

Arts Funding and the Cultural Wars; the continuing saga

Josephine Caust

University of Melbourne

Email: jo.caust@unimelb.edu.au

Abstract

Cultural policy and arts policy in particular has been a site of much contention and discussion in Australia over the past decade. The events of the past 2 years have taken this to another level and shown major ideological schisms in the present political approach. While the established arts sector has been protected and consolidated, the emerging sector, individual artists, and small organisations have all been negatively impacted. These policy changes suggest a retreat to a different cultural period; a time when Australia based its national identity on its English colonial founders. What this period highlights also though is the vulnerability of artists, the political framing of arts practice and the philosophical contradictions around the nature of arts funding.

Keywords: Arts Funding, Governments, Cultural Wars, Arts Organisations, Artists.

Word Count: 6,120

Background

In early 2013 the Federal Labor Government in Australia announced a cultural policy, *Creative Australia*, which resulted in significant promises of budget increases to the Australia Council, the national arts funding body. However the Coalition Party (conservatives) became the national government in September 2013 and rejected Labor's cultural policy. In May 2014 the Australia Council did not receive the increase in funds it had been previously promised under the former Labor government as part of the *Creative Australia* recommendations. Nevertheless in August 2014 an internal strategic review at the Australia Council, a follow up to the Trainor/James Review of 2012, announced changes to art form assessment processes. As part of this review there was a promise of a 6 year funding commitment to selected arts organisations. In December 2014, Arts Minister George Brandis removed more than \$6m from the Australia Council literature budget to set up a National Book Council in his ministerial portfolio. Then in May 2015 Minister Brandis announced that he was setting up a new arts funding mechanism under his personal aegis in the federal department for the arts. This program would be called 'the National Program for Excellence in the Arts'. To fund this new program he announced that he was removing a total of \$104.8 Million from the Australia Council budget over the following four years (2015-19). When announcing this budget cut to the Australia Council, Brandis also directed that the Australia Council should not make any cuts to the arts organisations that were part of their Major Arts Organisations remit. Thus the budget cut to the Australia Council would only affect funding allocated to the small to medium arts organisations and individual artists.

The arts sector was both divided and distressed by these events. Many individuals and organisations protested directly to the Arts Minister with no result. At the same time those unaffected by the changes, (e.g. those funded by the major organisation's board), mostly stayed quiet. Then a Senate Inquiry was initiated by the Labor Party and the Greens Party to address the issue. Two thousand plus submissions were received by the Inquiry. The Coalition government was ostensibly a member of the Senate Inquiry committee but did not participate in the rounds of information gathering. The arts

community continued to protest about the situation while the Australia Council stayed silent. In August 2015 the Australia Council announced the cancelling of any further funding rounds for the rest of 2015.

In September 2015 Tony Abbott was deposed as Prime Minister by another conservative, Malcolm Turnbull. This led to Minister Brandis losing his portfolio of the Arts and a new minister for the arts being installed. Within a few weeks this new Minister, Mitch Fifield, announced another policy change – there would continue to be a new direct government arts fund as created by former Minister Brandis, but instead of calling it ‘the National Program of Excellence’ it would be called ‘Catalyst–Australian Arts and Culture Fund’. At the same time the new Minister announced that he would be returning some of the money to the Australia Council taken by the previous Minister (\$32 million out of a total of \$104.8 million). Just before the 2016 May budget hand-down, a wave of successful Catalyst recipients was announced. This announcement was followed shortly by the calling of a national election on May 6th. On May 13th the Australia Council announced cuts to 62 arts organisations across the country. The country is now in the throes of a national election and the outcome will be known by July 3rd. The outcome of the election will likely have an impact on the future of arts funding. This paper considers the unfolding of these recent events, the philosophical context of art funding and the potential long term impact of the changes in Australia.

Governments and the Arts

The relationship between the arts, arts funding and governments is often dynamic, volatile and contested. Differences in approaches to arts funding can be influenced by various factors such as artforms, social values, locations, cultures, political affiliations, religious beliefs and gender (Brooks 2001). When Brooks (2001) tried to establish why certain groups oppose government support for the arts in the US there were contradictions within the reasoning for their opposition or support. Those opposed to arts funding saw it as providing support for an educated elite, fostering anti-religious sentiment, encouraging support of left wing activity, and letting government be involved in decision making about activity that they believed should be free of government interference. Those in favour of government funding for the arts saw it as support for activity that preferenced the disadvantaged, encouraged diverse expression, assisted in nation building and provided an important social outlet.

