

Culture vs. Policy vs. Culture: The Evolution of Cultural Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1967-2007

ROGER BILL

IN 1967 THE GOVERNMENT of Newfoundland and Labrador hired John Perlin, the then 32-year-old son of an upper-class St. John's family, as the province's first Director of Cultural Affairs. For the next two decades he managed the St. John's Arts and Culture Centre, a Centennial Year project funded by the Federal government, and was the most powerful cultural bureaucrat in the province. As he recalled of his tenure, "we really didn't have a cultural policy. Whatever policies were in place ... were more by accident than design" (Interview 23 November 2007). Forty years later, the Province has an explicit cultural policy and is led by a political party that proclaims, "no resource is of greater value to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians than our distinctive culture" (Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland 2007). *A Cultural Policy for Newfoundland and Labrador*, published in 2002, commits the government to nurturing and preserving the province's culture, "for its intrinsic value, as well as for its social and economic benefits" (2002, 1). The present government's *Blueprint for Development and Investment in Culture* includes a message from the Premier asserting that if we "invest wisely" in our arts and heritage, "the benefits will be tremendous" (2006, 5). This essay outlines the province's path from having no cultural policy in 1967, to a point 40 years later where it has an explicit cultural policy that identifies culture as a commodity. Borrowing a perspective from Richard Handler's *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* this essay will ask, how have competing conceptualizations of culture both shaped and been shaped by government policy? (Handler 1988, 18).

THE SMALLWOOD YEARS

It could be argued that Premier Joe Smallwood displayed ambivalence towards Newfoundland culture and its place in government policy. Frequently a passionate advocate for Newfoundland heritage, he also promoted a model of economic development that undermined the viability of outport culture by mimicking developments in other countries. One of Smallwood's successors as Premier, Brian Peckford, in an interview conducted as an email exchange, wrote, "Smallwood? I am afraid I find it difficult to be balanced ... I do not know if you have read Smallwood's book *The New Newfoundland* published by MacMillan Company in 1931. The first paragraph tells it all and foreshadows most of what Smallwood tried to do" (Interview 30 October 2007). That paragraph reads, "After more than three centuries' existence as a remote and obscure codfishing country Newfoundland in the past decade or so has entered upon a new march that is destined to place her, within the next dozen years, in the front rank of the great small nations of the world. That new march is toward modern, large-scale industrialism" (Smallwood 1931, 1). Smallwood went on to argue that "the outstanding fact is that after so long a period of primitive existence, Newfoundland has entered upon a new life, a life very much akin to that of industrial America or industrial Canada" (Smallwood 1931, 7). If, as Sociologist James Overton argues, "the outport is the seat of home-grown Newfoundland culture" and it is a culture that "exists as an observable 'fact'" (Overton 1988, 11), then Peckford's criticism of Smallwood's vision, in which outport culture should yield to the force of North American modernization, appears to be well grounded. Many commentators, like Peckford, remember Smallwood for his policy of industrialization, modernization, and rural resettlement, a combination of forces that were seen as "destructive of outport life and folk culture" (Overton 1988, 9).

In contrast, Ed Roberts, long time Smallwood political confidante, says Peckford's view of Smallwood is, "Bullshit," arguing, "there is no question we had to industrialize ... there was nothing new about that. Smallwood had lived hand to mouth in the 1930s and 1940s. He had seen poverty and the appalling living conditions in the outports. But, with Smallwood there was no denying Newfoundland heritage. At age 70 he went bankrupt producing the Newfoundland encyclopaedia" (Interview 22 November 2007). Clearly within Smallwood there was a tension between his desire to modernize and his pride in Newfoundland's heritage, so there continues to be conflicting opinions about Smallwood's vision of Newfoundland culture. Roberts is correct in pointing out that Smallwood balanced his vision of industrial modernization with a pride in Newfoundland's heritage. In 1937 Smallwood, writing as *The Barrelman*, emphasised, "I quarrel violently with the contention, wherever I encounter it, that we have little in our past history to justify national pride" (Smallwood 1937, 5). He expanded on his notion of national pride in the context of the 1934 decision of the Commission of Government to close the provincial mu-

seum: “The kind of pride, or rather the degree of intensity of pride I have in mind is such as would have caused an absolutely [sic] fury of protest at the mere suggestion of a brutal disbandment and scattering of our Museum. As a Newfoundlander I blush every time I remember that we allowed the Museum to be touched” (ibid).

Smallwood’s *Barrelman* columns and radio broadcasts are not the only evidence of the young politician as patriot and champion of what he later called Newfoundland’s “distinctive culture” (Rompkey citing Hiller and Harrington 1995, 50-1). Rompkey argues that by the time of the National Convention in 1946- 1948, Smallwood had “constructed a national mythos for Newfoundland, so that in 1947 possibly no one else was more ready to pronounce upon its tradition and culture” (Rompkey 1998, 269). Citing his speeches to the Convention, Rompkey reveals Smallwood’s desire for state support for culture during a debate over raising the status of Memorial University College to that of a university. Smallwood declared, “we have our own traditions. We have our own folklore. We have our own folkmusic ... We have got a distinctive culture all our own, and yet we have nothing ... nor have we had anything to foster and encourage the development and growth and recognition of a distinctly Newfoundland culture. And one of the most attractive possibilities of the Memorial University, if it became a university, would be that of having a university become a dynamo, a power-house, in the inculcation and dissemination and encouragement of a distinctly Newfoundland culture” (Hiller and Harrington 1995, 1, 50-1). As Premier, Smallwood did significant things to promote culture as well, establishing the provincial Arts and Letters Competition in 1951, forming Atlantic Films (a private company created to produce Newfoundland films for schools and promotional purposes), and the founding in 1961 of Memorial University’s Extension Service. This last innovation, an institution with a program of cultural outreach aimed at rural communities, in Rompkey’s estimation, is particularly relevant. As he put it, “the creation of the Extension Service came closest to a formal expression of arts policy until the Division of Cultural Affairs was established in 1971” (Rompkey 1998, 271).

