

Art world interlocks and the production of taste*

Gerald S. Kenyon A feature of contemporary capitalist countries is the concentration of economic power. However, as Bourdieu (1984), and others have shown, such arrangements do not come about in structural or ideological vacuums. More particularly, symbolic power, in the form of taste, or 'cultural capital', is argued to be a major element in status attainment and maintenance processes. If such hegemonic models of society have any credence, there ought to emerge some consequences for aspects of the non-market economy, specifically, non-profit enterprises. Among others, two accommodations suggest themselves: first, in such a climate, non-profit organizations should increasingly take on the structural and organizational characteristics of the profit world; and second, the non-profit sector should serve to re-enforce dominant corporate ideology.

In the case of the former, non-profit enterprises have indeed taken on a number of characteristics of their profit oriented counterparts. For example, they are becoming increasingly institutionalized, professionalized, and bureaucratized (DiMaggio, 1986). With regard to ideological propagation, the direct involvement of the private sector in non-profit enterprises creates, at least hypothetically, a variety of avenues through which influence might flow, either by design or by circumstance.

With respect to the arts, and more specifically, the 'high cultural' end of the spectrum, in most Western countries, the private sector has become involved in the affairs of non-profit organizations ranging from public museums and galleries, to the many performing arts companies. Several forms of involvement have emerged, including direct participation through membership on governing boards, and indirect participation through various forms of patronage.¹ In the case of the latter, of course corporate patrons are not alone; they share

their benefactions with very sizable public appropriations (Cummings and Katz, 1987; Mulcahy and Swaim, 1982; Zolberg, 1983).² However, the 'conservative' political climates of the 1980s have been characterized by efforts of governments in several jurisdictions to shift greater responsibility to private corporations. The extent to which this has occurred, and in what forms, reveals much about the present-day social significance of both the arts and the corporate world. For example, the stronger ties between corporations and arts organizations raises questions about whether corporations have had any influence upon the nature of the arts and their 'product', and, whether these new relationships have any utility in the forging of stronger links within the corporate sector, and between it and government. Or, in the context of taste as symbolic power, if cultural capital is closely tied to 'class fractions' (Bourdieu, 1984), there should exist a significant linkage between high status arts organizations and high status corporate entities.

Thus, the purpose of the research reported here was to look more closely at the present connection between the arts and the private economy, with a focus upon those networks of relationships which create, maintain and use symbolic power. More particularly, an effort was made:

1. To determine, in part, the extent to which corporate networking behaviour has become a model for the arts, i.e., the extent to which corporate-like networks of power relations have been created among high status arts organizations; and
2. To examine the extent to which high status arts organizations serve as vehicles for strengthening power relationships among high status corporations.

Rationale

High status arts networks

Networks of persons with common interests and communication channels are important elements of contemporary society. They often depart from institutionalized social structure, yet serve their members' social or economic requirements effectively (Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988; Berkowitz, 1982). For example, contemporary art worlds are characterized by large numbers of persons who cooperate to produce, distribute and receive a wide range of arts products (Becker, 1982); a process which precipitates a variety of networks, both formal and informal.

An important node in most production networks has become the board of directors; the most formal instrument at the level of trusteeship or organizational control. But boards seldom act in social isolation. Directors bring with them extra-organizational linkages with individuals and organizations outside their own. In corporations, a common occurrence is the cross-appointment of directors (Useem, 1984; Carroll, 1986). Corporate 'interlocking' occurs within both similar and disparate economic sectors. Moreover, with the rise of institutionalized nonprofit organizations, one might expect corporate networks to 'spill over' into nonprofit enterprises (Useem, 1984), although not necessarily evenly. For example, Ornstein (1988) found that corporate representation on the boards of major Canadian universities and hospitals actually declined in the 1960s and 1970s.³ Although comparable analyses of Canadian cultural institutions have not been undertaken, casual observation, together with findings in other jurisdictions (Zolberg, 1983) suggest that there is a substantial involvement of representatives of dominant corporations in arts organizations. However, the nature of the

arts networks per se, and the patterns of corporate involvement in those networks, are not well understood.

