leverage that the arts can gain from partnerships with business and social service agencies. He is not alone. The report is a synthesis of six town-hall-like discussions with people from all sectors of society interested in salvaging the support system for the arts. One arts activist, Syd Blackmarr, president of the Georgia Assembly of Community Arts Agencies, advocates folding the arts into civic activity. He is reported as saying that

it is time for those who know the power of the arts . . . to become members of the school board, the city and county commission, the planning and zoning commission, the housing authority, the merchants association, the library board. . . . The point is not simply to underscore the relevance of the arts to those various civic concerns, but to tap the public funds that flow through these channels, some of which might be used for the arts. . . . We must insist that when roads, sewers, prisons, libraries and schools are planned and funded . . . that the arts are also planned and funded. We must find the line items, the budget categories, the dollar signs in all of these local sources. (83).

It is quite evident that the turn to schools and communities is made with an eye to the bottom line. The report moves glibly from renewing the idea of the artist-as-citizen (84) who works with communities to using those communities as a springboard for drawing resources from urban revitalization and tourism (86). This is not, of course, a one-sided gain, for urban renewal projects are enhanced by cultural tourism. The report gives the example of Lowell, Massachusetts, which became a kind of theme park of itself, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which brought hundreds of millions of dollars to Philadelphia with the blockbuster Cezanne show in 1996. A participant in another town meeting reported in the American Canvas said that the “arts are a tremendous asset” in giving some communities an edge in the competition of the marketing of destinations for tourists (87).

The boundaries between economic, civic, and artistic activities are
blurred in these examples, to the point that several participants spoke of
the fusion of the everyday and art without the slightest awareness that
they were echoing the most radical dreams of the historical avant-gardes.
As I argued before, this is not exactly the same as the commodification of
art, as in the case of museum tie-ins: mugs, t-shirts, ties, posters, paper
weights, and so on. Although not mentioned in the *American Canvas*
report, the fusion of art with urban and community development is more
in line with the international movement know as “culture and develop-
ment”—that is, the concern with development that does not put commu-
nities at risk (culturally or ecologically) while contributing to the
economy. The central concept in the culture and development
movement—promoted by UNESCO and the World Bank, along with the
Rockefeller and Ford Foundations—is the development of civil society,
understood as the self-organization of communities.28 Yet it is evident
that this self-organization can no longer be understood as an autonomous
process. Now it is in partnership with the global nongovernmental orga-
nization and nonprofit sector as well as with capital.

The blurring of the private and the public has also been accompanied
by the approximation of the Right and Left on the political spectrum.
Many of the civil society activists in the United States and around the
world who were once much more critical of capital are now spearheading
these partnerships. As progressives move away from class struggle and
anti-imperialism, and as capital—at least those sectors of it that have
branched into cultural marketing and point of purchase politics—espouse
environmentalism, antiracism, and antisexism, community activists can
feel that they are working on behalf of social justice. This is certainly the
tenor of *American Canvas*, which oscillates between radical statements
and more conservative accommodations. In fact, at least in one case, one
organization put on an exhibit that included gay and racial civil rights art
work and then invited a cross-section of the community, including con-
servatives, to discuss how it might be contextualized so as to be accept-
able to all. We see here the notion of partnership extending from public
and private or economic and civic arrangements, to an embrace of politi-
cal adversaries in an attempt to push society to a phantasmatic happy
medium. The director of this community organization in Winston-Salem,
North Carolina, waxed enthusiastic that “suddenly, these people were all
partners rather than adversaries” (70).

