

Calculative Cultural Expertise? Consultants and Politics in the UK Cultural Sector

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Abstract

An explosion in the production of cultural data reflects the increasing influence of calculative reason in the cultural sector, a situation criticised as the ‘instrumentalisation’ of culture. This paper argues that this criticism concedes too much to the logics of calculation, and that power and political agency are being worked out in the sector in more complex ways in the wake of calculation than simply acquiescing to it. This is illustrated through an ethnographic account of the work of a new stratum of calculative cultural expertise that has emerged in the sector as calculation has become more important. These experts construct political agency through relational work that is concerned with both calculative and non-calculative matters, including the performance of objectivity, the mobilisation of various affects, and the construction of coalitions of actors.

Key Words: calculation; consultants; objectivity; cultural policy; expertise; governmentality; advanced liberalism

Introduction

Being an expert on matters of culture is popularly seen as a matter of subjective judgement. Cultural expertise rests on the ability to distinguish and valorise different cultural forms in a way that resonates with others possessing the same expertise, meaning expert judgements are as much of other people's judgements as of the forms in question. There is an element of a game about this, and the way these games are played reveals much about a society's social relations (Bourdieu, 1984). But in the subsidised cultural sector, new ways of judging and new modes of expertise are increasingly prominent, and these are at least as revealing. Quantitative and data-driven ways of thinking about culture have emerged in recent decades that aim to introduce a particular form of objectivity to the cultural sector. Since John Myerscough (1988) published *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, the amount of data produced on culture in the UK has grown to an avalanche as the subsidised cultural sector increasingly mobilised itself around the government's stated need for 'evidence-based policy-making' (Belfiore, 2009; Selwood, 2002). These trends highlight the way the cultural sector is increasingly governed under a calculative logic where defined inputs are linked to demonstrable outcomes (Belfiore, 2004; Caust, 2003).

The incipient colonisation of the UK's subsidised cultural sector by calculative reason has been accompanied by the incursion of a stratum of intellectuals who work with these logics, producing and disseminating quantitative renditions of culture for use in a funding environment that favours a particular idea of reason and evidence. These calculating cultural experts have a particular relationship to truth, and this effects how political agency is now constructed in the subsidised cultural sector (Eyal and Buchholz, 2010), with implications that range from material questions around which cultural forms will receive funding, to ideological questions regarding the place of cultural forms in the construction of community and nationhood.

Others have described the key implication as the instrumentalisation of culture, meaning the use of culture for achieving some non-cultural outcome (Belfiore, 2012; Gibson, 2008; Gray, 2007). While this is a salient criticism,¹ it concedes a lot of ground to calculative reason, effectively accepting that it is capable of rationalising the cultural

sector along calculative lines so that the cultural activity that is funded is only that which produces the best outcomes according to its criteria. It assumes calculative cultural expertise is little more than a set of calculating automatons, slaves to the form of reason that defines them. Work on calculative reason in other sectors (e.g. Higgins, 2004; Shore, 2008) makes a similar concession, fixating instead on the targets of the disciplinary power of calculation and how this renders them as governable subjects. While this often recognises that these targets do not necessarily acquiesce to the discipline of calculation, rarely is this possibility recognised in the calculating experts. But if political agency in the subsidised cultural sector, or indeed any sector, is increasingly constructed through practices of calculation, it behoves us to understand better how they it is achieved.

This interpretation of calculative reason in the UK cultural sector contributes to an emerging cross-disciplinary literature about the place of expertise in government and policy. The first section places this study in this literature. The paper argues that there is more to the work of calculating experts than calculation. While calculation has been inescapable in recent years, reducing the dynamics of the sector to a regime of calculation obscures other social relations and is potentially misleading as to how political agency in the sector is produced. The aim of this paper is not to suggest other dynamics are more important, but to situate the work of calculation in a broader conception of expert practice. This is illustrated through the work of a consultancy involved in the UK cultural sector providing calculative knowledge and expertise, drawing on a period of observational research to discuss how their expertise functioned in the sector. The paper concludes by reflecting on what the emergence of calculative reason has meant for politics in the UK cultural sector.