This situation suggests two lines of inquiry. First, to what extent have arts organizations taken on the network characteristics of the private sector; and second, to what extent are arts organizations serving the interests of the private sector. With regard to the former, given the magnitude of high status arts organizations and their concomitant professionalization and bureaucratization, it could be expected that formal relations among them (such as board interlocks) would have been pursued, and for essentially the same reasons which allegedly motivate the private sector, namely, to control competition, to reinforce ideology, and to influence public policy.⁴

More specifically, a number of hypothetical benefits might accrue from well placed interlocks, including their potentiality as mechanisms of financial control, inter-organizational co-optation, class consolidation, elite integration and information flow (Richardson, 1985, p. 103). While this study was not designed to address all of these, the extent to which some arise in the context of high status arts organizations is considered.

In a more global context, if Bourdieu's cultural capital thesis is pursued, then high status arts organizations should attract high status individuals and high status corporate affiliations⁵. As DiMaggio (1987, pp. 443-444) has proposed:

1. High-cultural tastes or 'cultural capital' assist in developing or reinforcing relations with high status persons;
2. Possession of 'cultural capital' is related to positive outcomes in the status-achievement process;
3. Persons with wide-ranging networks develop 'tastes' for the widest variety of cultural forms;

4. The number of genres a person consumes is a function of his or her socio-economic status.

The arts as medium for corporate communication and consolidation

Although business involvement in the nonprofit sector in general has become well established, and ties between the arts and the corporate world well documented (Zolberg, 1983; Useem and Kutner, 1986), less is known about the extent to which prestige arts organizations serve as a medium for establishing indirect ties within corporate networks.

Analytically, one might account for corporate involvement in the arts in one of three ways: 1. as a form of altruism, i.e., supporting the arts for arts sake; 2. as a vehicle for the advancement of political ideology, i.e., the role of the state in general, and specifically with regard to the arts; or 3. as a mechanism for social control, i.e., the direct reinforcement of business objectives.

Altruism as an explanation is difficult to support. Surely this would be a luxury most corporations could not afford. By definition, the profit motive must enjoy high, if not first priority, except where an aficionado of the arts is in a strong position of control.⁶

With regard to political ideology, corporate representatives frequently call for reductions in government expenditure and greater private sector involvement in what have been largely public enterprises. Therefore, to be consistent, the private sector is obliged to support the arts. Surely this explanation is plausible to some extent, although indirect benefits, such as reduced taxation, may significantly offset largesse. Moreover, it would not account for levels of support varying substantially across the major divisions of the corporate world.

Probably the strongest case for corporate involvement in the arts lies in its instrumentality. In addition to symbolic power

in general, association with high status arts virtually guarantees a connection to various networks, including intercorporate, governmental, and class, resulting in the reinforcement of prevailing corporate (and usually dominant) ideology. The solidarity so achieved facilitates influence over government policy at local, provincial and federal levels. While not the only meeting ground, significant government involvement in the arts (Cummings and Katz, 1987), and the networks which follow, is likely to assure fruitful intercourse.

Finally, the intercorporate interlock literature addresses the question of whether interlocks strengthen intercorporate alliances, as opposed to class alliances, or both (Ornstein, 1984). Data from this study permit a look at the role of arts organizations in this context.

Data and their analysis

Some of the above propositions can be addressed empirically by examining such phenomena as the composition of high status arts boards and patterns of patronage, particularly at the corporate level. For this study, analyses were restricted to performing arts companies involved in the production of ballet, opera and symphonic music. More specifically, information was obtained through selected interviews and document analysis pertaining to the leading five companies in the province of Alberta: The Alberta Ballet, The Calgary Opera, The Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, The Edmonton Opera, and The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. All are well established professional companies, with full seasons, and annual budgets ranging from 1.5 to 4.5 million dollars.

Each 'significant' person associated with one or more of the arts companies was identified, including members of the board of directors, artistic directors, senior management staff⁷ and major donors and patrons.⁸The data

represented the five-year period 1985-1990⁹. Corporate and professional affiliations were ascertained, permitting an analysis of both direct and indirect network ties (Berkowitz, 1982). In addition, a content analysis of taped interviews and company documentation was undertaken.

In Canada, the western province of Alberta is well suited as a context for examining the significance of corporate involvement in the arts. It supports a number of professional performing arts companies and institutions, and for several years, its government has been among the leaders in per capita financial support of the arts.¹⁰ Annual grants are provided both directly, through allocations of the Ministry of Culture and Multiculturalism, and indirectly through The Alberta Foundation for the Performing Arts.¹¹ The organizations studied in this project also receive substantial municipal and federal government contributions. In addition to such public patronage, there is a record of substantial corporate support in the Province.