It is asserted though that in general terms arts funding tends to favour existing dominant social hierarchies while underprivileged and less notable groups receive little support by comparison (Feder & Katz-Gerro 2015). There is some evidence too that political parties from all persuasions tend to allocate a similar amount of funding to the arts sector (Getzner 2015; MacNeill et al 2013) although others have observed a distinct difference between political groups (Lewis and Rushton 2007). Recent events in the UK suggest a conservative political agenda is connected with reductions in government arts expenditure especially to arts activity that is not seen as ‘high art’ (Chatzichristodoulou 2013; Harvie 2015). Further the priorities of political parties may differ with conservative parties tending to preference larger institutions and private philanthropy while political parties aligned to the middle or left showing more interest in supporting art for the disadvantaged or encouraging industry models (Caust 2014; Harvie 2015). Alternatively why governments support arts funding is described as,

Left-wing governments are expected to favor culture spending because of an ideology of redistribution, but at the same time right-wing governments are expected to favor culture spending as a way of catering to high-income voters (Getzner 2015:81).

Nevertheless it has also been observed that parties from both sides of the political fence will tend to favour the major cultural institutions (Bereson 2001; Getzner 2015) although this is more evident under conservative parties (Getzner 2015). It seems that there is tension between large institutions which get the majority of the allocated funding and smaller organisations which get much less (Feder & Katz-Gerro 2015). Generally though all political parties see a ‘use’ for arts funding that is not

necessarily related to the arts practice it is supporting. So arts funding can be seen as an instrumental mechanism to ensure certain political/economic/social outcomes that are not necessarily connected with the arts practice itself (Belfiore 2007; Gray 2008). In this model artists and arts organisations have to demonstrate that their activity supports the attainment of the funder's goals such as participation, access and social engagement. This means the way art can be defined or described is changed by the engagement and priorities of the funders.

It is 'good art' because it is useful art, which can produce tangible and measurable social benefits rather than relying on aesthetic qualities, artistic excellence or conceptual innovation (Chatzichristodoulou 2013: 306).

Further it is observed that arts funding in recent contexts can be seen as a mechanism to support arts practices that make money rather than supporting practices that are not focussed on generating income (Chatzichristodoulou 2013). This is in contrast to how arts funding was originally conceived as a means of ameliorating the impact of the market place (Williams 1981). Getzner (2015) asserts that,

...GDP is the main determinant of public cultural spending. Growth in GDP leads to increases in cultural spending, both in the short term as well as in the sense of a long-term, stable relationship (2015: 62).

So this would suggest that in good economic times arts funding tends to be more generous than in challenging times. The conservative coalition in the United Kingdom recently demonstrated an economic 'austerity' approach when they oversaw cuts to 1,480 small cultural organisations in 2011 (Chatzichristodoulou 2013). Over a four year period from 2010–2014, the Arts Council of England's budget was cut by £100 million resulting in a loss of around 140 companies nationwide (Harvie 2015). The cuts to central arts funding were then copied by local governments particularly in conservative regions, leading to even greater losses of £1.58 billion across the country (Harvie 2015).

It is also noted that while arts funding is generally a very small percentage of a government's budget, there is much attention paid to it by politicians in terms of the benefits it offers to their electorates (Bertelli et al 2014). If politicians do get directly involved in arts decision making though, there can be pressure exerted to favour arts organisations or individuals associated with their particular electorate or party (Bertelli et al 2014). Arts funding and so called 'pork barrelling' can also be seen to be directly related (Denemark 2000).

Retracing recent events

In 2014 the then Minister of the Arts George Brandis became angry at some visual artists who protested about the treatment of refugees on Manus Island and Nauru by threatening to withdraw their participation in the Sydney Biennale. The artists objected to the major sponsor of the Biennale being Transfield Holdings who are the providers of security services to the island's facilities. At the time Minister Brandis told artists that they did not have the right to object to what an arts sponsor might be otherwise involved with. Artists should not 'bite the hand' that feeds them essentially.