Conceptualising Expertise

Eyal and Buchholz (2010) argue that the classical sociology of intellectuals, fixating on the characteristics of 'the intellectual', is being overtaken by what they call a 'sociology of interventions' which emphasises the moments that expertise intervenes on problems in the public sphere. This highlights a renewed focus on the figure of the expert, not simply as an individual embedded in a particular scientific community and offering

impartial knowledge, but equally as a subject contributing to, and emerging from, value-laden projects of government driven by a variety of actors, including, but not limited to, those contained within the bounds of the formal state (e.g. Pickard, 2009). This resonates with recent work in a variety of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology and science and technology studies (STS), that has sought to disaggregate and reconceive the state, policy and government, and in which expertise is often found to feature as a central, constitutive aspect. Taken together, this work contributes to the rethinking of categories like state and society not as determinative structures, but as emergent assemblages produced, in part, by the work of expertise (Mitchell, 2002).

Of course, intellectual work has long had a prominent role in structuring societal relations, as reflected in the use of portmanteaus based on the names of significant intellectuals (eg. 'Keynesian' economics, 'Rawlsian' justice) to describe social structures apparently based on their ideas. But while the work that I am describing certainly pays heed to such influences, one of its main contributions has been to bring the eye to some of the more mundane and everyday manifestations of expertise in our society and the importance of understanding their role (Collins and Evans, 2007; Mitchell, 2002; Osborne, 2004). Doctors, teachers, accountants and engineers, for example, all shape our lives in often profound ways, but their significance tends to fade into the background. And yet it has been in the use and management of these kinds of technical expertise that we can see a shift to more calculative forms of government.

The governmentality literature provides genealogies of dominant mentalities of government as emerging from configurations of knowledge and power where expertise has an important productive role in achieving government 'beyond the state' (Miller and Rose, 2008; Rose, 1999). The emergence of a regime of what governmentality scholars describe as 'advanced liberalism' over the last few decades involved a shift in the way expertise is mobilised and validated (Rose, 1999). In contrast to government through 'the social', where overall welfare was maintained through solidaristic citizenship and collective provisioning, advanced liberalism is liberal insofar as it imagines the population as comprised of formally free subjects, and 'advanced' because it has extended this logic through the figure of the calculating individual who rationally responds to incentives in a self-maximising fashion. By rendering individuals in this

way, the work of experts like teachers and doctors are increasingly mediated through mechanisms that provide evidence that their services are a rational choice for the responsible individual. This gives centres in funding and legislative relationships with the experts a form of power (Miller and Rose, 2008). In these emergent governmental assemblages, experts are increasingly required, through various systems of audit, contract and budget control, to provide evidence of their performance. But additionally, these new cultures of display open up expert domains to inspection and surveillance by a new stratum of *calculating* experts, such as auditors and accountants, and change the terms through which the centre's aims are translated (Larner, 2002).

The governmentality literature places expertise in the exercise of power in a nuanced way: while expertise is clearly implicated in power relations, it is not simply a tool the more powerful wield. However, this conceptualisation remains diagrammatic, and so tells only half the story. It pays little attention to how government is achieved in practice, and to how expertise actually works out in social relations (McKee, 2009; McNeill et al., 2009; O'Malley et al., 1997). While calculative reasoning is clearly present in the assemblages that eventuate, experts and the individuals they conduct are unlikely to submit unquestioningly to its authority. Rather than a smooth landscape of perfect surveillance and docile bodies, we are likely to see a more complex landscape of forces and counter-forces, the uneven application of incentives and disincentives, and expected and unexpected outcomes (Barnett, 1999; Barnett et al., 2008; Li, 2007; McKee, 2009). Understanding how expert knowledge intervenes on this uneven landscape and achieves any kind of coordination, however transient, gives us a fuller picture of the work of expertise than a diagrammatic rendition.

Telling this other half of the story means considering how expertise is constituted. The STS and actor-network theory literature sees expertise as best understood not as individualised but as distributed across networks of human and nonhuman actants (Callon, 1998; Eyal and Buchholz, 2010; Latour, 1993). An individual's expert status depends on their position in assemblages of human and nonhuman materials and technologies, often stretching across national borders and overlapping with institutions like universities (Bockman, 2007; Fourcade, 2006). Having the status of an expert may give the power to intervene in the public sphere, but the building, maintenance and

manipulation of the assemblages that allow this is often a fraught and difficult process (Li, 2007). Constituting expertise then, will often involve myriad other, 'smaller' power-laden acts. Allen (2003) argues that power can be exercised in a variety of modalities, including authority, inducement, coercion, seduction and persuasion, which can be used in any number of contingent combinations. The use of resources, like money and knowledge, alongside these modes of power can allow actors to shape the assemblage (though not always successfully) in a way that aligns with their interests (Grundy and Smith, 2007; Lakoff and Klinenberg, 2010; Li, 2007).