If outport life and folk culture were threatened by Smallwood’s industrial policy, however, then the founding of the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Arts Council (NLFAC) in 1966 can be viewed as a push back against the threat. The formation of the council was, like the building of the Arts and Culture Centre and the introduction of cultural programs 30 years later, triggered by a Canadian government initiative. In 1964 the federal government had created the Canadian Folk Arts Council with a mandate to organize provincial councils who would showcase folk art in various 1967 centennial year exhibitions and celebrations. The NLFAC was the last provincial council to be established, and was led by a committee of 14 people, ten men and four women. The ten men included a lawyer, a dentist, an Anglican minister, a university historian, a university folklorist, three business people, and a provincial government employee with an interest in heritage preservation. Of the four women on the committee, one was the British-born spouse of the Council’s

first president, two were members of St. John's merchant families, and the fourth was the daughter of a St. John's merchant, Anna Templeton, who travelled rural Newfoundland teaching craft skills. The Council's leadership were all members of urban, St. John's middle and upper classes. None were artists, and, while they may have subscribed to an ideology of Newfoundland nationalism, the President described the Council's task in terms of creating a Canadian culture. The President, Lewis Brookes, characterized Newfoundland culture very much as a "thing" (Handler 1988, 14) and specifically as a Canadian thing, "I believe that out of this folk art program, out of the songs and the dances and the traditions of all of our forebears will come this truly Canadian culture that we've all been talking about" (Brookes 2004). What resulted from the Council's programming, particularly after the launch of the annual St. John's Folk Festival 10 years later, was an objectification of culture in which "culture and tradition" became "objects to be scrutinized, identified, revitalized, and consumed" (Handler 1988, 12).

Researchers such as Overton (1996), Bruner (2005), and Harvey (2006) have theorized on the impact of commodifying culture for the tourist industry and this paper will address some of the issues they raise. But first I would argue that throughout John Perlin's tenure as the Director of Cultural Affairs, the government's cultural agenda was largely expressed in the programming at its Arts and Culture centres. As late as 1990 a Provincial Arts Policy Committee observed that the, "provincial government arts policy is in fact now largely an 'Arts and Culture Centre' policy" (Drawing Conclusions 1990, 1), and my contention is that the seeds of that policy were planted in 1967.

Though government policy, such as it was, concentrated on the arts component of cultural policy, Smallwood also created a division of historic resources that operated in a parallel to the division of cultural affairs. In addition, Smallwood bureaucratically coupled cultural affairs and historic resources with tourism. That coupling, with a one brief exception, has endured from 1967 to the present and further encouraged acceptance of the conception of culture as a commodity which could be sold to tourists.

Smallwood's national pride notwithstanding, Roberts recalls him in the mid-1960s as a man who, "Was not interested in cultural matters. I don't recall him playing music. He read, but he didn't have artists in his coterie, he did not collect art or go to the theatre" (Interview 22 November 2007). Roberts also says, "I don't think the government ever interfered" (ibid) with the running of the Arts and Culture centres. Perlin concurs with Roberts' recollection, "He is absolutely right. They never did. I don't think I ever, ever had an attempt by government to interfere in programming (Interview 23 November 2007). He also recalls that Smallwood rarely attended performances at the Arts and Culture Centre, "Joey was at the official opening, but he came back only once after that" (ibid).

While Smallwood demonstrated little interest in the performances at the Arts and Culture Centres and his government may not have interfered with programming,

the Director of Cultural Affairs was a controversial person. Perlin recalls that while there was a tradition of amateur theatre in St. John's in the 1960s, local or Canadian productions were rarely featured at the Arts and Culture Centre. "There was not much of a Canadian theatre scene in those days," says Perlin (Interview 23 November 2007). Like Georges-Emile Laplame, Quebec's first Minister des Affaires culturelles, Perlin was what Handler describes as an advocate for "high culture" (Handler 1988, 98). Newfoundland writer and actor Andy Jones agrees, "I never felt he was sympathetic to the emerging local arts scene, and (he) was more interested in culture with a capital C" (Meeker 2007). A provincial Arts Policy Committee reviewing the programming of the Arts and Culture Centres under Perlin's leadership noted that, "There is some considerable disenchantment in the artistic community with the Division of Cultural Affairs" (*Drawing Conclusions 1990*, 7). The Committee report quotes the Resource Centre for the Arts, operator of the artist-run Longshoremen's Protective Union Hall theatre commenting on Perlin's track record, "it is our firm belief, based on ten years of experience, that the Division of Cultural Affairs is no great friend to the creators of art in this province. We are unsure whether this has been a sin of omission or commission. But sin it most assuredly has been." (ibid).

Perlin's critics were not limited to performing artists. Edythe Goodridge, the university Extension Service's person in charge of their visual arts program, describes the University gallery in the mid-1960s as the "de-facto provincial gallery" and Perlin as her "nemesis." She claims his idea of culture "perpetuated the worst of colonialization" (Interview 11 November 2007). Perlin remains unapologetic in the face of criticism that he privileged elite art over cultural expression rooted in the province's traditions. Reflecting on his years as the Director of Cultural Affairs, he said, "My conscience is clear. I have done the best possible job, given the parameters I was given to work in, for the government — who was my employer — and the artistic community. There are some people ... who will be for me and others who will be against me. If everybody loved me, I don't think I could have done my job properly" (Meeker 2007). As to critics such as Goodridge, for example, he describes his decision to invite Memorial University to operate the Arts and Culture Centre art gallery as, "The biggest mistake I ever made" (Interview 30 November 2007).