Brandis took this further though and told the Australia Council that they should not fund artists who were involved in these actions. If the artists could not accept money from Transfield, then they should not be receiving money from the government arts agency either. However the Australia Council maintained a 'dignified' silence at the time. They neither provided solidarity with the protesting artists nor publicly agreed with the Minister that they should punish them by withdrawing funding from the artists involved. Was this inaction seen by Brandis as disloyalty? Did he decide then that the arts world needed a good shakeup and he would be the one to provide it?

One year on and Brandis had created his new 'Program for Excellence' by stealing a sizeable proportion of the Australia Council's forward budget. He did not give the Council any warning of this imminent action. In addition he 'told' the Council that they were not allowed to 'make up' the

loss of funding by taking any money from the big end of town –the major performing arts organisations. In this action he affirmed a conservative approach to arts funding where major cultural institutions are favoured at the expense of the smaller to medium sector (Getzner 2015; Harvie 2015). He stated in addition that,

I think the Australia Council ought to continue to have the principal role in arts funding in Australia... but, that being said, I do not favour the view that it ought to be a monopoly funder of the arts. I think that the idea of a funding mix with some programs administered through the ministry and most programs administered through the Australia Council is a healthier and more contestable way to do arts funding (Brandis qtd. in McKenzie Murray The Saturday Paper 2015).

Brandis's said he was supportive of the Australia Council and arts funding in general, but he believed that setting up another government arts funding mechanism was a form of 'competition' policy for the sector which he believed was necessary.

The Australia Council and the majority of the major arts organisations remained silent during this 'heist' and complied with the Minister's direction. But the rest of the arts community rallied and protested – a Senate Inquiry received nearly 3000 submissions demonstrating the feeling of the community. The arts sector fought hard to communicate its concerns about the Brandis changes to anyone who would listen (Saulwick 2015). They wanted everyone to understand that the arts sector was not just the 'high arts', but it was also about small and medium size organisations and individual artists who work in many different contexts doing every kind of arts practice. They did this because in many cases their very survival and continuity as artists and arts organisations was at stake. They talked about the nature of the arts ecosystem and how important it was because of its interdependency (Saulwick 2015; Stone 2016).

Minister Brandis ignored all the protests continuing to argue that his new fund was providing diversity to the arts funding model. The title of 'the National Program for Excellence in the Arts' suggested that it would be funding a 'superior' category of arts activity to that previously funded. The aims of the new *Program* were:

- deliver a wide range of quality arts and cultural experiences that grow arts audiences, throughout Australia and internationally
- strengthen Australia's reputation as a sophisticated and artistic nation with a confident, outward-focused arts sector
- encourage greater private sector support and partnership funding for the arts
- support collaborations to develop arts and culture initiatives including in specific regions or priority areas.

The audience was acknowledged in the first goal, the nation as a whole in the second, the private sector in the third and the regions were in the fourth goal. This approach again seemed to frame the arts in an instrumentalist model (Belfiore 2007; Chatzichristodoulou 2013; Gray 2008) where the arts are being seen a means to 'grow the nation' and contribute to an image of a 'sophisticated' country.

But then a change at the top occurred with Prime Minister Tony Abbot being removed by his own party and replaced by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in September 2015. Unlike his predecessor Prime Minister Turnbull, was known to be someone who appreciated the 'finer' things in life, including the arts. There was an expectation within the arts community that Prime Minister Turnbull would act quickly and return the money taken from the Australia Council. A new Minister for the Arts, Mitch Fifield, was appointed and he sounded more convivial and appeasing than Mr Brandis.

But look I'm someone who's open. I'm someone who wants to consult. I'm someone who wants to listen. So my ears are open and I'm taking a fresh look at the arrangements (Fifield in interview with Cathcart, October 2015).

Minister Fifield said he realised that there was considerable disquiet in the arts community, so he was talking to everyone to find out what he should do. In November 2015 Minister Fifield announced that he would give a small amount of the money back to the Australia Council but he would keep the balance (\$70 million) and re-title the Minister's Fund *Catalyst* instead of *Program for Excellence*. In announcing the change of name Minister Fifield noted that the intent of this program was to reward 'innovation' as compared with 'excellence' in the previous iteration. He said that *Catalyst* aimed to fund innovative ideas from arts and cultural organisations that may find it difficult to access funding for such projects from other source. (see Catalyst Guidelines)

The first recipients of the Catalyst Fund for Innovation were announced early in 2016. A commercial gallery in Queensland was given \$500,000 to mount a new indigenous exhibition and take it to Monaco. Then Minister Fifield announced that Catalyst was awarding \$1 million dollars to the Heysen (a notable Australian landscape painter of the early 20th century) Museum in the Adelaide Hills to help with its upkeep. (ABC News 2016). Concern was immediately raised that this was a political move as the museum resided in a Coalition seat that was seen to be under electoral pressure.