From this point of view, a 'sociology of interventions' aims to understand expertise as assembled in a co-constitutive fashion alongside the social world that is its object. Calculative expertise is no different from other forms of expertise in this regard. Although we might understand calculative expertise in its own terms as rationalising or, inverting this, as instrumentalising or disciplinary, it remains that it must be constructed as having political agency in the assemblages that it helps constitute. So how is this political agency constructed? This paper will explore the answer to this question through an examination of calculative cultural expertise in the UK subsidised cultural sector.

Assembling a New Cultural Sector

Social phenomena have been measured for centuries (Bayatrizi, 2009; Poovey, 1998). Some spheres of human life are now understood almost exclusively in quantitative terms. Economic life, for example, comprises measurements of GDP, productivity, business confidence, unemployment and inflation, to name just a few (Breslau, 2003; Mitchell, 2002). The measurement of culture, insofar as it is understood in these terms, is a relatively recent phenomenon. This makes it an interesting case for thinking about calculative expertise because it allows insight into practices of measurement when they are still relatively experimental, innovative and not yet institutionalised – even firmly established and hegemonic measurements like GDP were once experimental. Moreover, because it reveals the political context in which seemingly apolitical measurements take shape, it denaturalises these established measurements and helps us to think about the power of calculation as founded on the powerful assemblages of bodies, things,

relations and discourses in which they function, rather than as an inherent characteristic causing rationalisation and instrumentalisation.

The explosion of measurement in the British subsidised cultural sector resulted from a series of restructurings after 1980 (Selwood, 2002). Perhaps the most famous example of measurement that influenced the sector was the introduction of the discourse of the 'creative industries' in 1998 with the publication of the Creative Industries Mapping Document (see DCMS, 2001) which claimed to measure the contribution certain industries made to the British economy. Although this includes such industries as architecture and advertising, the cultural industries that were included, and many of which were state subsidised and supported in various ways, were reimagined as 'creative' and thought about increasingly in calculative terms while further blurring boundaries between 'culture' and 'economy'. Meanwhile, by 2002 the subsidised sector itself was made up of over 70 non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs). These publically funded agencies were responsible for different parts of the subsidised cultural sector and 95% of the government's cultural spending (Select Committee on Culture Media and Sport, 1999). It included English Heritage; Museums, Libraries and Archives; the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts; and Creative Partnerships, alongside the restructured Arts Councils and new and renovated 'creative industry' bodies such as the UK Film Council. These were all overseen by the new Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS): the first time 'culture' had been used in a departmental title.

The NDPBs were arranged around DCMS in a series of arms-length relationships mimicking the relationship DCMS had with Treasury. These relationships were based on funding being doled out with the expectation that DCMS, and in turn the NDPBs, would achieve agreed targets (Hewison, 2010). The diagram of government was one where responsibilities get cascaded down hierarchised centres of calculation (Miller and Rose, 2008): from the Treasury, to DCMS, to the NDPBs, to the cultural agencies, who return evidence of their 'impacts' and 'outcomes' back up the hierarchy in order to earn higher budgets or avoid cuts. This was overseen from 1999 by the Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team (QUEST) who would report on whether standards were being met and provide expert advice within the sector (Select Committee on Culture Media and Sport,

1999). This was typical of the 'New Public Management' that informed UK public sector restructuring since the 1980s (Belfiore, 2004; Hood, 1991), but also of advanced liberal government. Some centres have power over others (Treasury over DCMS, DCMS over the NDPBs) through the funding-evidence relationship. So in this diagram power accrues through this calculative logic, clearing the path for entry into the sector by calculative expertise.

