

Art and the Twenty-First Century Gift: Corporate Philanthropy and Government Funding in the Cultural Sector

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Abstract

Marcel Mauss’s work on the archaic gift contributes to understandings of corporate and government support of arts organisations, or ‘institutional funding’. His approach allows us to see institutional funding as a gift that is embedded in a system of exchange wherein gifts come with a variety of obligations, and self-interest and disinterestedness are inseparable. The institutional gift operates through money and contracts; nevertheless, it entails obligations to give, to receive and to reciprocate. This system of obligations has been joined, in the contemporary institutional gift, by another obligation: *the obligation to ask*.

Institutional funding of the arts has acquired additional twenty-first century elements. The article elaborates these, using the UK as an example. It also argues that the ambivalence felt by some members of the arts world about institutional funding stems, in large part, from the obligations inherent in the gift. The recent imposition of the neo-liberal model into the arts is an intrinsic part of the exchange between institutional funders and arts organisations. Given that Mauss’s work is strongly anti-liberal and anti-utilitarian, it is ironic that his ideas should prove so useful for understanding a form of twenty-first century gift in which neo-liberalism plays such a crucial role.

Keywords: Gift, Art, Arts Institutions, Corporate Philanthropy, Cultural Policy, Government Funding.

Introduction

Mauss's (1990 [1925]) *The Gift* provides a useful approach to understand government and corporate support of the arts ('institutional funding') and the reciprocities and social processes that this involves. Together, government and corporate support of arts organisations is referred to as 'institutional funding'; that is, funding by a collectivity (an 'institution'), and stands in contrast to funding or philanthropic giving by individuals.

When a corporation or government agency gives to the arts, the arts-organisation recipient must return specified and unspecified benefits to the funder. Corporate philanthropy obtains on a *quid pro quo* basis, in which corporations expect to receive benefits from their gifts (advertising exposure, corporate functions in the arts venue, private tours of the exhibition or the back-stage), and many of the return benefits to corporations are specified before the gift is finalised. Government grants explicitly come 'with strings attached'. Arts organisations are funded for the greater good (in the form of exhibitions and performances), but they must also provide returns specified in government regulations such as the provision of strategic plans and social outreach programmes. This exchange-like characteristic of institutional funding of arts organisations can be aptly described by Douglas' (1990, vii) famous phrase, there are 'no free gifts'.

In contemporary society, 'gifts' have come to imply a particular form of one-sided offers, which, in their purest form, carry no self-interest on the part of the giver or obligation to reciprocate on the part of the recipient (Parry 1986). This view defines institutional philanthropy as outside the realm of the gift. Government *grants* and corporate *giving* are, nevertheless, positioned as gifts.² This suggests that an understanding of gifts might be helpful in understanding institutional funding of the arts, and to that end I will develop a Maussian perspective on the topic. In other words, it may be easy to say that institutional funding is not a gift; however, I seek to understand what we can learn about institutional funding and about Mauss in the twenty-first century by taking seriously the possibility that this form of philanthropy is a gift.

This article focuses on funding for arts-producing or -displaying *organisations* in the British ‘supported art sector’.³ To start, I provide a brief discussion of the players in institutional philanthropy: funders – both government (and the agencies who disburse government funds) and corporations – and recipients, arts organisations. Theoretical understandings of the gift are developed in the latter part of the article.

Government

Governmental funding of the arts blossomed in the latter half of the twentieth century. In the UK, the Arts Council of Great Britain was established 1946. The Arts Council was set up at ‘arms-length’ to the government. Its job was to *respond to external initiatives*, not to generate them. I will return to this observation.

A crucial shift in UK government support of the arts occurred in 1979, when Margaret Thatcher came to power. Thatcher’s cultural policy was particularly important, because it made explicit the conditions upon which grants were given. Notably, Thatcher imposed neo-liberal models of business management on arts organisations as conditions of funding. Neo-liberal models suggest that market principles provide the best basis for nearly all domains of life, and that if a market is lacking in a given domain, one should be created (Harvey, 2005: 2). Of course, the ‘pure’ market envisioned by adherents to this philosophy does not and has never existed. Economies are embedded in social relations and the idealised, pure market is a creation of the neo-liberal imagination, not an empirical fact. Crucially, neo-liberalism is a contested, though robust, ideology (Crouch, 2011). The arts had been a domain where market mechanisms were devalued (though not fully absent). With Thatcher, market mechanisms were inculcated, by government action as well as through the actions of corporations (Alexander and Rueschemeyer, 2005). Of course, the market was not perfectly realised in the supported arts sector, as it cannot be fully realised anywhere, and its ideology was resisted. The crucial point, however, is that arts organisations were asked to think of themselves explicitly as money-handling businesses, rather than scholarly organisations or houses of aesthetic excellence where financial matters were mentioned only *sotto voce*.