Several major arts organisations already comparatively generously funded and not subject to cuts at the Australia Council, did well from the new Fund. These included Musica Viva in Sydney (\$397,550), the Adelaide Festival Centre (\$400,000), the Arts Centre in Melbourne (\$285,000), the Australian Chamber Orchestra (\$220,000), the Australian Ballet (\$200,000), The Australian Ballet Centre (\$1,000,000), and the National Museum in Canberra (\$389,000). What was really odd was that several recipients received more than the stated upper limit for grants of \$500,000. These included Circa Contemporary Circus (\$840,000), Expressions Dance Theatre (\$610,806), Playwriting Australia (\$800,000), the Bundanon Trust (\$735,000), The Australian Ballet (\$1,000,000), Polygot Puppet Theatre (\$570,000), Back to Back Theatre (\$800,000) and, as noted above, the Heysen Museum (\$1,000,000). Further the amount of money allocated overall was twice what was stated as the amount of money available for disbursement annually.

There was a sense of unreality about all of this. On the one hand there was a Minister for the Arts and his government going around giving money to unusual (and some unknown) recipients and on the other hand many artists and arts organizations faced imminent cuts. While the 2016 May Budget generally ignored the arts sector the announcement of the Catalyst recipients the day before the handing down of the budget on May 2nd, was clearly a strategic move by the Federal Arts Minister. As arts funding is usually rare on the ground and bound by many restrictions, there was the odd possibility that successful groups received *more* than they actually applied for. There was a view too that perhaps the Catalyst Fund was being used as a means of 'bribing' certain areas of the arts sector to support the Federal Government on its way to an election. It was noted too that regional areas in particular did well in the Catalyst outcomes (usually areas that are more likely to support the coalition parties). The election was announced on the 6th May and the government then went into so-called 'caretaker' mode. Nevertheless on Friday May 13th, the Australia Council announced that it would no longer be providing core funding to 62 existing arts organisations across the country.

The Australia Council and decision making

The Australia Council, as noted earlier, stayed publically silent through the arts furore created by the actions of Minister Brandis in 2015. It was clear that they had not been consulted before the May 2015 cuts took place but they made no formal complaint. In many ways they went on with business as usual including their plans announced in the previous year to change their whole process of arts funding. While this move had originally been prefaced by an increase in funds from the previous Labour government, the Council seemed to have disregarded that factor and was determined to act as though nothing had changed.

An external review of the Australia Council, conducted by Gabrielle Trainor and Angus James in 2012, recommended a closer engagement by the Minister of the Arts in the day-to-day running of the

Australia Council. Trainor and James argued that there should be agreement between the Minister and the Council about any future strategic plan. They based their model on that of the Canada Council, including the Canadian use of an “ad hoc” peer system for grant recommendations. The changes to the Australia Council were multilevel. A key action was the removal of artform boards and the establishment instead of peer panels for grant assessment which would be convened when they were needed. This meant that any continuity of knowledge about arts organisations would no longer reside within the membership of the artform boards. In addition the new grant process merged artforms into funding categories which were no longer located around artforms. The Council advertised then for people to nominate to be part of the process and more than 500 artists and art workers self-nominated to be part of the peer group process.

A peer is anyone who has sufficient knowledge or experience of the arts sector to make a fair and informed assessment of applications for funding (Australia Council’s Peer Fact Sheet).

The three main criteria for inclusion as a six-year funded organisation were:

- Artistic Merit
- Organisational Competence
- Contribution to the Strategic Goals of the Australia Council.

Despite vagueness around the meaning of their new strategic goals this implied more philosophical direction from the Australia Council than previously. Further, given the absence of artform boards, it was unclear who would be making the decision re the funding of the new six-year organisations. The selection then of suitable peers or the “Pool of Peers” was made by an internal committee of the Council. This approach seemed to show a lack of transparency about who was deemed suitable and who was not, and on what criteria decisions would be made about suitability. In addition it would seem artists and arts organisations would not necessarily know who their assessing peers are. In the previous funding model artform board members were known and invited to performances or exhibitions. In the new model it was possible that the assessing peers may not have seen the work of the group they were assessing. However applicants could choose which artform peer panel they wished to be considered under.