THE PECKFORD YEARS

A former advisor to Brian Peckford, whom I interviewed, characterized Perlin's version of culture as an "elite culture," one that catered to a St. John's establishment whose idea of fashion was to "shop in a Water St. clothing store called the London, New York, and Paris" (Interview 5 November 2007). The interview was conducted in the former advisor's kitchen and on the wall were two framed posters from the 1970s advertising concerts for the band Figgy Duff, a band which combined tradi-

tional Newfoundland music with rock and roll drums and amplification. Pamela Morgan, its singer/songwriter, recalled her early years with the band, “when people stopped being ashamed of the way they spoke, and rebelled against the newfie joke” (Amber Music 1995). Morgan wrote of Figgy Duff, “we were in sync with a roots movement all over the world, as people began to look inward to their own people for inspiration” (ibid). Thirty years after the launch of Figgy Duff, a former advisor to Brian Peckford still displays the band’s show posters in her home. Looking back from her kitchen in 2007 it is easy to accept Rompkey’s characterization of Peckford as the first Newfoundland Premier “to openly embrace the arts as an expression of the provincial culture” (Rompkey 1998, 272).

Overton says Brian Peckford’s 1979 victory occurred in the midst of a “cultural revival” (Overton 1998, 7) in Newfoundland in the 1970s and 1980s and Rompkey cites Sandra Gwyn’s 1976 *Saturday Night* magazine article as naming the phenomenon “The Newfoundland Renaissance” (Rompkey 1998, 272). As Overton put it,

“culture is on the march in Newfoundland. In the last decade or two it has become one of the most widely used words in the province, particularly, but not exclusively, among what may be called the new middle class. Many lament the loss of a distinctive way of life rooted in the outports. Others complain about the destructive effects of mass culture and North American values on ‘traditional culture’ and attempt to preserve and revive this unique culture. Cultural arguments have been used in defence of the seal hunt and to justify the stand of Brian Peckford’s Progressive Conservatives on the control of offshore and other resources” (Overton 1988, 6).

Roberts agrees that culture became part of the political lexicon in the 1970s and the emergence of Newfoundland writers, visual artists, performing artists, and film makers represented a “potent political force” but, unlike Gwyn and Overton, Roberts suggests, “It was not a revival. It was an arrival.” As he points out, “We didn’t have a long literary tradition in Newfoundland” or a record of producing visual art or professional performing art that had somehow been stifled, only to be resurrected in the 1970s. (Interview 22 November 2007)

Regardless of whether it was an arrival or a revival, Rompkey acknowledges that “something extraordinary was in the making” (Rompkey 1998, 273) and Overton argues that this extraordinary something rested, “on certain essential ideological foundations. The key assumption of the revival is that there exists a distinctive Newfoundland culture, way of life, ethos, character, soul, or ethnic identity ... This unique culture centred on the outports has been undermined by industrialization, the welfare state, urbanization, and the introduction of North American values in the period since the Second World War. Newfoundland culture is now threatened with extinction” (Overton 1998, 9). Such ideas are not unique to Newfoundland, Handler describes a similar fear in Quebec — a “negative vision” or fear that external forces threatened the national culture with extinction (Handler 1988, 5, 120).

One event that seems to illustrate that an *extraordinary something* occurred in the mid-1970s was a take-over of the St. John's Folk Arts Council by what one Council member characterized, in an undated internal history of the SJFAC, as a "revolutionary faction" (Rayment undated, 2). In the period 1966-1976 the SJFAC identified itself as part of a larger network of Canadian folk arts councils, but, according to Rayment, opposition arose within the organization to the "Brookes Era" and culminated in 1977 during Peckford's rise to power with a change in leadership and approach. He reports that the "Brookes Era" emphasized multiculturalism (for example, one day multicultural festivals coinciding with the St. John's Regatta) and "formal presentations and polished performances, and contests and adjudications." As Rayment put it, "younger generations caught up in the idealism of pure folk art, particularly as applied to Newfoundland culture" pushed for change in the SJFAC and during the Council's 1977 annual meeting this "revolutionary faction" took control of the SJFAC (ibid). This "younger set ... led council activities away from formal presentations to large outdoor festivals and 'Times'" (ibid). Lewis Brookes resigned from the SJFAC in 1977, coincidentally the same year that his son Christopher and other political activists bought the Longshoremen's Protective Union Hall in St. John's, converted it into a theatre, hoisted the nationalist Pink, White, and Green flag over it, and proceeded to produce some of the most political theatre ever staged in post Confederation Newfoundland.

The SJFAC became more politically focused at this point. The folk festival adopted symbols of Newfoundland's nationalist ideology; a national anthem and a national flag (Hobsbawm 1983, 7). The Ode to Newfoundland continues to be performed at the festival and though the Pink, White, and Green nationalist flag did not fly in the festival's early years, the colours on the cover of the first festival programs were pink, white, and green. Clearly, following 1977 the process identified by Whisnant of, "an intervener, by virtue of his or her status, power, and established credibility" defining "what culture is" and legitimizing that definition in the larger society (Whisnant 1983, 262) was in evidence at the annual SJFAC folk festival.

Bannerman Park, the site of the annual St. John's Folk Festival, was not the only place where Newfoundland's traditional folk arts were on display in the 1970s. Gerald S. Doyle collected and published *Old-Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland* and Art Scammel and Omar Blondell recorded them from the 1920s to 1950s, and between 1967 to 1979 CBC television in the province broadcast a locally produced program called *All Around the Circle* which further legitimized Newfoundland folk music. Newfoundland dramas, like *As Loved Our Fathers* by Tom Cahill, found their way onto television screens in the province, and a year after Peckford took office a new generation of Newfoundland actors and musicians calling themselves *The Wonderful Grand Band* broadcast the first of what would be 40 enormously popular half-hour television programs over the next three years. To the extent that television is a mirror to a community, then beginning in the late 1960s and expanding in the 1970s Newfoundlanders saw their artistic creations and dis-

tinct accents not only reflected but celebrated on television screens. I would argue that the impact of that mirroring should not be underestimated.