In her first few years as Prime Minister, Thatcher reduced government funding for the arts, implemented planning and auditing requirements for grant applicants, and set up incentives

for private (especially corporate) arts sponsorship. Underpinning these actions was her belief in ‘enterprise culture’ (Alexander 2007a; Heelas and Morris 1992), a concept that enshrines the values of liberal economics. Along with other public services, arts organisations were required to produce and meet performance indicators, to use marketing tools to reach ‘customers’, and to provide ‘value for money’.⁴ They were required to engage in forward planning, setting targets against which future performance would be measured and to acquire supplemental funding from private sources in what is now called a ‘mixed economy’ approach.

Subsequent governments of John Major, Tony Blair, and Gordon Brown tweaked the system according to their political proclivities. Notably, the returns expected from arts organisations shifted to social inclusion as Blair became Prime Minister, and moved on to economic competitiveness and the creative economy toward the end of Blair’s tenure and into Brown’s. All of these governments, however, maintained a neo-liberal model of cultural policy and an emphasis on private funding to complement (or supplant) public support of arts institutions (Alexander 2007b, 2008).

Coalition Government

In 2010, the coalition government of David Cameron (Conservative) and Nick Clegg (Liberal Democrat) was formed. In the face of the global economic crisis, their cultural policy centred on cutting public funds. The 2010 Spending Review slashed the budget for Arts Council England by 29.6% over four years, while the grants provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) to the National Museums were cut by 15%.

In 2010, the Cabinet Office issued a Green Paper on ‘Giving’. In this, they proposed a strategy to encourage all types of charitable donations – and to cushion the impact of spending cuts. The Green Paper focussed on five elements, which provide the acronym ‘GIVES’:

- Great opportunities
- Information
- Visibility
- Exchange and reciprocity

- Support

The descriptions of two of these building-blocks might suggest that the government had been reading Mauss:

Visibility: we need giving to be more visible – the more people see that their peers are giving, and how much they give, the more likely they are to give or give more themselves. (Cabinet Office 2010, 7)

Exchange and reciprocity: we can encourage people to give in new ways by making the benefits of giving more tangible and immediate – giving is not a one-way street but a mutually rewarding experience. (Cabinet Office 2010, 7)

Under ‘visibility’, the Coalition government drew on the agonistic element in the gift, as Mauss describes it, and the ideas of ‘exchange and reciprocity’ go to the heart of the Maussian approach to the gift.

In December 2010, Jeremy Hunt, the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport gave a speech on the government’s plans to encourage philanthropy in the arts. He addressed the issue of ‘exchange and reciprocity’, by discussing the benefits of philanthropy to the donor.

He said:

I want to make a ... point about philanthropy. [It] is as beneficial to the donor as to the recipient and should be recognised as such. I experienced this myself through the small charity I co-founded before I came into politics – one that operates on a tiny scale but has nevertheless given me more pride than anything else I have done.

Vernon Ellis talked about the same feeling when he was asked about the incredible support he has given to the English National Opera over the years. He said that the joy and satisfaction that comes with seeing the results of an investment like that is something that keeps getting greater and greater. (Hunt 2010, n.p.)

Corporations are to be key players in this agenda. Hunt said,

Of course the motivation for many businesses is around marketing and branding rather than being philanthropic in its purest sense. But as long as it respects the independence and artistic integrity of the recipient, then of course we want to encourage it. (Hunt 2010, n.p.)

In the speech, Hunt made an explicit comparison to the US, saying that the philanthropy agenda is ‘about a highly ambitious aim for this country to combine the best of US-style philanthropic support with the best of European-style public support’ (Hunt 2010, n.p.). He said the UK has a lot to learn from a country in which cultural giving is £37 per capita each month, as compared to the UK where it is £6. This type of comparison is evidence of a competitive element in cultural policy, where nation-states position themselves not only for their own citizens, but also for their place on the international arena.