This is revealing of the mentality of government behind the reform of the subsidised cultural sector: one that favours calculative logic as a way of rationalising the sector. When examined in this light, critique points out the negative aspect of this, such as that it is instrumentalising culture (Belfiore, 2012; Gray, 2007), but in doing so it effectively mirrors its claim. This risks seeing calculative reason as dominant simply because it is calculative reason, rather than because of the social relations through which it is mobilised. Understanding how these social relations have changed, and how power has flowed through them in new ways in the wake of calculative expertise, means expanding our analysis of the diagram to consider the emerging assemblage.

A key reason for doing this is that the assemblage did not function as the diagram envisioned. Apart from the difficulty associated with defining, let alone measuring, culture for the purposes of target-setting (Gray, 2009; McGuigan, 2004), QUEST, intended to be the focal point of what was imagined to be the right kind of expertise, lasted just three years, while one critic wondered if there had 'ever been any sanction if you never actually hit (the targets)' (Hewison, 2010: 7). Nevertheless, the various discourses and practices claimed to manifest 'impact' were adopted to different extents in parts of the sector, as the explosion of cultural data testifies. Agencies took on the responsibility of producing regime-appropriate changes in their organisation. Selwood (2002) documents many of the claims that were being made by agencies like the Arts Council regarding the supposed benefits of the arts to health, community, crime and other social issues since this mode of government began taking shape in the cultural sector in the 1980s. While targets were often a focal point of resistance (Hytner, 2003), this renovated understanding of the significance of the cultural sector was being absorbed by the actors and agencies that constituted it.

So despite the failure of the assemblage to mirror the diagram, calculative expertise has still reshaped the sector, linking it to a wide variety of social outcomes, even if the efficacy of these links was questioned. But more fundamentally, the presence of calculative expertise suggests it has utility in the power games being played in the sector. How can we understand the power, such as it was, calculative expertise came to represent here?

The discussion that follows this section draws on a six week period at a cultural consultancy in London called Cultural Consultants Incorporated (CCI).² These ‘cultural consultants’, as I call them, occupy many of the pathways and tension points between the cultural sector and the world imagined by the diagram of government. CCI formed in London in the late 1990s and when I visited in late 2010, they had around a dozen staff, as well as a number of other associates. While it is a private sector, profit-driven company itself, the majority of their clients were in the public sector, and include city councils, NDPBs, government departments and ‘third sector’ organisations like charities, although it did have some private sector and international clients.

CCI embodies government ‘beyond the state’ in two ways typical of liberal governmentality. One is the production of intelligible fields of action (Miller and Rose, 2008). Much of their earlier work involved forms of creative industries ‘mapping’, drawing together datasets and their own research to quantify creative and cultural activity for local government. As with the original mapping document, they did not just map a pre-existing reality but made the creative industries into a knowable, and so governable, object (Christophers, 2007). The other is the disciplining of particular actors within that field. Around 20% of CCI’s work was in evaluating cultural and creative sector agencies and programmes. These used technologies like surveys, interviews and financial analysis to provide assessments of performance against concepts valorised in the emergent diagram like social impact and value-for-money. Alongside other forms of calculative work, such as cost-benefit analysis and economic impact assessment, evaluation disciplines actors into producing the measurable performances expected under advanced liberalism. While this is useful for placing the role of this relatively new calculative cultural expertise within advanced liberalism, it tells us little about how it works in practice.

Methodologically, this means moving beyond the typically Foucauldian-governmentality focus on the minutiae of everyday life, such as research reports and technical notes, to consider the social relations in which they were produced. This required a more ethnographic method, using interviews and participant observation, to flesh out calculative expertise as calculative experts, humanising them, and recognising that just because they work within a calculative regime, they are not simply calculating automatons mindlessly putting the governmental diagram into effect (Boyer, 2008). Work on the anthropology of policy is a useful guide here (Schwelger and Powell, 2008). This literature recognises policy does not simply proceed down a hierarchy from the elite spaces where it is invented into society where it is realised, successfully or unsuccessfully. Instead policy takes shape across a wider field, involving multiple actors with multiple histories and geographies, and including those that are being governed as well as those seeking to govern (Schwelger and Powell, 2008; Shore and Wright, 2011). Policy is understood as a part of a story about the ordering of society and space. But rather than 'follow the policy', the strategy employed here was to 'follow the experts', although the aim is the same: to use a small site, studied in depth, as a window onto wider processes (Shore and Wright, 2011). This is not, then, intended to be a comprehensive survey of how calculative expertise works in the British subsidised cultural sector or within advanced liberalism more generally. Instead this is a concept-building exercise that will resonate with other cases, rather than necessarily explain them.

