

Funding the Future

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I was shocked by this story in the [Guardian](#) this morning:

Artists and musicians have accused the government of neglecting the country's "cultural national health" by pursuing a "catastrophic" 50% funding cut to arts subjects at universities, which could come into effect from autumn.

One of the lesser known parts of my career is the five years I spent as a director of an undergraduate and postgraduate theatre school in London, to which I dedicated a lot of time as it transitioned from the control of its founder into an independent entity that then merged with the University of the Arts. I worked for the school because I very strongly believed in the importance of accessible education in the arts.

The government does not. It says it wants to reallocate about £18 million a year to nursing and computer studies.

I have three observations. First, there is no shortage of money. We now know that. We can waste tens of billions a year on pointless track and trace testing, none of which works, but not apparently fund the arts.

Second, modern monetary theory does, of course, reiterate that point. Money is available for appropriate decisions by government. There is literally no reason for this supposed rationing at present.

Third, there is something much more sinister about this. This rationing does, of course, mean that access to the arts is mainly targeted on those least able to afford to participate in them. There is class war in such measures. The 'unimportant' arts are not for those without means is the actual message being sent out.

But there is another message too, which is that the arts must be rationed because they are, by definition, a place for subversion. The whole importance of the arts comes from the fact that they should make us look at the world in a different way to that in which we are used to doing so. Art makes us reappraise what is important. The questioning of value is implicit within art or, in my opinion, what is offered is entertainment but not art, and the two are quite different.

Art builds new narratives. It seeks out change. It promotes understanding. It challenges, threatens, informs, subverts and should simultaneously suggest the mechanisms for building better, or it does not do its job. But of course, this is not what a far-right government of the type that we have wants.

We have a government whose narrative is of control, suppression and denial in all its many forms. The arts threaten that narrative. And so, just as at one time books were burnt, in the modern UK the arts must be suppressed. The ability to build new narratives is to be curtailed. Few decisions are as sinister as this.