Corporations

In the United Kingdom, corporate giving to arts organisations grew due to government initiatives. In the mid-1970s, before Thatcher came to power, ‘the business community gave around £600,000 per year to the arts, with most of this coming from British subsidiary companies of United States firms’ (Gray 2000, 119). Starting with Thatcher’s regime, matching grant schemes were coupled with funding cuts to encourage arts organisations to develop fundraising skills and to seek out corporate largesse. Together, these actions provided strong incentives for arts organisations that did not want to shrink their operations. Match-grants provided (somewhat weaker) incentives to corporations, as does UK tax law, which renders corporate donations tax-deductible as advertising expenses. Such policies have been effective. According to the non-profit organisation Arts & Business (2012, n.p.), the business sector contributed about £134.2 million to the arts in 2010-11, down from the highest level, of £171.5 million, given in 2006-07.

A crucial benefit to corporations is the association of their name with an arts organisation. Contemporary performances and exhibitions, from all arts disciplines, are accompanied by banners, brochures, wall labels, and programmes bearing corporate logos. Corporate donations produce advertising exposure and brand recognition. Further, arts organisations

provide special events, such as drinks receptions in the galleries, private after-hours guided tours, priority booking or access to performers backstage. Businesses garner prestige by sponsoring prestigious arts events, the so-called ‘halo’ effect. It is no coincidence that the top corporate donors in the UK include tobacco, oil and gas, banking and financial services companies. Arts sponsorship can help to burnish a tarnished image. In an interview with the BBC on 27 January 2011 (when Arts & Business, 2011, announced that corporate philanthropy was down 11% from the previous year), Jeremy Hunt stated that he ‘thought corporate philanthropy was a good opportunity for banks to gain a better reputation. “If you are looking for ways to rehabilitate yourself in the public eye, then supporting things that really matter to society like the arts is an excellent thing to do,” he said’ (BBC News 2011, n.p.).

Arts organisations are well aware of these benefits, and they stress them in their fundraising pitches. As the Tate (2011, n.p.) proclaims on its website:

Sponsorship at Tate guarantees your company:

- Increased visibility and enhanced brand awareness through logo accreditation on all marketing and publicity material, including a presence on Tate’s award-winning website.
- Extensive national and international bespoke media campaigns.
- Exclusive entertaining opportunities and access to leading opinion-formers from the worlds of arts, media, business, fashion and film as well as high-profile public figures.
- Brand merchandising opportunities in the context of Tate’s leading exhibition programme.
- The opportunity to affiliate your company with world-class innovation and creativity through an association with the internationally-acclaimed Tate galleries.
- Bespoke employee and community packages. Tate has a varied education programme running alongside each exhibition, which can provide the basis of tailored packages for your CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility] agenda.

So corporations derive a range of benefits from sponsorship of the arts. It is important that they do so, because business firms must demonstrate to stockholders the value of their philanthropic giving.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility is a phrase encapsulating the idea that businesses should play a positive role in society: following the spirit of the law, adhering to ethical standards and working proactively in the public interest. It is captured by the phrase, ‘doing well by doing good’. ‘Doing well’ is obviously important to profit-seeking firms, and is particularly important with respect to corporate philanthropy, because limited companies are legally owned by their stockholders and obliged to return earnings to them in the form of dividends or increased share prices.

The economist Milton Friedman (1970) is well-known for his criticism of corporate social responsibility, including corporate philanthropy, as he sees this as taking money from profits that belong to shareholders, in effect, stealing it. As he states in the title of his essay, ‘The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits’. This is an interesting issue in itself, but for our purposes the important point is that corporations are well-advised to make a business case, rather than an ethical one, for any charitable giving.

Recipients: Arts Organisations

Grants from governmental agencies come with strings attached (e.g. requirements to produce forward plans), and corporations expect *quid pro quo* returns in the form of advertising and functions. Governmental agencies require successful grantees to sign formal ‘Funding Agreements’ in which they adhere to specific demands made by the agencies. In addition, grant applications are only successful when they address the specific policy objectives in the priority areas designated by the grantor. Corporations, similarly, give only to those arts organisations that help them meet business goals, directly or indirectly, and they negotiate the details of this exchange in advance.

In response to this, arts organisations do what is asked. They conform both to formal terms and to informal assumptions that accompany the grant.

Publicly, arts organisations stress the benefits of public and corporate philanthropy. They would be foolish not to do so. Privately, however, some in the arts world complain about the amount of time and money invested in grantsmanship and fundraising, and others are concerned about various impositions that are made on cultural organisations by their funders. Of course, there are people in arts organisations who believe in the positive aspects of the external funding, notably, employees in the development office. Senior management and trustees who come from business rather than the art world also feel less conflicted about the fundraising game and the way arts organisations have changed to play it effectively.