Whether Peckford tapped into the emerging nationalist sentiment or exerted some leadership of it, he took power with a mandate to rearrange government priorities. He won three elections in part on nationalist appeals, and was responsible for several cultural initiatives during his first term. One of Peckford's first actions as Premier was to reorganize government departments and he took advantage of the opportunity to elevate the status of culture in the hierarchy of the provincial bureaucracy. For the first time the word culture appeared in the name of a government department, the Department of Tourism, Recreation, and Culture. The department has been refashioned several times since 1979. A decade later it was the Department of Cultural Affairs, Tourism, and Historic Resources and in 1992 it became the Department of Tourism and Culture. As of 2008 it is called the Department of Tourism, Culture, and Recreation. He also commissioned the province's first official flag, designed by the artist Christopher Pratt.

It is fair to say that the creation of the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council (NLAC) was a very important cultural initiative of the new Peckford government. Coincidentally, the first section of the Quebec Liberal Party's platform in the 1960 Quebec election (which marked the beginning of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec) promised the creation of a Quebec Arts Council. Peckford's move represented a partial transfer of power from the Director of Cultural Affairs, specifically the ability to make monetary grants to individual artists, to an organization that would be artist-influenced, though not artist-run. Ultimately that represented an early step in what later was the emergence of a coalition of artists who began to redefine arts as a cultural industry.

In 1967 artists in this province did not identify themselves as members of a cultural industry, nor did provincial government policies or programs recognize them as such. Forty years later, the idea that artists are members of a cultural industry has been solidly cemented into government policy. This transition can be traced, in part, to a rethinking of government development approaches during the Peckford years, the creation of the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council (NLAC), and the subsequent emergence of an artists' organization. This last development grew out of frustration with the performance of the NLAC and the government's Division of Cultural Affairs. In addition, this transition was occurring against a backdrop of a larger shift in the "discourse of culture" to the "discourse of the economy" in Canadian public policy (Dorland 1996, xi).

In 1981 Peckford's government passed Bill 56 creating the NLAC with a mandate "to promote the study, enjoyment of and the production of works in the arts of the province and to encourage the preservation and public awareness of cultural heritage" (RSNL 1990 Chapter A-178, 2). The fostering and promoting art was to be done primarily through the distribution of financial grants to individual artists. The Act specified that the NLAC would report to the Minister of Culture and Tourism,

and at the same time operate at arms-length from the government. This relationship made for and continues to make for what I would call, alternately, a cooperative partnership and an antagonistic partnership.

The tension inherent in the partnership was clear. On one hand the NLAC was an agent of the provincial government, which provided the bulk of the Council's budget and appointed the members of its Board of Directors. On the other, the Council was a lobbyist for artists and often displayed its displeasure with its financial allocation or government cultural policy. The first full-time Executive Director of the NLAC, Ken Pittman, recalls that during the Council's early days the provincial government was, "very paternalistic ... John Perlin was appointed to the Board, he had signing authority on the Council's bank account, and when the NLAC made recommendations to government they landed on John Perlin's desk" (Interview 12 November 2007). Perlin recalls his role differently. "I was certainly not controlling the council and if I had signing authority on the bank account it was only because they asked me to do it," he says.

On the evening before the Board of the NLAC held its first meeting the Directors met at the home of Goodridge (one of the early lobbyists for the creation of an arts council and the first, part-time Executive Director of the Council). If the creation of the NLAC did not usher in an era of harmonious relations between artists and Perlin, then at least the rhetoric was tempered by the respect accorded the first Chairman of the Arts Council Board, Dr. George Story. Story, an English professor at Memorial University was the lead editor of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (Story, Kirwin, and Widdowson, 1982). It is Story's words which continue to be used by the Council on their Internet site as a statement about the importance of the arts in the province: "It is our creative ability that ensures our survival as a recognizable people and culture, and enables us also to contribute to the enrichment of the establishment of the nation of which we form a distinct part" (Internet site-www.nlac.nf.ca/index). One can hear the echoes of Georges-Emile Lapalme, the nationalist Minister des Affaires culturelles in Quebec, "It is not by money that we will win against the Americans or the English. It will be by culture" (Handler 1988,101) or in the Quebec Liberal party 1960 campaign platform, "It is by our culture rather than by numbers that we will prevail" (ibid,103). If the goal of the Arts Council has always been, as John Doyle, a former Chair of the Board says, "to get the maximum amount of money out of the provincial treasury and into the hands of artists," then persuading the public, politicians, and bureaucrats to share Story's view of the importance of the arts has been its primary objective (Interview 9 November 2007).

In its first full year of operation the NLAC distributed \$100,000 in direct grants to artists, but artists failed to persuade the provincial government to increase the allocation in subsequent years. Frustrations grew. In 1985 then Chair of the NLAC Board of Directors, Pat Byrne, and several members of the board, resigned in protest over the government's budget allocation. Singer Anita Best, one of those who resigned, says, "at the heart of the issue all the way through was the Arts and Culture

Centre ... this white elephant ... this monstrosity that took all the money” (Interview 3 December 2007).

One year later, in 1986, Best and other artists met in Gander and took the first steps in the formation of the Artists’ Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador. The NLAC budget was in a deficit; cheques were bouncing. (MUN Extension Service, 14). At the Gander meeting Best challenged the Chair of the NLAC and called the NLAC, “a handmaiden of government.” (ibid 14). The artists debated forming a new organization to represent their interests, one of the key issues was who would be eligible for membership in the new association and how would the Board of Directors be selected. By way of criticizing the government’s power to appoint members of the NLAC board, Best said, hinting either knowingly or unknowingly at the eventual identification of artists as members of a cultural industry, “Artists are primary producers. If we were a group of farmers looking for a board to represent us, who would be on the board? Farmers. It seems clear who the electorate should be” (ibid, 56). On the last day of the three day conference the artists voted to develop a “representative association” to lobby on their behalf.