During my time at CCI I observed their work in the cultural sector, assisted with work tasks, and read through their database of current and completed projects. I conducted interviews with each of the consultants and other cultural sector actors associated with CCI as clients, partners and peers. The field notes and interviews were transcribed and analysed to identify key practices and discourses around which the work and world of the consultants takes shape. All direct quotes used below are drawn from the interview transcripts.

In the following sections I discuss how the calculative cultural expertise that CCI manifests functions in the subsidised cultural sector. This shows how their work builds

and maintains relations between themselves and other actors in the sector, as well as between other actors. Their building of relations is intended to construct particular power geometries, such as coalitions of actors whose interests can be made to line up, or in the manipulation of power relations between actors. When successful, this gives their clients, and themselves, claims on particular resources in the sector – resources that can be redeployed in further relational work. With regard to the calculative knowledge they produce, their relational work is around the production of objectivity. By presenting themselves, and so the calculative knowledge they produce, as objective, they effectively purify it of self-interest, and so give it power as a form of scientific authority. But this is wrapped up with relational work of other kinds, which I discuss in the second part. This is work that is not concerned with calculation directly, but is equivalent in that it is about the construction and manipulation of relations of power. The point here is that although calculation shapes how relational work is done, it is the latter that remains the key to understanding how political agency is constructed in the sector.

Becoming Objective

Objectivity haunted CCI's work. At 'scoping meetings', where the consultants met with their clients about what the research programme would contain, the question of what the consultants would and would not do often hung on what they deemed 'proper research'. At one such meeting, where I was taking notes for CCI, there was visible relief from the consultants when the client remarked, after some subtle prompting, that they were not seeking an 'advocacy document'. On the way back to the office from the meeting, I asked Robin, one of the senior consultants, why this was. He told me that CCI actively positioned itself as doing research that was scientific in its conception and execution, and did not simply say what the client wanted it to. Because clients often wanted the research to be useful to them as an advocacy tool, this presented an awkward dilemma for CCI which the scoping meeting was intended to sort out. But why were CCI concerned with this in the first place?

On the one hand, the idea that objective representations untainted by self-interest or other influences are possible underpins the target regime governing the UK cultural

sector, and calculative reason under advanced liberalism more generally. This is because, at the surface, the regime assumes that the representation of culture that targeting requires can be accurate, and so a fair basis on which to make decisions about resourcing. But on the other, why would CCI be concerned with being objective for a target regime that was failing anyway? Although the context of the target regime is important, objectivity was as much about the knowledge politics of the sector as any claims for scientific knowledge.

Much of CCI's work produced numbers: measures, multipliers, rates, proportions, and so on. Although numbers have a built-in form of objectivity and authority from societal 'trust in numbers' (Poovey, 1998; Porter, 1995), the quantification of the cultural and creative sector that CCI's work contributed to was often questioned for its robustness, purpose and usefulness – this was a point of tension for CCI whenever they engaged others in the sector. Selwood's 2002 judgement that much of the data gathering that had gone on in the cultural sector was 'spurious' reflected the attitude of others in the wider cultural policy community (Belfiore, 2009; Hewison, 2010; Tremblay, 2011). At a conference on the creative industries held in London in November 2010, creative economy luminary John Howkins wondered aloud how many in the sector really believed some of the numbers describing the social and economic impact of many cultural activities. Numbers are far from naively accepted as truth in the sector.

Mitchell (2002) argues that modernist, post-enlightenment forms of knowledge function through a system of representation. This system distinguishes the representational from the real: there are 'good' representations and 'bad' representations, but only one 'really' real we are always trying to capture. Criticism of attempts to represent the cultural sector and what it does, such as those above, reproduce this sense of a 'real' cultural sector, rather than undermine it. The criticism assumes it is a case of coming up with better representations, based on better models of how the cultural sector works, and better methods for describing it. As a consequence, those who convince they have the most accurate representations of the cultural sector, and so the best understanding of the 'real' cultural sector, have the authority to speak 'truth' about the sector. This is a mode of power (Allen, 2003), even if it is not an

absolute one. By taking Mitchell's perspective we can see that being objective is not as much about speaking truth as it is about exercising power.