The Gift: Systems of Obligations

For Mauss, the gift is comprised of a three-fold system of obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to reciprocate. Applying this to the UK arts-support system: Corporations clearly have no obligation to give, though the Coalition Government hopes to increase social expectations that encourage corporate philanthropy. Government also has no obligation to give money to the arts. Once the money is appropriated to a governmental or nongovernmental agency, however, the agency has an obligation to disburse it. On the world stage, supporting national culture is an institutionalised task of government, to a greater or lesser extent. On the national level, British government can reduce funding to the arts, but citizens are likely to object if funding ceases entirely. Some level of obligation to give might arise from these sources.

In terms of the obligation to receive, arts organisations are not obliged to accept either government grants or corporate donations. However, failing to accept funding would come at the cost of reduced operations and programming, so in reality, only in the most unusual of circumstances would arts organisations actually refuse monetary donations, especially since they tend *to seek these in the first place*.

This brings us to the issue of the issue of *asking*. Silber (1998) argues that a fourth phase of the giving cycle needs to be added to the tripartite system proposed by Mauss in order to understand giving in contemporary society. In reference to her work on American philanthropy, which focuses on individual giving, she writes:

an important feature of modern philanthropy, beyond the act of giving, receiving, and returning, is the act of asking or soliciting philanthropic giving. This act has now acquired an unprecedented level of legitimacy and explicitness, and in fact possesses its very own structures of organisation and professionalisation. (p. 145)

This is an important observation and is applicable to institutional funding. With the addition of the phase of asking, the gift circuit becomes complete. Indeed, as mentioned above, government agencies were set up to *respond* to public initiatives, not to seek them out.

In addition, the asking phase highlights an important aspect of the system. Arts organisations are more likely to win government grants if they can fill out grant applications correctly and convincingly. They also must be able to meet government requirements for accountability. Corporations are more easily approached when arts organisations ‘speak their language’ in being able to show corporations why funding makes good business sense. In these ways, arts institutions are required to take on, at least at a surface level, *the cultural beliefs of the funder*.

Mauss did not include an asking phase in his characterisation of the gift system. However, asking for or soliciting gifts is not, in itself, new. For instance, Malinowski (1922) identified a ‘request’ gift, a yam or shell, which initiated a *kula* ring between partners in the Trobriand Islands.⁵ A crucial difference is that, in the contemporary gift, asking occurs at each gift cycle, whereas in the *kula*, the request gift is made as a starting gesture in a recurring cycle.⁶ In addition, grant applications and funding appeals are very explicitly requests. Arts organisations do not pretend in any way that applications or appeals are gifts.

The final phase, obligation to reciprocate, clearly occurs in institutional funding of the arts, and I believe this is a crucial contribution of a Maussian approach. I suggest that institutional donations *are* gifts, despite the strings attached and the *quid pro quo*. This renders Mauss’s work relevant to our understanding of this giving system. The exchanges involved demonstrate that in providing support for art, which we can see as a public good, both government agencies and corporations display a strong interest in what will benefit themselves, and not just what is good for art or for the public. The arts and the wider public are nevertheless served, highlighting the inseparability of self-interest and disinterestedness in the donations.

The Gift: Honour

Mauss describes the strong connection between the gift and the giver. In the archaic societies he discusses, this connection was deep, spiritual and mystical. In institutional giving, the connection is rather more prosaic. Both corporations and government agencies require that their logos appear on the websites and printed materials of the organisation they fund, so that they are recognised for their generosity. Further, it is not for nothing that the current government wants to increase the visibility of donors and to celebrate them through some kind of honours system. The Government's Green Paper also discusses the importance of role models. Celebrating philanthropists not only gives status honour to the donor, but also provides examples (or targets or benchmarks) for others.

As Mauss points out, there is an agonistic element in giving. Giving more than former givers wins more status for the generous group (tribe, family or clan). In our contemporary example, an agonistic element in arts giving occurs amongst givers of a particular sort (corporations competing for prestige with other corporations or nation-states with nation-states). Corporations compete to gain recognition and to differentiate their firms from others. Sponsorship of visible and prestigious events, or more accurately, *more* prestigious events than those sponsored by business competitors offers (greater) esteem to a corporation (than its competitors).