One of those attending the Gander meeting was traditional singer Eleanor Dawson, who had been a member of the previously noted “revolutionary faction ... younger set” who took over the St. John’s Folk Arts Council nine years earlier (Rayment undated, 2). Ten years after the Gander meeting, in 1998, Dawson became the first Executive Director of the Association of Cultural Industries in Newfoundland and Labrador, and she is currently the Director of Arts in the Culture and Heritage Division of the provincial government’s department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, making her one of the most important cultural bureaucrats in the province. Dawson is not the only person who was involved with the Artists’ Coalition who went on to a career as a cultural bureaucrat in the public service. Ann Anderson, who had followed Pittman as an Executive Director of the NLAC and became the Co-ordinator of the Artists’ Coalition, is currently a Cultural Development Officer with the federal Department of Canadian Heritage in the province. Perlin, the province’s first cultural bureaucrat, may not agree that, “he was more interested in culture with a capital C” (Meeker 2007), but two of the most important cultural bureaucrats in Newfoundland in 2008 were among those in the 1980s who wanted Perlin replaced and a change in government’s cultural policy.

More than 25 years later I asked Peckford what his “thinking” was at the time and what he wanted his Department of Culture to do? He replied, “I was eager then to assert a confidence in ourselves and that we were able to do great things. A part of that was using the word culture but perhaps more important was to manifest this word and confidence into real tangible things — that was why the flag was so important — the formation of the first arts council, taking one per cent of the capital cost of a provincial building and have it go into Newfoundland and Labrador art in that building, the publishers assistance program, sustaining grants to the symphony and Rising Tide” (Interview 30 October 2007).

WELLS TO TOBIN TO WILLIAMS AND THE EMERGENCE OF CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

Clyde Wells, who succeeded Peckford as Premier in 1989, responded to lobbying by the Artists' Coalition by appointing an Arts Policy Committee chaired by a Memorial University English professor, Patrick O'Flaherty. Hearings were held, and a report was published in 1990 that recommended fundamental changes in the way government addressed cultural issues. *Drawing Conclusions* or, as it was better known, the O'Flaherty report, concluded that funding of artists was, "so low as to constitute an embarrassment to the province" (O'Flaherty 1990,27) and that "The arts are not a frill, but an industry which is worth investing in" (ibid, 3). The report also noted that the Artists' Coalition "forcibly expressed" the view to the committee that, "the Arts Council was an old-fashioned body, handing out small grants, and meeting no particular purpose" (ibid, 25). The O'Flaherty report led to an increase in funding for the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council and coincided with the resignation of Perlin as the Director of Cultural Affairs. Perlin says his resignation was not connected to the O'Flaherty report. "It was never, ever suggested I go. No one asked me to resign" (Interview 23November 2007).

The Wells government received a second report, in 1991, that also shaped its approach to cultural policy. *The Business of Culture: An Economic Analysis of Newfoundland's Cultural Industries* was prepared for the Economic Recovery Commission (ERC) by John Barry, a business consultant. The idea of identifying the arts as a cultural industry originated with Susan Sherk, one of the ERC's Commissioners. Sherk, who worked with Goodridge at Memorial's Extension Service and edited its publication *Decks Awash* in the 1970s says in commissioning Barry's study that she, "wanted to try and make an economic case for the arts ... to legitimize the arts" (Interview Dec 7). Sherk, whose business background included managing corporate communications for the Canadian divisions of two large international companies, says that in the 1980s Newfoundland artists did not recognize themselves as business people and, "undervalued their work. I wanted them and the government to understand that this was business" (ibid). Barry's analysis concluded that the province's cultural industries were, "clearly a growth opportunity sector" (Barry 1991: Executive Summary 2).

There is perhaps some irony in government adopting as a development strategy a concept that had its origins in a Marxist critique of capitalist entertainment. The concept of cultural industries can be dated from the 1947 publication of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, who, in their chapter analyzing the American film industry, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," argued that, "what is new [about art] is not that it is a commodity, but that today it deliberately admits it is one" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1989, 157). According to Dorland, their analysis of the "fusion of cultural forms with capitalist modes of organization" (Dorland 1996, 359) was re-discovered by Marxist ana-

lysts of mass-media culture in Germany and France in the 1970s and then “found its way” (ibid, 360) to Canadian university sociology departments and subsequently into policy discourses. Dorland also argues that the discourses of culture have undergone a “slow and difficult transition” to the discourses of economy (ibid, xi).

The transition from the discourses of culture to the discourses of economy may have been slow in Canada as a whole, but it could be argued that in Newfoundland the transition was rapid. The cultural industries concept initially appears in the O’Flaherty report in 1990. It appears again in the 1991 ERC analysis, and in a 1995 evaluation of a five million dollar Canada Newfoundland Cooperation Agreement on Cultural Industries the author concluded that “The agreement was credited with providing a sense of legitimacy to professionals within the cultural industries” (Rowe 1995, 4) and that “The term cultural industries is now widely used” (ibid, 19).

The Wells government signed the Canada Newfoundland Co-operation Agreement on Cultural Industries in 1992 and that agreement was followed by other federal/provincial programs. In contrast to Quebec, where Federal government monies for cultural industry activities were sometimes seen as encroachments into the provincial cultural domain (Handler 1988, 83), there was no opposition voiced in Newfoundland. In the early years of the moratorium on the cod fishery, diversifying the economy of rural Newfoundland was a priority for the Provincial government, cultural tourism was identified as a growth opportunity, and no one accused the Federal government of unwanted meddling in provincial affairs.

Dawson, the first Executive Director of the Association of Cultural Industries, recalls that the cooperation agreement money caused artists to alter the way they identified themselves, “The result was that artists who were applying for funding began to describe their projects as economic development projects. The amount of money available for economic development dwarfed the amount of money available through the Arts Council. It happened very quickly” (Interview 8 December 2007). The transition may have happened quickly, but Doyle warns, “It is a risky one. The risk is that the test of an artist’s worth is ‘Are you contributing economically?’” (Interview 9 November 2007). There is an irony in the path taken by artists, who have always considered their pursuits to be cultural but now identify themselves as members of a cultural *industry*, since it is in contrast to the path taken by craft producers, who for decades identified their pursuit as industrial, and latterly came to see themselves as members of a *cultural industry*.

