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SPECIAL ISSUE: *Mapping an Altered Landscape: Cultural Policy and Management in Ireland*

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Thank you very much to the organisers for inviting me to be here. I'm not going to speak from the perspective of the Heritage Council, per se, because this is about cultural policy; it is not about any one particular group of people.

I'm going to divide my talk into three parts. The first part I will describe as tweets – my colleague Pat Collins (beside whom I was sitting) said to me there is no point in trying to summarise, just read the tweets – I don't have a smart phone and I couldn't read the tweets over his shoulder, but people in this room and outside this room were tweeting about the conversation as it went along. So I did the old-fashioned thing and I wrote down a few quotes. So I'm going to start with a couple of quotes. They are in no particular order and I don't necessarily agree with all of them as will become obvious as we go along. The second part is going to be a rant, and it will take up exactly where Sheila [Pratschke] took up as well, which is that there is something seriously wrong with Irish society right now that we need to repair. We need a revolution. And it has to happen. And people in this room and our associates are where it is going to have to happen because it is not happening anywhere else. Then, finally I am going to top it off with some 'asks', as it were, in other words, things that I would like to see featuring either in the policy or in the philosophy of the policy itself.

Let me start with the tweets. As I say, these quotes come in no particular order... 'The right to make art is in tandem with the right of people to have culture'... 'Luck is not policy'... 'Culture is like political catnip' ... 'They [Scottish Dentists] are not cultural people' (as an aside, I don't know what a cultural person is, or that everyone isn't one)... 'An audience of citizens who wants to access culture'. The Minister who was here today wants to create one of those. Which is great; it is good news for us. And I paraphrase the final one because I couldn't write it all down, but it is that notion that somehow or other the creative edge of culture and arts can 'bob around like a flotilla of tugs and brightly painted boats in the wake (or in the slipstream) of the great big established liners'. Well, we all know who populates liners!

So now for the rant. The collapse of the banks and of those who in concert with them in the body politic, ran them, has created a power vacuum that has been filled with conservative, grey-suited bean counters whose neo-liberal agenda is finishing off the job that our delinquent bankers and their political acolytes started. Bureaucracy has replaced not just policy but also imagination, creativity and bravery in public life. We need to stop this. So to those speakers already today who railed against the stranglehold of administrati, I applaud you. Business and culture are not incompatible but to those who have suggested that our collective, that is, the arts, culture and heritage, needs to man-up to the new reality and language of metrics and job creation, output, bums-on-seats, blah blah blah... We've all heard it before. I quote back at you a news report from this morning where the President of the European Science Foundation said that the reason why Irish scientists are not as successful as they should be in ESF funding is because their submissions focussed too much on job creation and not enough on pure science. What in the past would be called alchemy, the joy of experiment and new uncharted

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waters, the very things that make art and music and drama and literature and design and so on... magic. Once again we are behind the emerging zeitgeist.

We had a minister here this morning in the room and we missed the opportunity to speak to him directly, to plant a clear and simple message in his receptive head. The message that investment in culture is investment in society. That value is not measurable in pounds, shillings and pence. It's much more precious than that. It is good social policy because culture, the arts, heritage, you name it whatever way you want to, is how and where society self-critiques, self-creates and self-loves. Moribund culture is the sign of a society in a death spiral. Irish society is in a crisis not because the banks have failed but because in our efforts to save the beloved banks we have sacrificed our society and we have sacrificed what one speaker referred to as 'polis'. The years and years of general neglect of social wellbeing by successive governments has made us particularly vulnerable to the economic crisis because the creative sparks that we need to reinvent how we do things are too tiny and too disparate. Those creative sparks derive from the smithies of cultural self-generation. So it is clear that we need to be much more forceful in asserting the vital and the existential importance of heritage, of the arts and of culture. A society without these is not a society – a society that does not hold a mirror up to itself is not a society, it is a club, and an exclusive one at that.

The crisis in the arts, in heritage and in culture is also playing out in the universities, by the way. I work in a university. We feel acutely the stabbing nibs of the bottom-line bureaucrats who've lost sight of what education is for and have replaced the true meaning of education with utilitarianism. It's a kind of grubby, greasy-fingered version of education as a commodity. So the same problem exists here too, and I find myself angered, I have to admit, by the complicit giggles accompanying Aidan Pender's remarks on the existence of 'academic literature' on tourism. Why should that be funny? You know, in this distinctly anti-intellectual society of ours real, dispassionate, expert knowledge is trumped by seat-of-the-pants flying. Poor knowledge is like poor art – it's meaningless. We can no longer afford to allow ourselves to be governed by poor knowledge.

So, here are my 'asks': We need a policy that is about 'polis', in the traditional Ancient Greek sense of the word. We need to grow up as a society and speak openly about the importance of culture and the importance of maintaining culture. Benign neglect as a modus of parenting culture is no longer good enough. It never was. We need a policy that champions culture and that champions the principle of fostering and supporting cultural activity and cultural thinking as essential, routine and normative social governance. We clearly need a policy whose nucleus is trust. Artists of all types need to be left to do what they do. To be the awkward moment. To be the discordant voice, the magicians that shake us all out of cultural complacency and ward off today's tendency not just towards cultural amnesia but also towards cultural ignorance.

The anarchy of cultural creativity is not to be feared, even by the government and the civil service. We need, as the Minister says, a policy that has, as a core value, cultural education, contexted in an envelope of active, engaged, reflective, culturally-astute citizens. Which is to say, a real society, a cogent society. Which is why I button-holed him after he spoke, before he left the room with just one suggestion which I will share with you. Yes, we need a National Cultural Policy, because we need government to step up to that plate. They need to start looking after society. Not just us, not just artists and sculptors and writers and musicians but actually this is for the whole of society. I said to him that the policy will be great but actually a really positive step would be for the government to openly and publically sign up to the Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005). The Faro Convention, for those of you not familiar with it, is a convention which preserves and declares the right of the public to participate in culture

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and in cultural heritage. That is something we have studiously ignored in the country. Finally, we need a policy that encircles culture in its fullest sense and doesn't try to negotiate any traditional divides between arts, heritage, crafts etc. It's all culture. A policy that recognises that culture is all of these things, and is at its most creative and inspiring when these worlds, when these 'silos', these separate disciplines, collide. Silos and culture are like oil and water, they don't mix because culture is mix. We need a wider definition to allow for what is happening now and what will be happening in the future. In other words, we need to make sure that we let the future happen.

Conor Newman is a senior lecturer in archaeology at the School of Geography and Archaeology, NUI Galway, and acting director of the Centre for Landscape Studies based at the Moore Institute. He directed the Discovery Programme's archaeological survey of Tara and has published extensively on the subject. He was visiting professor of Celtic archaeology at the University of Toronto on three occasions, and in 2011 was awarded the British Academy's John Coles Medal for Landscape Archaeology. He is the chairman of the Heritage Council.

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