Benchmarking is also important, and has more of a consensual aspect. Benchmarking is a process of comparing one's own business to other businesses and to industry standards, to gauge, for instance, an appropriate level of corporate philanthropy. Through benchmarking, corporations become more similar. As corporations compare themselves to each other, they attempt to align themselves with industry norms; consequently, they make a stronger business case for sponsorship because other companies engage in the same activity.

The competitive, agonistic element of giving is less evident in government grants. However, Meyer (1980) argues that nation-states act in ways to symbolise that they are civilised, modern, and otherwise good countries in comparison to other nation-states. There is both a competitive and a normative aspect to this. Meyer wrote about institutionalised ways of thinking about various governmental activities, especially the provision of education. He did not mention the arts, but perhaps funding the arts is simply the 'done thing.' It is interesting,

in this respect, that Hunt's speech uses philanthropy statistics from the cultural sector in the United States against which to compare the United Kingdom. Brown, before him, claimed that the UK's strength grew, in no small part, from its excellence in the creative industries. In the former case, the UK is seen to be doing rather poorly compared to the US, and citizens must give more. In the latter, the UK is already better and wants to stay that way.

Systems of Services

Mauss discussed gift giving as a 'system of total services', a concept which suggests that the whole community is involved in giving, receiving and reciprocating, and that these activities are complexly interwoven with ideologies from across the fabric of society.⁷ He writes,

these total services and counter-services are committed to in a somewhat voluntary form by presents and gifts, although in the final analysis they are strictly compulsory... Everything ... is woven into an inextricable network of rites... There is total service in the sense that it is indeed the whole clan that contracts on behalf of all, for all that it possesses and for all that it does, through the person of its chief. (1990 [1925], 5-6)

This total system, in which 'the cycling gift system *is* the society' (Douglas 1990, ix, emphasis added) is not fully realised in the twenty-first century gift. In institutional funding, strong and direct reciprocities occur in dyads, between the arts organisation and the corporation or government agency. Specific exchanges are initiated when arts organisations ask for funds through grant applications and fundraising (though, of course, they could not request funds if the state and corporate apparatus for giving were not in place).

In addition to direct reciprocities between art organisation and funder, arts organisations provide public goods in the form of exhibitions and performances. These provide prestige for arts organisations and their funders, but the benefits stretch beyond the direct exchange between grantor and grantee. I am dubious about claims regarding significant redistribution of wealth through arts philanthropy (as Cameron appears to suggest), similarly I do not believe that arts organisations are in a position to end social exclusion (as Blair wanted). Nevertheless, arts organisations can include a few more people and exclude a few less, at least with respect to public participation. It is certainly the case that high culture

organisations have become distinctly less elitist in the past half-century. Arts organisations also contribute directly to the economy (an issue discussed by Brown) through tourism and sales from the shop, employment and the like, and perhaps even provide kindling and a spark or two to ignite the creative imagination and thereby help to expand the creative industries outside the arts. It could also be that some people actually find pleasure in the art itself.

These public goods arguably reflect back on the nation-state, and by association, the current Government. I note that the Coalition Government, despite cuts elsewhere, has retained the policy of free admission to national museums. Corporations receive less indirect feedback via the public good, but discussions of corporate philanthropy, and corporate social responsibility, suggest that they receive some benefits via recognition when contributing to it. Further, once a funder has decided to fund a particular organisation or project,⁸ the giving is *done in public* rather than behind closed doors. Government and corporations keep an eye on other nation-states and other corporations, respectively, and both watch and are watched by members of the wider society, whether as voters, citizens, customers, consumers, watchdogs or pressure groups.

Silber (1998) argues that the concept of ‘total services’ is applicable to the case of individual philanthropy in America. She writes,

modern philanthropic giving is no less a total phenomenon than archaic gift exchange ... it has remained a blend of economic, legal, aesthetic, moral, and even religious dimensions, and ... it is still often accompanied, as in the archaic setting studied by Mauss, by festive, celebratory, ritual activities, such as dedication ceremonies, dinners, galas, reunions, and concerts, where artists and other celebrities contribute to what Durkheim called an intensified sense of social effervescence... (p. 144.)

The system for institutional funders is similarly total, in the sense that it draws from a variety of different ideological dimensions of the wider society, including institutionalised ideas on the value of art, the value of giving to the public good, and – in the twenty-first century gift – the ascendancy of the neo-liberal model of business organisation.