Objectivity, then, requires more than just the production of numbers: it requires the production of objectivity. So how do they achieve this? According to one consultant:

'Objectivity doesn't exist, but there are degrees of staying truer to, I suppose, well established research principles, rather than just saying what the client wants' (Robin, senior consultant).

'Objectivity' contrasts with a client's subjectivity. Despite this, Robin still cleaves to the notion that you can produce something resembling 'the truth', in the form of good representations, about the sector if you follow 'well-established research principles'. This is what positivists call 'mechanical objectivity': objectivity derived from following rules, procedures and principles (Porter, 1995). The consultants talked about having to learn about statistically significant sample sizes, using data sets, non-leading interviewing, and transparency through technical notes around data manipulation and interpretation. This is combined with what Porter (1995) calls the 'disciplinary objectivity' of having recognised expertise:

'we can point a stick at the work we did on the creative economies in regions, the work we did on social outcomes in museums, the work we've done on economic impact... that are all I'd have thought pretty robust' (Matt, senior consultant).

But disciplinary objectivity also describes objectivity that comes from being part of a knowledge community with a consensus on method. So CCI hires people with backgrounds in the kinds of quantitative social sciences that have authority bestowed on them in the assemblage:

'The people we have here are people who are trained to do that kind of thinking and analysis. We're not all ex artists and arts managers here. Those guys out there are trained researchers, sociologists... Robin's a highly trained social researcher, think about it. Imran is a highly trained social scientist. Scientists aren't we?' (Matt, senior consultant).

It is useful to be able to call on both disciplinary and mechanical objectivity in the performance of objectivity. If good research practice is less critical, or time is being squeezed (as it often was – most rarely left the office before 7pm) the consultants can

rely on their own knowledge to make judgments on the meaning of particular data and justify it based on their disciplinary objectivity. But these are important too precisely because they are *performances* of objectivity (on performativity, see Butler, 1990). These performances shape the consultant's own subjectivities as objective researchers, and they have relational effects as well: if successful they convince clients, peers and auditors of the objectivity of the research. Objectivity emerges as a dimension of power from these relations.

Objectivity is relational in another sense as well. Conversations I had in interviews and around the office about objectivity often became conversations about client management. The unofficial client strategy of CCI, repeated to me numerous times, was to 'manage client expectations.' Competing demands make relationship management central to practices of objectivity. Without managing their relationships they cannot get away with producing work that is 'objective' because the clients will not necessarily be happy with the results. Stop being objective, and risk no longer having the authority they trade off.

CCI do a number of things to 'manage the expectations' of their clients. Apart from the scoping meeting referred to above, maintaining the relationship while maintaining objectivity often comes down to the negotiated manipulation of language. This can be done at the beginning:

'You can guide... clients 10 or 20 per cent this way or that way. You can't get them to reframe the question completely, because the problem that they've got is bounded by the *realpolitik* of whatever they're trying to do' (Allanah, associate).

Or it can be in the reporting of results: for one project CCI:

'did some data analysis and something like 30% of the projects had said they were happy with (it). And the initial wording from (the client) had been: "most projects felt happy with it", and in the end we actually changed it to, "a significant minority of projects"' (Carolyn, consultant).

When even this fails CCI has acted to protect their reputation. In one report that was made public, the client used CCI's introduction as a foreword for the report, but:

'they changed a lot of our phrasing, they made things sound really positive, where we wouldn't necessarily say it that way, and that was our report, with our name,

essentially it says this is what CCI put down, and we went back very clearly and said, look, this is your bit... it will go as a foreword from yourself into the report, but it won't go into the report as our introduction' (Carolyn, consultant).

So CCI's work is about more than just calculation. From the client's point of view, CCI's reputation for objectivity, maintained through these kinds of relational tactics, gives them authority-based power that, in turn, gives credibility to any claims being made based on their research. This *purifies* the claims, cleansing them of the taint of self-interest, by removing them from the messy politics of the sector and making them apparently objective truth (see also Christensen and Skærbæk, 2010; Latour, 1993), in the same way that 'truth' is based on representations removed from the messy 'real' cultural sector. For CCI, the objectivity produced by their relational and tactical work gives them knowledge-based authority, a form of power, in the assemblage, as a basis from which to pursue their interests. Calculative reason does not operate in the sector as an externally-imposed rationalising or instrumentalising force. It is being mobilised by actors within the sector as part of their own political projects.