By examining information supplied by each of the five companies, and consulting standard business reference materials¹², it was possible to create a data base comprised of 810 entries: 567 persons and 243 firms and foundations. The organizational role or position of each person was recorded, together with their corporate or professional affiliation, if any.¹³ Table one summarizes the several dimensions of the data base.

Table one. Nature of the data: five Alberta performing arts companies (1985-1990)

Organization	Directors and Senior Managers	Patrons	
		Persons ¹	Corporations ²
Alberta Ballet	70	13	39
Calgary Opera	56	19	29
Calgary Philharmonic	62	100	63
Edmonton Opera	43	20	43
Edmonton Symphony	96	88	69
Total	327	240	243

1 annual contributions of \$1000 or more
 2 annual contributions of \$5000 or more

Results

Most of the findings were based upon the use of sorting and cross tabulation procedures to determine the nature and extent of the several interlocking configurations of interest. The key variables were: name, position (in relation to arts organization), profession, name of professional or corporate affiliation, and type of corporation or profession. For most variables, the data were complete. However, in some instances, information was not available. This was particularly a problem in the case of 'corporate or professional affiliation', and 'type of corporation'. Approximately ten per cent of the data were missing for these variables. However, it should be noted that the major effect of missing data in these analyses would be an under-estimation of both the degree of interlocking, and the density of the network.

Interlocks among arts organizations

Interlocking among the five performing arts companies can occur both directly and indirectly. Direct interlocks are those whereby common board membership occurs between two or more organizations.¹⁴ Indirect interlocks exist in two ways: where directors have common

corporate or professional affiliations; or where arts organizations share common patrons, whether they be individual or corporate.

Table two shows the extent of both direct and indirect interlocking of board directors among the five major performing arts companies examined in this study. Table Three gives the interlocking among arts companies via patrons.

The data reveal that, unlike major corporations, the common appointment of directors is virtually absent among prominent performing arts companies. Also unlike their corporate counterparts, neither artistic directors nor members of senior management serve on other boards, as is often the case for the 'chief executive officer' of the large private firm. Perhaps this should not be surprising, for at least two reasons. First, given common sources of audience and patron support, joint membership may be regarded as somewhat of a conflict of interest.¹⁵ Second, since directors serve on a voluntary basis, members may be constrained by the limited time available for such activity. While location might be regarded as a serious constraint, since the two major

Table two. Director interlocks among five performing arts companies¹

	Ballet	Cal opera	CPO	Edm opera	ESO
Ballet	-	2	1	1	2
Cal opera	20	-	3	0	0
CPO	7	9	-	0	1
Edm opera	26	23	1	-	0
ESO	42	19	3	31	-
Total directors	(62)	(53)	(56)	(34)	(86)
Total ties	101	76	25	82	98
Unknown affil	21	4	5	9	3

1 above the diagonal: direct interlocks; below the diagonal: indirect interlocks

cities are 300 kilometres apart, the absence of significant numbers of direct ties applies to within-city interlocks as it does between. The Alberta Ballet is 'shared' between the two cities and draws its board membership from several parts of the Province.

However, when it comes to 'indirect' ties, the figures in table two show that the high status arts world is linked together through the corporate and professional affiliations of their board directors. In total, there are 382 direct and indirect ties in a network involving the five performing arts companies.

Professional performing arts companies typically rely on substantial patronage, both public and private. As shown in table three, the individual, corporate, and foundation patrons of the arts organizations studied here represent a sizable network of 282 ties. Thus, when taken together with the ties among directors, there are at least 664 links among the five companies. Theoretically, of course there are many more possible connections. Though the 'density' is not high, it is by no means trivial, and could be under-estimated, given the missing data, and the fact that intercorporate ties per se were not

Table three. Indirect interlocking among five performing arts companies via individual and corporate patrons

	Ballet	Cal opera	CPO	Edm opera	ESO
Ballet	-	11	16	10	17
Cal opera		-	21	6	9
CPO			-	9	17
Edm opera				-	25
ESO					-
Total patrons	47	46	162	56	152
Total ties	54	47	63	50	68

a part of this investigation. It would appear that these organizations at least are substantially linked together by their patrons.