The provincial government’s *2006 Blueprint for the Development and Investment in Culture* identifies crafts as one of the province’s cultural genres. That has not always been the case. In 1992 the Economic Recovery Commission published a discussion paper titled *Cultural Industries — New Opportunities for Growth* which identified performing, visual, literary, and media arts as cultural industries, but the discussion paper specifically noted that crafts were not a cultural industry (ERC 1992, 1). As well, since the 1960s bureaucratic responsibility for the arts rested

with the Director of Cultural Affairs in a department that was also responsible for tourism. In contrast, responsibility for funding craft development has rested with the department responsible for rural development. Today that is the Department of Innovation, Trade, and Rural Development.

The process which resulted in governments and artists conceiving of creative activities as a cultural industry, can be contrasted with the experience of artists and the path craft producers have travelled. In June 1972, the university's Extension Service (the same agency which would later organize the 1986 meeting of artists in Gander that led to the creation of the Artists' Coalition) hosted a group of about 50 craft producers on the Memorial University campus in St. John's. The meeting's aim was to discuss the development of the craft industry and to take the first step in organizing a provincial crafts association. The Extension Service's report on the meeting reflected the language of the day: craft producers were identified as "craftsmen," aboriginal people in Labrador as "Indian and Eskimo residents of the coast," and the Director of Vocational Training as "Miss" Templeton (MUN Extension Service, June 1972, 7, 24, 3). It is therefore tempting to think of an organization which used such language as being old-fashioned, but almost 20 years before the provincial Arts Policy Committee published a report proclaiming that the arts "are an industry worth investing in" (O'Flaherty 1990, 3) and a market study for a provincial Economic Recovery Commission used the expression "cultural industries" (Barry 1991, iv), the craft producers organized an association whose purpose was the development of an "industry" (MUN Extension Service 1972, 2). In fact, long before that date craft producers saw themselves as industrial. The Newfoundland Outport Nursing and *Industrial* Association, NONIA, for example, had been founded in 1920 with the objective of providing outport women with a means of making money to pay for the services of nurses from England and "to raise the standard of living in NONIA communities" (House 1990, 25). In 1972, when it sent representatives to the meeting, it provided work for 400 women. The second meeting of craft producers proposed to, "organize various craft organizations into a united craft industry" (MUN Extension November 1972, 2). It is clear from reading the reports and minutes from the first Board of Directors' meetings that the new Newfoundland and Labrador Craft Development Association priorities were business matters such as bulk-buying and tax issues. The Association's current membership in the St. John's Board of Trade suggests the group's orientation has not changed. Since at least the early 1970s people who produce crafts have identified themselves as members of an industry, but what has changed is the recognition that their pursuit is a cultural one.

It took artists longer than crafts producers to identify themselves as members of an industry, but by 1998 the transition was virtually complete. That year artists responded to the federal/provincial funding program by forming an Association of Cultural Industries (ACINL). Dawson reports that the first meeting was called, "to discuss a manpower project, to discuss issues like professional development, but it

became immediately apparent that what artists thought was needed was a cultural policy” (Interview 8 December 2007). In 2000, long after the Tobin administration dismantled the Economic Recovery Commission and launched the Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation, the ACINL published, *Proposal for a Cultural Policy for Newfoundland and Labrador*. Some of that philosophy found its way into government priorities. Two years later, in November 2002, the government published *A Cultural Policy for Newfoundland and Labrador*, the opening statement of which reads, “Newfoundland and Labrador has a culture that goes to the heart of our identity and the quality of life we hold dear” (A Cultural Policy 2002, 1). It also notes that *culture* has value as an economic commodity, committing the government to “nurture and preserve this province’s culture for its intrinsic value, as well as for its social and economic benefits” (ibid). Premier Tobin (who was replaced by Roger Grimes when he resigned part way through his second term in office) did more than just articulate a cultural policy. He also assembled more than \$40 million to build The Rooms, a new facility in St. John’s to house the province’s museum, art gallery, and archives.

Four years after the publication of the 2002 policy document the Danny Williams government published yet another policy document, *The Blueprint for Development and Investment in Culture*. Williams is quoted in the document as arguing that “Deep within each of us is the pride that unites us and today we have a new sense of pride. There is something precious about Newfoundland and Labrador that you cannot fully appreciate until you have lived here; Until you come to care for this place so deeply that the thought of losing it is more than you can bear” (Blueprint 2006, 2). The Premier, also mindful that culture has value as an economic commodity, writes, “Our arts and heritage in all of their forms are one of our province’s success stories and we recognize that if we invest wisely the benefits will be tremendous” (ibid, 5). The *Blueprint* identifies cultural tourism, specifically, as “a powerful economic engine” requiring “a sufficient supply of excellent cultural products” for its development (ibid, 40).

TOURISM AND CULTURE

While both arts advocacy groups and governments have embraced culture as an economic engine, not everyone agrees that a commodification of culture is an unqualified good thing. David Harvey, for example, argues that “capitalism treats as commodities many of the fundamental elements of the web of life that are not produced as commodities,” including “such features as culture, tradition, intelligence, (and) memory” (Harvey 2006, 113). He further argues that the process of capital appropriating cultural histories as commodities to be consumed through tourism “entails wholesale dispossessions” (ibid, 44). Similarly, Overton argues that the tourist industry represents the spread of industrial capitalism into the realm of lei-

sure (Overton 1996, 4). In several essays focused on what he calls “the politics of tourism, culture, and development” Overton concludes that tourism and the transformations it brings are a “form of neo-colonialism” (ibid, ix, 4). Overton contends that what is being packaged in a Newfoundland tourism industry based on nature, a way of life, and heritage is “the heritage of centuries of underdevelopment” and further, it is being sold by advertising “which exists to play the pimp in capitals’ efforts to seduce consumers” (ibid, 105, 107).