In all gift systems honour or esteem is exchanged alongside or as an intrinsic part of any material goods that are involved. Stirrat and Henkel (1997) describe the esteem that attaches

to the chief (and beyond, to the social group) in the agonistic form of the gift system, the potlatch, as an accumulation of symbolic capital:

Mauss pointed out that there was no direct or immediate reciprocity involving material goods but, rather, that to counter the accumulated symbolic capital of the giver, other chiefs and clans had to give away or destroy even more valuable goods at the next potlatch' (Stirrat and Henkel 1997, 70).

They argue that in the contemporary development gift, the return gift comes as 'various forms of symbolic capital' (p. 78). In institutional funding, a key aspect of the return gift is similarly symbolic: the legitimisation of neo-liberalism. By practicing aspects of this belief system through activities requested by funders, arts organisations actively participate in neo-liberal capitalism and, in this way, legitimate it. This contributes to a 'total' integration across several aspects of society.

However, it may be that we should consider the system more as 'partial' than total services.⁹ The system does encompass widely shared institutionalised notions, established laws and procedures, and it produces a circulation of benefits that accrue to funders, recipients, and members of the public. Nevertheless, the system obviously includes only a few actors in society and the direct reciprocities mainly benefit the organisations involved. Wider benefits are diffused, intangible, and contested. (For instance, some believe that arts institutions offer elitist fodder, not a broad public good; others believe that government should not fund art and culture, as a matter of principle, regardless of the merit of the works.)

Another way in which the system may be 'partial' rather than total relates to the use of money. Institutional funders provide funds, which are subsequently spent to produce something tangible (an exhibition or performance). Payback takes the form of actions (producing planning and accountancy documents, putting corporate logos on publicity material) and intangibles such as the lending of prestige, the acceptance of an economic doctrine, and the provision of possibilities involving custom or votes. Money is fungible; fixed, tangible (archaic) gifts are often not. It could be argued, therefore, that money is less connected to honour than are tangible gifts, since it is separated from social bonds (Simmel 2011 [1907]). However, as Bloch and Parry (1989) suggest, monetary transaction systems might be more similar to other transaction systems than we think (also see Maurer 2006).

Most reformulations of Mauss (e.g. Appadurai 1986; Gregory 1982; Laidlaw 2000) focus on the blurriness between gifts and commodities, rather than on the contrast between gifts of goods and gifts of money. Certainly, Mauss himself described the objects (*mwali* and *soulava*) in the *kula* as ‘a kind of money’ (1990 [1925], 23; see also n. 29, pp. 100-102). Honour, prestige and the circulation of symbolic capital are clearly a crucial aspect of institutional philanthropy, on the part of both donors and recipients, despite the use of money as an element in the transactions.

Discussion

Producing or displaying great art has always been the USP (the unique selling point) of arts organisations, although it has not always been described with this term. What is new in the past 30 years is a way of funding arts organisations that has meant that they are required to take on a neo-liberal mind-set, a particular way of thinking in which the arts are valued by their extrinsic outcomes and organisations are run with business-world logic and tools. This model, imposed by government and corporations is an intrinsic part of the exchange which arts organisations enter into when they seek institutional funding.

Mauss would have been concerned with the inculcation of enterprise culture into the arts and other arenas. He started his ‘Moral Conclusions’ with this thought:

It is possible to extend these observations to our own societies. A considerable part of our morality and our lives themselves are still permeated with this same atmosphere of the gift, where obligation and liberty intermingle. Fortunately, everything is still not wholly categorized in terms of buying and selling. Things still have sentimental as well as venal value. (p. 65)

A few pages later he wrote,

we can and must return to archaic society and to elements in it. We shall find in this reasons for life and action that are still prevalent in certain societies and numerous social classes: the joy of public giving; the pleasure in generous expenditure on the arts, in hospitality, and in the private and public festival. (p. 69)

In many ways, this joy is reflected in the gift system related to institutional funding. However, the relationship between arts institutions and their funders is complex. Many in the art world believe that, partly because of fundraising pressures, the arts are reduced to ‘buying and selling’, as the instrumental approach to funding equates the ‘sentimental’ value of arts with such ‘venal’ ones as how many people have come to see a show.

This instrumental approach may account for the fraught relationship between recipient and donor in what could be seen as a ‘charitable’ situation, where distaste is expressed by some in the art world about institutional (especially corporate) funders. That charity can ‘wound’ has been noted by Douglas (1990, vii), who commented that ‘the recipient [of charity] does not like the giver, however cheerful he be’. Her explanation of this is that it wounds because charity cannot be reciprocated. As Mauss (1990, 65) put it, ‘The unreciprocated gift … makes the person who has accepted it inferior.’ Being patronised, being made inferior is certainly not an enjoyable condition. However, I suggest an alternative interpretation for the source of the (often privately expressed) disdain towards institutional funders on the part of some people in arts organisations: the imposition of neo-liberal beliefs on arts organisations.