Acting in the Assemblage

Over a period of a few days at one point during my stay, the consultants often gathered around a computer in groups of up to six, discussing a colourful map of London on the screen. The map had been created for a client who wanted to know where the districts in the city were with the highest proportion of 'creative' people:

'We created an index with seven different indicators... I had completely underestimated that amount of work it takes to build those indicators... So, we struggled. We presented on Monday, and it was a sort of qualified success... I would have liked to have wowed them a bit more, but they weren't wowed by it because it's actually not very wow-ey thing at the moment, it needs a lot more work' (Matt, senior consultant).

Another consultant sums up what he thinks their debates were about:

'I think that Matt's emphasis was on making it look good in a way that he thought the client would expect... My issue with the previous maps was I thought they were inaccurate, I thought they were just wrong. And I thought if the client made any

decisions based on them they'd be incorrect, and I prefer going with one that's far less attractive but a bit more accurate. Imran I think was torn between not caring that much about it, and... not having the time capacity to do that much more work on it.' (Jeff, consultant).

This story is illustrative of how calculation, such as that producing the map, is made at the intersection of a variety of concerns in CCI's day-to-day work (cf. Latour, 1993). Apart from objectivity, there are concerns over accuracy, presentation, impact and time, all being negotiated. Like objectivity, these have relational aspects and effects. Any illusion that calculative cultural expertise can sit outside of social context, already undermined by the recognition that objectivity is relational, collapses here: it is a multiply constituted relational actor. Calculative reason, which finds its power through the authority that accrues from the relation of objectivity this expertise produces, is deployed alongside other logics in the work of expertise. In the remainder of this section I will illustrate this with two examples: one regarding the use of affects other than those associated with numbers; and one that considers the different modes of power necessary to build politically useful coalitions.

CCI's research projects are often more than numbers. Many of their projects will include case studies. These are narratives ranging from a few lines to several pages describing particular people, events and places involved with the client's work. Case studies add depth, context, faces and stories to the picture drawn by the numbers. But they add something else too:

'Advocacy. You might present data... (but) for people to listen, or people to get things, they like to hear a story, a feel good story. Case studies are all about making you feel good: this project's fantastic, this is how it's impacted... it's something that they can hand to their funders, hand to their beneficiaries, partners that they're trying to work with, or volunteers' (Olive, consultant).

Case studies work on a different register to numbers. While numbers appeal to rationalist notions of truth, case studies appeal to a different affective domain. Drawing on Allen's (2003) power modalities, they can be used for seduction and persuasion, as opposed to number-generated authority.

Sometimes case studies are as important as numbers. On one occasion, I went with Jeff to a progress meeting for a project developing creative industries in an English city. The meeting was attended by Jeff as the evaluator of the programme, two council officers who provided the funding, and representatives of the creative industries involved. It was clear that budgets for such projects would be tightening, and the council officers needed evidence of the ongoing contribution of the programme. But while they wanted numerical evidence, they needed it combined with more qualitative information about the programme in the form of case studies. They said the people they report to were more interested in how they could make the programme look to the media.

When what counts as evidence is this fluid, consultants need to be adept at more than just number-crunching, and this meeting revealed another important dynamic shaping the assemblage in which different modalities of power matter. During the meeting pressure was put on Jeff to produce the case studies as soon as possible so that they could be used to get funding signed off. Due to his time constraints, and the fact that the brief for the evaluation did not originally require them, Jeff was reluctant to commit to what he foresaw as the writing of several long case studies. This pressure ranged from conciliatory tones ('We're talking five questions, ten paragraphs'), to bullying ('Do a little more than usual! This is important!'). In the end, the council officers negotiated much shorter case studies than Jeff expected, just four or five lines each, which he obliged them with: 'in total it's probably three hours more work than I'd have put in anyway, which is okay' (Jeff, consultant).