Arts mediated corporate interlocks

In the previous section, the question was addressed of whether there is a network tying together some of the major elements of the performing arts, and if so, to what extent it is dependent upon corporate and professional involvement through either board membership or patronage. There is of course another side to the coin, and that is the question of whether the arts serve to strengthen inter-corporate or corporate-government networks. Since art worlds are comprised of much more than the performance itself, it is hypothesized that their attractiveness to corporate and professional worlds is neither aesthetic, nor altruistic. Rather, in contemporary capitalist societies, the arts have become an effective vehicle for the display and use of symbolic power. While there are several dimensions to the question, only one will be focused upon here; namely, the issue of whether it is reasonable to believe that the arts serve as a communications node, facilitating either class-wide consolidation, sector-specific consolidation, or both. This question was pursued by following four steps:

1. By determining the pattern of direct ties between corporations and the arts;
2. By determining the extent to which those companies that support the arts represent the dominant corporations of the country and of the region;
3. By determining the extent to which there are industry specific ties to the arts;
4. By determining the extent to which the arts facilitate corporate-government networks.

Although space limitations do not permit the presentation of the data, for those corporations and firms having the greatest number of ties

(five or more) with high status performing arts, the pattern is one where the ties tend to be distributed across all five arts companies. The question remains, however, as to whether these firms are representative of the dominant companies of the country, or merely a cross-section of all corporations. The findings revealed that most are among the 'top' companies, in terms of size and position in the national and regional economy.^{16,17} On the question of whether interlocks are class-wide or industry specific, it has already been shown that the firms with the greatest number of ties to the high status performing arts are for the most part representative of the leading corporations, thus lending some credence to the hypothesis of class-wide influence. However, by casting a wider net, it is possible to determine whether certain industries 'favour'¹⁸ the arts. The information in table four indicates that there is a clustering around certain categories of firms. However, part of the explanation lies in the nature of the regional economy; Alberta is dominated by the oil and gas industry. Agriculture, while being the second largest industry, is nevertheless greatly under-represented in the number of ties. Moreover, banking and financial services tend to be concentrated in central Canada, yet rank closely behind the oil and gas industry.

Finally, in addition to the involvement of the private sector in the high status performing arts world, there are other important 'players'. For instance, in Canada, as in most other countries, government at all levels has become an important patron. Grants are routinely provided for operating support, company development and touring expenses. Inherent in these arrangements are strong ties between a variety of public agencies and the arts companies. Although these fall largely in the category of patronage, a number of board members have professional affiliations with

Table four. Number of ties by corporation type or profession

	Ballet	Opera	CPO	Edm opera	ESO	Total
Banking/Fin. Srvcs	13	10	26	11	33	93
Oil and gas	10	15	42	5	10	82
Law	9	7	18	6	18	58
Medicine	5	3	7	11	29	55
Media	2	7	6	7	15	37
Other resources	2	7	15	3	5	32
Education	6	5	5	7	7	30
Manufacturing	2	2	7	2	13	26
Food and beverage	2	1	3	-	8	14
Other professional	3	1	2	-	4	10
Other	25	30	24	22	78	179

government agencies and departments. An analysis of the data revealed that for the five performing arts companies studied in this investigation, there were five federal, 47 provincial and nine municipal ties.

Thus, corporations which depend heavily on government policies, such as oil and gas industries, are afforded an additional communications channel, and one in a high status context.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the networks of relationships between the private economy and high status arts from two perspectives: 1. to determine if there is evidence to suggest that corporate behaviour has become a model for the arts, i.e., to what extent have corporate-like networks of power relations been created among high status arts organizations; and 2. to examine the extent to which high status arts organizations serve as vehicles for strengthening power relationships among high status corporations. The evidence suggests that there is a sizable degree of interlocking among the five professional performing arts companies

studied here, but made up of few direct interlocks between various pairs of companies. Rather, network connections are facilitated largely through indirect interlocking via corporations and professional firms.

Further, the findings tend to confirm the DiMaggio propositions; thus, elite integration and symbolic power explanations have some merit. High status corporations are attracted to the high status arts, with the consequence that they are well positioned in high status networks comprised of other like entities, which in turn afford the opportunity to strengthen communication channels not only among corporations, but also between them and government at all levels. Whether such findings would hold beyond a regional context is the subject of the next stage of the inquiry. Work is now in progress involving the analysis of six major Canadian performing arts companies: The Canadian Opera Company, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, The National Ballet, Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal, The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and the Toronto Symphony.