We can be doubtful about the viability of this new post–Cold War
legitimation strategy. But *American Canvas* is staking the entire future of
the NEA and the support system for the arts on it. It attacks the enter-
tainment industry for prostituting America’s values and advocates trans-
mitting a cultural heritage that will preserve what the culture industry
leaves aside. In the process, however, *American Canvas* abandons other
values traditionally ascribed to art and creative culture, most notably val-

euqations rooted in cultural traditions and critique. In his criticism of the

report in the Nation, Arthur Danto pointed out that there is a difference
between table settings and quilts, on the one hand, and art work that has
won the recognition of other artists and critics. Of course, his complaint
might have its origin in the absence of critics in the American Canvas.
After all, the report reflects the concerns of arts organizations, which after
exponential growth in the past thirty years now seek to perpetuate their
own existence.

One last thought. The 1980s were declared the decade of the curator
—he or she was considered to be the real protagonist of the arts. I wonder
whether arts administrators are not attempting to take on the protagonist
role. The exclusion of critics and academics might be a hint. The new

rovernmentalization requires subordinating the arts to administrators,
planners, managers, and entrepreneurs, regardless of their ideological
proclivities. Indeed, arts administrators have pretty much resigned them-

elves to the entrepreneurial ethos that accompanies partnerships with
private enterprise. This marriage of progressives and capital was written
into law in 1997 when Congress allowed the NEA for the first time to
solicit funding from the corporate sector. Given this accommodation of
the nonprofit arts world to the historical legacy of U.S. philanthropy, the
conservative attacks in and of themselves pale by comparison.

Notes

George Yudice, “For a Practical Aesthetics,” Social Text, nos. 25/26


Times, 28 July 1989, A1, B6. The word indecent was subsequently omitted in the
“compromise” wording of the obscenity ban.

July 1989, H1.

5. Jerry Gray, “House Approves Measure to Kill Arts Endowment,” New


7. President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, Creative America:

Michael Kammen, “Culture and the State in America,” Journal of American
History 83 (December 1996): 795.

8. Public Law 89–209, National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities
Act of 1965, cited in President’s Committee, Creative America, 23.

21. This vision of the new system of higher education was voiced by Allan Lee Sessoms, president of Queens College-CUNY, at a forum on the Privatization of Higher Education, CUNY Graduate Center, 31 October 1997.
22. Although it is tangential to the argument I am developing here concerning the privatization of culture, it is worth mentioning at least briefly that the corporatization of U.S. universities serves, furthermore, to underdevelop foreign university systems. In fact, the university system is part and parcel of U.S. comparative advantage, not only in its size, over $200 billion, but also in its ability to draw foreign students and the benefits derived therefrom. Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter are hardly exaggerating when they observe that “so many international students are coming into the United States that such students could be seen to counterbalance the trade deficit in the economy.” (Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter, “Academic Capitalism, Managed Professionals, and Supply-Side Higher Education,” *Social Text*, no. 51 [summer 1997]: 36 n. 12.) This practice can only keep other systems less competitive, for the very best talents in science and technology will do their graduate work in the United States. Aside from the financial gain, our universities presumably benefit from exposure to an international scholarly climate, which is, some international educators propose,
an added asset for competing in the global economy. At a meeting of university and corporate researchers at the Council for Chemical Research (CCR), the view was expressed that “the United States benefits from the research that [foreign students] do [here], usually at low cost.” (See Bruce Finlayson, “Education and Training of Graduate Students.” Paper presented at the Meeting of the Council for Chemical Research [CCR], January 1996. Online: http://www.chem.purdue.edu/ccr/news/jan96/news2.html.) The costs of preparing these students in primary and secondary schools for entry into U.S. institutions is, of course, borne by their home countries. The contribution of U.S. universities toward their graduate education is minimal in comparison. Furthermore, foreign students earn their way through U.S. institutions by working as teaching and research assistants. As Finlayson points out, using professors to staff these courses would cost several times more. The United States only spends a small amount, in comparison, on its graduate education. Foreign graduate students also provide U.S. students with international perspectives that, according to corporate rhetoric, make them more competitive in the global marketplace. And, of course, foreign students also bring in extra “revenue streams” to U.S. institutions, either through family support or through their work.


30. Gray, “Cuts to the Arts.”