Selling Newfoundland folk culture did not originate in the 1960s. If Overton is correct, then for decades Newfoundland governments have been pimping nature, a way of life, and heritage. Long before Smallwood hired Perlin to run the Arts and Culture Centre, governments marketed Newfoundland culture to tourists. As Smallwood put it in 1931, “There is no other country in North America where life is simpler, where the people are more genuine and hospitable, where outdoor attractions are more numerous or easily availed of, or where greater joy of living can be experienced for so small a cash outlay” (Smallwood 1931, 64).

Goodridge argues that tourism marketing since Confederation has reinforced three stereotypes of Newfoundlanders, “First we had the simple fisher-folk, innocent, hard-working naïve people who would invite a stranger into their house for a cup of tea. Next came the rowdy Irishman and now we have what I call the northern Appalachian hillbilly, you know, come join us for a stomp and holler” (Interview 11 November 2007). Though Goodridge and Doyle’s tenure on the Arts Council were separated by 25 years, they both express caution about the link between tourism and culture and the issue of “folk versus fake” (Bendix 1989, 132). As Doyle put it, “I have a real aversion to a link between tourism and culture. I have a real fear of the kind of culture you would get out of that ... a rubber-booty kind of art, a backward looking folkloric art. It’s not a good link” (Interview 9 November 2007). Doyle could be describing what Boissevain characterizes as “tourist traditional,” a style that lacks authenticity, but satisfies tourists and their hosts in a kind of game which is “played by both parties” (Boissevain 1996, 160). From this perspective, culture is contested and “No longer is authenticity a property inherent in a object, forever fixed in time; instead it is a social process, a struggle in which competing interests argue” (ibid). Newfoundland is not unique in this. Jane Nadal-Klein witnessed such a struggle over identity and representation in Scottish coastal communities. Her interest was in how fishing communities adapted to a decline in their traditional industry and a growth in tourism, a circumstance familiar to rural Newfoundland communities. Nadal-Klein asked, “how do purveyors of Scottish heritage decide which face of Scotland to project?” The answer, she concluded “lies in what sells” (Nadal-Klein 2003, 180).

The implication of choosing to project what sells, according to Bruner and Overton, lies in what I would call *cultural feed-back*. Based on his research in Bali, Bruner observes that “the way local peoples tell stories about their traditions to foreigners influences how they talk about and express their own culture to them-

selves” (Bruner 2005, 22). In writing about the politics of tourism, culture, and development in Newfoundland Overton argues that the version of Newfoundland that was invented for tourists was “not invented just for tourists. The same totems, icons, and images highlighted for tourists came to be seen as the essential symbols of Newfoundland national identity” (Overton 1996, 17).

The link between culture and tourism in Newfoundland and Labrador is deep and enduring. The 1966 Come Home Year campaign attempted to attract expatriate Newfoundlanders to return as tourists. Rompkey notes that the campaign, which included arts events, accomplished two things: “it created a link between public funding and the arts, and it entrenched the idea that traditional outport life could be commodified and marketed” (Rompkey 1998, 271). The campaign also proved to be the first of a series of tourism campaigns marketed as special celebrations. It was the following year that Perlin became the government’s chief cultural bureaucrat, and he either worked in tandem with the province’s tourism division or his responsibilities overlapped with the tourism division, in his capacity as the head of the province’s special celebrations committee, for the next 22 years. In the context of an economic development strategy that relied heavily on tourist promotion, Newfoundland culture became a commodity. The notion now appears to be deeply ingrained in government policy. The 2006 *Blueprint For Development and Investment in Culture* sets out that the first of several “Guiding Principles and Values” is that, “Our culture defines our identity, enriches our lives and provides economic opportunities. It is a valuable asset, worthy of public support and investment” (Blueprint, 17). The risk in the strategy, as Doyle cautions, is that the test of an artist’s or cultural worker’s worth might become, “Are you contributing economically?” (Interview 9 November 2007).

CONCLUSION

This review of cultural policy since 1967 illuminates several major shifts. In the first phase, public policy, perhaps more by accident than design, emphasized high culture. In the 1970s the artistic community pushed the government’s conception of culture to encompass indigenous and folk culture, with a concurrent objectification of the latter. Overton (1988) explores the forces at work in Newfoundland and Labrador in the 1960s and 1970s that caused this shift, and I would add to Overton’s list, the legitimizing effect the production of original Newfoundland television programming had for indigenous and folk arts. Clearly, the new elite that came to power in the 1970s triggered what Rompkey calls an, “explosion of creative energy” (Rompkey 1998, 272). What happened in Newfoundland and Labrador paralleled the cultural awareness in Quebec that paved the way for the Quiet Revolution (Handler 1988, 84).

First craft producers, and latter artists, began to identify themselves as workers in cultural industries. Their work has gone from having intrinsic value as a “source of enjoyment, criticism, and inspiration for society” (*Drawing Conclusions* 1990, 2) to being valued by the market as commodities (Smith 1988, 55). The objectification of folk culture can be observed, for example, in the 40 year history of the St. John’s Folk Arts Council, especially once the council changed direction as a “younger generation caught up in the idealism of pure folk art” (Rayment undated, 2) took control of the SJFAC in 1977. The staged “folk dance celebration” that epitomizes the Council’s annual Folk Festival is an example of what Handler calls, “cultural objectification” (Handler 1988, 14). Each of these transitions occurred against a backdrop of a continuing merger of the government’s culture and tourism projects. The merging of culture and tourism is evident in the Provincial government’s 2006 *Blueprint for Development and Investment in Culture* which identifies cultural tourism, specifically, as “a powerful economic engine” requiring “a sufficient supply of excellent cultural products” (ibid, 40) for its development.

This provokes a question beyond the scope of this essay, why did the Smallwood government decide to spend the Federal government funds available for a centennial project to build an Arts and Culture? For the moment it would be fair to say that while the Government of Canada may not have overtly influenced the province’s policy choices from the 1960s to the present, it certainly enabled it. The federal government influenced other cultural policy choices since the 1990s, at the very least through cost shared cultural programmes.