Unlike some other forms of charitable gifts, the institutional gift is reciprocated; therefore, fundraising does not make the soliciting organisation inferior. Rather, it is the reciprocity that leads to discontent, because part of the bargain involves *the exchange of politico-cultural beliefs for funding*. Many find measuring art by extrinsic concerns to be anathema, and this is the root of the dislike where it occurs. Related to this, and also to another well-known contribution by Douglas (1985 [1966]), some people in the arts world feel that their organisations are polluted by money coming from corporations whom they may see as deserving of the dirtied reputations they seek to cleanse through arts sponsorship.

Some might argue that government grants and corporate donations are not properly gifts, in part because of the instrumental calculation and self-interest involved in giving process. Here, we can usefully consider the contemporary opposition between gifts and economic transactions.¹⁰ In Parry’s rendering of Mauss work, ‘the ideology of a disinterested gift emerges in parallel with an ideology of a purely interested exchange’ (Parry 1986, 458). That is, in modern societies, the gift comes to represent something altogether different than it did in the tribal societies Mauss discussed. Parry writes, ‘Exchanges between groups which had an aesthetic, religious, moral, legal and economic aspect have been *stripped down* to leave

purely *economic* exchanges between *individuals'* (p. 457, emphasis in the original). Gifts are what is left over, and are viewed as gifts only if they are disinterested. Contemporary ideology neglects the continuing existence of interested gift systems that fall between purely economic exchanges and purely disinterested gifts; we lose something when we fail to recognise this third category.

The system of exchange in the institutional funding of the arts shows a great affinity to the gift-exchange model described by Mauss. Institutional funders and arts organisations are juristic persons, that is, they are collectivities that act as a unit. In this way, exchanges between funders and arts organisations may be more similar to the exchange amongst groups, often represented by the chief or leader, than they are to exchanges amongst individuals. The gift itself, in the context of institutional giving, remains an inseparable combination of interest and disinterest, and is supported by and constructed with ideologies and actions from different aspects of the wider cultural and economic systems. As in the archaic system, benefits may accrue more directly to those at the top of the group or organisation than to those further down in the hierarchy. A difference between the archaic gift and some forms of the twenty-first century gift revolves around a new phase of the gift cycle: that of *asking*. In contemporary gift systems like institutional philanthropy, the recipient must in the first instance, and for each subsequent exchange, solicit the gift.

Conclusion

Mauss's work is useful in helping us understand the reciprocities involved in institutional philanthropy, which comes with stated and unstated obligations and, in the form of the neo-liberal model, cultural baggage. The archaic gift, according to Mauss, is imbued with spiritual and social obligation; gifts generate reciprocity, building social bonds and connections in the process. Institutional funding produces public goods such as art exhibitions and performances, which forge social links of various kinds and are marked by ceremonial festivities. There is an agonistic element in the system of archaic gift exchange and in contemporary giving to the arts. Corporations compete with one another for prestige through the cultural gift, and governments compete for legitimacy amongst voters and for legitimacy vis-à-vis other nations in the world. Increasing globalisation and developing communication technology have made the gift more visible on the public stage, and for corporate giving, have brought in more international players. Moreover, advances in late capitalism, from

branding to the proliferation of neo-liberal strategies of administration, are now crucial to the system. In the twenty-first century gift, moreover, the recipient must *ask for the gift*, through fundraising or grantsmanship, in order to start the cycle of giving, receiving and reciprocating.

In the system of exchange for institutional funders, there is no free gift, but nevertheless, there is a gift. There is a system of services, total in some ways, but not completely total in other ways. That this is so is not surprising, at least to any good Durkheimian, given the high level of differentiation and the very fine gradations in the division of labour in contemporary society. The monetary form of institutional funding also loosens, but does not sever, the connection between the gift, giver and receiver.

In closing, I recall Mauss's political concerns. As Douglas (1990, x) reminds us, Mauss wrote 'in a tradition strongly opposed to English liberal thought', with *The Gift* itself 'a plank in the platform against utilitarianism' (p. viii). The imposition of today's neo-liberal model into spheres such as the arts, where it was previously vilified or ignored, is achieved, in part, through the gift exchanges between institutional funders and arts organisations which the arts organisations themselves initiate. It is ironic, therefore, that Mauss's ideas should prove so useful for understanding these.