In this governmental assemblage agency is made possible by the ability to produce the necessary verifiable performances and reporting them to whichever auditing body is surveilling them. In this case, the auditing body is the council, represented by the officers. But the officers do not perform a straightforward auditing role. They were supportive of the programme, and were pulling in much the same direction as the others at the meeting, but in a way that led them through the necessary reporting requirements. Achieving this meant a combination of persuasion, coercion and negotiation at the meeting, resulting in particular actors (Jeff) producing the necessary materials. This story illustrates the need for various, contextually-shaped combinations of those modalities of power to smooth the circulation of the mobile traces (such as the

case studies) that hold the assemblage together. These combinations construct coalitions of actors, such as the people at this meeting, that get people working together, making possible the operation of political agency in the assemblage.

It is an aspect that CCI is heavily involved in. Speaking to Jeff later on, he reflected on the differences between himself and one of the more senior consultants, Regina, when faced with clients who want more than they are entitled to under the contract:

'I think that's partly because I haven't got the status to (say no). So Regina can say, very easily, that's not within our remit, and the client will absolutely accept that. But if I say that there's a difference... I assume at some level there's a power game relationship there, which is beyond my ken. And also it's an authority thing I guess... Regina's got authority. She's like a headmistress, whereas I'm clearly a primary school teacher' (Jeff, consultant).

CCI recognises the importance of such skills to coalition building. If successful action in the sector was just about producing accurate, objective, calculative knowledge, such skills would not be necessary. Nor would the production of case studies. But political agency is messier than this. Certainly governmental diagrams shape the sector. They result in actors emerging who facilitate the programmatic realisation of whichever logics inform that diagram. But in practice political agency can work through a variety of different modalities (Allen, 2003), and must engage with numerous tensions, making the assemblage that emerges a more complex actuality.

Conclusion

What insights can we draw about how calculative cultural expertise constructs political agency? From one point of view, political agency in the subsidised cultural sector remains the product of games of power: the rules may have changed, but not the fact of the game itself (Bourdieu, 1984). Calculative reason has not rationalised the sector according to its own internal logics. This stems from the fact that we cannot easily separate calculative logics from the social relations in which they are mobilised, and this is reflected in the relational work that calculative cultural expertise does, both in the production of calculative knowledge and the various other matters of concern they often find themselves engaging. These experts are not just automatons. In the

governmental assemblage that emerges (as opposed to the envisioned diagram), they work with a variety of resources and techniques and through a variety of power modalities to drive particular projects and shape the assemblage in particular ways (Allen, 2003; Barnett et al., 2008).

But this does not mean that nothing has changed regarding the construction of political agency. Numbers are increasingly important *resources* in the cultural sector. Because of calculative reason, their use can be captured and mobilised by a variety of different forces and actors working with, against, or at an angle to the 'centre' (Grundy and Smith, 2007). So numbers govern not just because they discipline or instrumentalise, but because they have been engendered as a resource. Recognition of their usefulness to power relations in this context has made performances that are measurable necessary *and* desirable. As a consequence, different kinds of actors capable of working with numbers become more important to the sector – 'scientists', as Matt put it, rather than 'artists and arts managers'. And these actors will produce performances that have particular relational effects. Key is the production of objectivity, which imbues calculation with power. But the production of objectivity remains bound up with all manner of matters of concern, so to reduce calculative experts to practitioners of objective calculation underplays the various contributions they are capable of making to the construction of political agency.

Of course, there is much to criticise here. Calculative renditions of culture risk reducing cultural processes to only what is measurable, and so miss their significance. If this effects how resources are distributed, it could have serious consequences for the sector's health. But blanket assessments that calculative reason instrumentalises or disciplines cultural activity concedes too much to it. This analysis shows that although calculative reason is significant, it has not necessarily colonised the subsidised cultural sector in the way imagined. Certainly calculation, and calculative expertise, has a growing prominence and influence in society today, but despite its own pretensions and the fears of its critics, political agency and power is not necessarily reduced to it.

Endnotes

1. Elsewhere, I too use the concept of 'instrumental cultural policy' to distinguish particularly calculative forms of cultural policy from other forms (see Prince, 2013).
2. This is a pseudonym, as are the consultants' names. I have been deliberately vague with details about clients, projects and dates to conceal identities.

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