Notes

1. Although the vast majority of corporations do not support the arts, those that do are no longer content with annual, largely unnoticed contributions to the general fund. Rather their involvement is likely to be more direct in return for higher levels of corporate visibility. Thus, it is not unusual for companies to 'lend' expertise in the financial management of organizations, to supply representatives to boards and fund raising committees, to sponsor specific performances or exhibitions, and to use events as venues for special entertaining.
2. In most western countries, support of the arts, particularly those in the realm of so-called 'high culture' comes from a mix of public and private sources, in addition to revenues from ticket sales. Typically, performing arts companies can expect performance income ('earned') to provide at most half of their operating budgets. In most jurisdictions, public support has been formalized through the creation of government agencies and the necessary enabling legislation to fund and control arts organizations. In Canada, the responsibility for public support falls to all three levels of government, federal, provincial, and municipal, each with its own mandate. Arts organizations expect and receive financial support from each. However, in recent years, government policy has encouraged greater private sector support of the arts, which has met with some success.
3. However, he goes on to speculate that more recently there is reason to believe that corporations have gone on a 'social and political offensive' (Ornstein, 1988, p. 383).
4. Despite what might be regarded as considerable common cause, there is some evidence that cooperation has been resisted in one area, namely management (Freedman, 1986).
5. In lamenting about the state of arts organizations per se, the comments of one observer revealed both the intimacy within arts networks and the role of such networks in status attainment. In reference to the 'top cultural decision makers in the country', Mays (1985, p. 27) states, I see no reason to make terribly many distinctions among these people, whether they be board members, or people who are here being called cultural managers, directors of organizations, or whatnot. It seems to me that if they are not on boards, they are married to somebody who is. If they are not married to somebody who is, they are going to the same cocktail parties. If they are not going to the same cocktail parties, they are going to be going to them next year, because one of the things that boards in this country are about is social climbing.
6. Although anecdotal, and in the context of television, note the following: 'My company spends a quarter of a billion dollars a year on TV advertising and we do not do it because we are patrons of the arts. We do it to sell cars and trucks.' Lee Iacocca, President and CEO, Chrysler Corporation (Iacocca, 1990, p. 9).

7. Restricted to General Manager and Development Officer.
8. Defined by amount of contribution: \$1000 or more for individuals, and \$5000 or more for foundations and corporations.
9. A board member or patron was included if they were associated with a particular company at any time during the five years between 1985 and 1990. In the case of the Edmonton Opera, data from the early years of the period were not available. However, there is considerable overlap from year to year (approximately 80 per cent, in the case of board members).
10. Contributions from provincial governments have been growing in recent years. By way of comparison, the combined support of the arts from provincial sources now exceeds that of the Federal Government.
11. One of five 'arms-length' bodies. The other four are: The Alberta Art Foundation, The Alberta Cultural Heritage Foundation, The Alberta Foundation for the Literary Arts, and The Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.
12. E.g.: *Alberta business who's who and directory*, The Financial post's *Directory of directors*, and The Toronto globe and mail's *Report on business magazine* of June, 1989, which contains the annual report on the top 1000 companies in Canada.
13. In most instances, the affiliation was direct, i.e., as a paid employee, usually in senior management, or as a member or the firm's board of directors. In a small number of cases, the affiliation was indirect, i.e., through spousal or other family relationships.
14. By obtaining data over a five year period, this, of course, is a somewhat liberal definition. However, given membership continuity, and the likelihood that in the short run, a director's influence would probably continue after leaving the board, the definition is regarded as largely valid.
15. However, interview material revealed that in the case of the volunteer member of the board, it is apparently not uncommon for serial membership, i.e., moving from one arts organization to another over a period of time.
16. In the tradition of corporate interlock research, different indicators are used, including gross assets, gross revenues, and number of employees. As indicated in the notes to table five, different measures were chosen, based on the nature of the firm, whether the context is national or regional, and to some extent, the availability of information.
17. Upon assessing the stature of those corporations in this table for which actual rankings were not available, it was found that most are regarded as leaders in their sectors. For example, Bennett Jones is one of the largest legal firms in Calgary, and has the former Premier of the Province as a senior partner; Canterra Energy has close ties to Nova Corporation; DuMaurier Council for the Performing Arts is funded by the Imperial Tobacco Company; and Re/Max is among the largest real estate companies in the country. On the other hand, Western Gas Marketing was unranked on any of the lists consulted.
18. Or, in the context of this research, whether the high status arts 'favour' certain industries.

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