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the seminar series, *The 21st Century Gift*, University of Sussex, 1 February 2011. I am grateful for comments by Nick Allen, James Benson, Anne-Meike Fechter, Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner, Katharine Tyler and the anonymous reviewers.

² Common understanding of words such as 'grants', 'giving', 'donations', 'philanthropy', and even 'support' is that gifts are involved. 'Funding', as a term, does not as clearly suggest a gift. I have chosen to use 'institutional funding' as the main way to describe government grants and corporate giving, however, as this is a useful shorthand to refer to both types of support for the arts.

³ This article draws on archival policy analysis, supplemented by my previous research in cultural policy and funding for the arts (see Alexander, 2007b; 2008; Alexander and Rueschemeyer, 2005) and by 20 years of informal observation of the supported arts sector. It

should be noted that policy documents are very important cultural objects, often concentrating and crystallising ongoing discourses, at least from the perspective of the political party that creates them.

⁴ In other words, arts organisations were asked to be *responsible* (on this aspect of neoliberalism, see Trnka and Trundle 2014).

⁵ The literature on development (e.g. Sahlins 1989; 1992) describes acts of eliciting or requesting funds from development charities or politicians that perhaps, in future research, could be related to an asking phase in the philanthropic gift. Another area that merits further work concerns the divide between two sorts of recipient of arts sponsorship, namely the arts organisations, on the one hand, and the public, on the other. As I argue below, ultimately it is the public who asks for or wants the exhibitions or performances that are produced by the arts organisations. In this way, there are also two sorts of asker as well as two sorts of recipients.

⁶ In discussing Malinowski's work, Mauss recognises that an initial gift is 'solicited with all one's might by means of "inducements"' (Mauss 1990 [1925], 27). In the *kula*, each step in the process of initiating an ongoing gift exchange is well-known and named. However, Mauss does not see this description as sufficient to add an 'obligation to ask' to his tripartite system of obligations. I argue that in the twenty-first century institutional gift, an asking phase is essential.

⁷ As Gofman (1998) points out, Mauss often used the term 'total', as in 'total services', 'total prestations', or 'total social fact'; however, his use of such terms, while suggestive, 'is itself far from being total' (p. 63). Gofman argues that 'the total social fact' is notoriously ambiguous and fragmentary. The same could be said for 'total services'. Mauss did not use the term 'total prestations' in *The Gift*, although he used this term elsewhere and it is commonly used in the secondary literature. In drawing on his ur-text, I have followed Mauss's use of the term 'total services', but this seems equivalent to 'total prestations'.

⁸ Decisions about whom to fund are made in private. Details are not made public either by corporations or by governmental/non-governmental agencies.

⁹ In using the term 'partial', I attempt a play on words with 'total'. This works in English, but arguably does violence to the underlying concept, which I do not intend. The 'total' in 'total services' suggests an 'indivisible whole' or 'complete' in the original French, rather than an 'aggregate' or a 'sum of the parts'. What I want to emphasise with the term 'partial services' is that the twenty-first century gift is necessarily shaped by the complexity and division of labour in contemporary society. The contemporary gift weaves together strands from

numerous spheres, but draws together only some of the myriad elements in the whole of society. As Stirrat and Henkel (1997, p 71) put it,

for Mauss, what characterizes modern society is the breakdown of total social facts, the collapse of what might be called a holistic approach to social life and the establishment of separate domains of existence... In such contexts, argued Mauss, the nature of the gift is transformed.

¹⁰ Here, I consider the distinction between commercial exchanges and gift exchanges. In contrast, in a three-category classification of reciprocity, redistribution and commercial exchange (Polanyi 2001 [1944]), a case can be made that institutional funding is ‘redistribution’. This is obviously so for the treasury’s transformation of tax revenue into disbursements to the Arts Councils and the DCMS, but also for corporate philanthropy, in that corporate profits are amassed and then redistributed via arts sponsorship, rather than exchanged via a price mechanism in a marketplace. These categories are analytically distinct, but may be blurred in practice, and as I have already stated, my aim in writing this article is to consider Mauss’s theories as they apply in the twenty-first century and to learn more about institutional funding through applying a Maussian perspective. I do this by seeing what we learn when we look at institutional funding as a gift. My goal is not to convince readers that institutional funding is entirely commensurate with gifts in archaic societies, as it clearly is not.

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