In contrast, I argue that the fuel that ignited the creative explosion in Newfoundland in the 1970s was local and as the reverberations from that explosion have rippled out over time the province’s cultural policy has evolved. If the province’s first Director of Cultural Affairs, in the absence of any policy directive from government, personally defined cultural policy by default, then the shock waves that Ed Roberts described as a “potent political force” in the 1970s pushed culture onto the political agenda (Interview 22 November 2007). Culture was embraced by Brian Peckford in 1979, and in 2006 defined as “central” to Danny Williams’ vision of Newfoundland (Blueprint 2006, 5, 11).

rogerbill@nf.sympatico.ca

References Cited

- An Act Respecting the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council*. RSNL 1990 Chapter A-17:2; available at <http://www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/sr/statutes/a17.htm>; accessed 30 March 2009.
- Anderson, Ann. Interview 8 December 2007.
- Association of Cultural Industries. *Proposal for a Cultural Policy for Newfoundland and Labrador*. November 2000. St. John’s.

- Barry, John. *The Business of Culture; An Economic Analysis of Newfoundland's Cultural Industries*. Prepared for: The Economic Recovery Commission of Newfoundland and Labrador. 1991. Also, interview 9 December 2007.
- Bendix, Regina. *Tourism and Cultural Displays: Inventing Traditions for Whom? The Journal of American Folklore*. Vol. 102, No. 404 (April-June 1989), 131-146.
- Best, Anita. Interview December 2007.
- Boissevain, Jeremy, ed. *Coping with Tourists: European Reactions to Mass Tourism*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996.
- Boniface, Priscilla and Peter J. Fowler. *Heritage and Tourism in 'the global village.'* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Brookes, Christopher. *Folkus: Lewis Brookes, Founding President of the St. John's Folk Arts Council*. Transcription of CBC Newfoundland and Labrador Radio archive tape S69-30; available at, www.nfolk.com/bsidearch/jul94/folkus.html; accessed 30 March 2009.
- Bruner, Edward M. *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Dawson, Eleanor. Interview 8 December 2007.
- Dorland, Michael. *The Cultural Industries of Canada: Problems, Policies, and Prospects*. Toronto: James Lorimer, 1996.
- Doyle, John. Interview 9 November 2007.
- Goodridge, Edythe. Interview 11 November 2007.
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. *Creative Newfoundland and Labrador: A Blueprint for Development and Investment in Culture*. 2006.
- Government of NL, *A Cultural Policy for Newfoundland and Labrador*. 2002.
- Government of NL, News Release: Progress of the Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation. June 2, 1988; available at, www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/1998/drr/0602n03.htm; accessed 30 March 2006.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Horkheimer, Max, and T.W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Continuum: New York, 1989.
- House, Doug. Interview 22 November 2007.
- Handler, Richard. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 1988.
- Harvey, David. *Spaces of Global Capitalism*. Verso: London and New York, 2006.
- Meeker, Geoff. *King of Arts: John Perlin retires as province's cultural boss*. Meeker on Media Internet Blog. Transcript of original 1989 Sunday Express newspaper article; available at, <http://www.thetelegram.com/index.cfm?sid=64977&sc=88>, accessed 30 March 2009.
- Morgan, Pamela. *Amber Music*; available at, http://www.ambermusic.ca/artist_figgyduff.htm, accessed 30 March 2009.
- Nadel-Klein, Jane. *Fishing for Heritage: Modernity and Loss Along the Scottish Coast*. Oxford: Berg, 2003.
- Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council Internet site; available at <http://www.nlac.nf.ca/index/index.shtml>, accessed 30 March 2009.

- O'Flaherty, Patrick. *Drawing Conclusions. A Report of the Arts Policy Committee*, 1990. Available at the Legislative Library, Provincial House of Assembly, St. John's, NL
- Overton, James. "A Newfoundland Culture?" *Journal of Canadian Studies*. Vol. 23. No. 1 & 2 (Spring 1988), 5-22.
- _____. *Making a World of Difference*. St. John's: ISER 1996.
- Peckford, Brian. Interview 22-30 October 2007.
- Perlin, John. Interview 8 October 2007; 23 November 2007.
- Pittman, Ken. Interview 12 November 2007.
- Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador. *Proud. Strong. Determined. The Future is Ours*. Available at the Legislative Library, Provincial House of Assembly. St. John's, NL.
- Rayment, A.F. *A History of the St. John's Folk Arts Council*. Collection 051, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Queen Elizabeth Library. Memorial University of Newfoundland. St. John's, NL.
- Report of a Province-Wide Arts Conference. Gander, NL. 7, 8, and 9 March 1986. Prepared by the Extension Service of Memorial University.
- Roberts, Ed. Interview 22 November 2007.
- Rompkey, Ronald. "The Idea of Newfoundland and Arts Policy Since Confederation." *Newfoundland Studies*. Vol. 14. No. 2 (Spring 1998), 266-281.
- Rowe, Andy. *Evaluation of the Canada Newfoundland Cooperation Agreement on Cultural Industries*. 1995.
- Sherk, Susan. Interview 7 December 2007.
- Smallwood, J.R. "From the Masthead by The Barrelman." *Daily News*, 1937.
- Smallwood, J.R. *The New Newfoundland*. New York: MacMillan, 1931.
- Smith, Valene. *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.
- Story, Kirwin, and Widdowson. *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982.
- Whisnant, David. *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.



CAPTIVATING.



CAPTIVATING.*

*CANADIAN MAGAZINES MAKE YOUR INTERESTS MORE INTERESTING. From Literature to Business, all written from a refreshingly Canadian viewpoint you won't find anywhere else. Just look for the Genuine Canadian Magazine icon at your favourite newsstand, or visit magazinescanada.ca to find what interests you.