The Australia Council said that its new approach was a response to concerns in the arts field that wanted a more democratic method of grant selection. They believed it would ensure a broader pool of people to choose from. It would also allow people who were involved in grant recommendations to apply for grants themselves (previously this was not allowed while they were serving on an Australia Council committee). It was also intended that there would be four rounds of project grant applications a year with assurance that funding would be available for each round and not spent all at once in the first round.

The new approach raised further questions such as:

- Who chose the peers for each round?
- How would conflict of interest be avoided when there is a lack of openness around who the peers might be at any given time?
- Would this mean that decision making is further centralised, with staff taking on more responsibility to make the overall strategic artform decisions as well as select and manage the peers?
- Who would be providing a continuity of knowledge about the artforms and the funding history?
- How would state and regional differences be managed and what happens if the majority of funding is recommended for activity in Sydney and Melbourne for example?

The new approach at the Australia Council reflected a desire they said to broaden what was understood by artforms, simplify the grant application process, cater more successfully for cross disciplinary applications and allow more engagement in decision-making from a larger and broader group of people. But there were clear gaps in the 'process' that became evident when it was put into place. More importantly the Council itself failed to adjust its plans for a changed environment. When the Council's plan was conceived there was likely to be a generous amount of funding available. But once a new Federal government came in and changed all the ground rules, taking away a large amount of the Council's funding, the Council itself should have reviewed how it would manage this. While there may have been an overall intent to broaden the approach and allow new players in, the reality was that the amount of money to play with had dramatically fallen.

It was announced by the Australia Council in the second half of 2015 that future grant rounds would be cancelled and instead of 6 year funding commitments only a 4 year funding commitment was to be offered. In May 2016 the major grant round resulted in the receipt of 260 applications with 128 companies being successful. Of these, 43 were new multi-year funded companies but at the same time 62 existing arts organisations lost their ongoing funding. In addition there was a maximum grant to any organisation of \$300,000 ignoring what the company may have received previously. So despite being successful, several companies actually received a significant cut in their funding. The major criteria for receiving funding was a good Strategic and Business Plan that addressed the strategic goals of the Australia Council, suggesting that the quality of the arts practice and the track record of the company was seen as less important. While some arts organisations were winning the arts funding lottery through the Catalyst Fund, other arts organisations were defunded by the Australia Council, as a result of the establishment of the Catalyst Fund. The actions of the Australia Council raised some other questions however:

- Was the Australia Council using the Catalyst Fund scenario as an excuse to offload some of its less popular clients?
- Did the Australia Council take the wisest course of action in the circumstances?
- Had there been any communication between the government and the Council about their possible decisions?
- Was the Minister involved in the final decision making given the recommendations from the Trainor/James Report that the Minister should have a closer relationship with the Council?
- Was there any sense of what this would mean for the companies concerned?
- Was there any idea what this would mean for the arts sector as a whole?

In the announcement of the successful grant winners, the unsuccessful organisations were not mentioned. However the Australia Council Media Release made an odd statement that,

No organisations have been cut or defunded. The current cohort of small to medium organisations have contracts until December 2016 and would always have had to apply in a competitive environment for the next round of multi-year organisational funding (Australia Council Media Release May 13th 2016).

This seemed an ingenuous response when 62 companies had lost their on-going funding. Those who were defunded only discovered this when they realised their names were not included in the successful list. So both the process of communication and decision making seemed to lack respect for the organisations affected by the cuts. The organisations not funded included national organisations such as the National Association for the Visual Arts which had been active in the campaign against the funding cuts and Asialink which had been at the forefront of developing cultural relationships with Asia. Most of the contemporary art galleries across the country were defunded as well as many small to medium theatre companies, music groups and community cultural development organisations. Many of these organisations play and have played a major role in the cultural and artistic life of their region and country, so to say that they had not been cut or defunded, was at the best seen as 'semantics' and at the worst 'a deliberate spin'.

Immediately after the media announcement the Chief Executive Officer of the Australia Council Tony Grybowski seemed to think that the Council had done a great job. He was interviewed that evening on the 7.30 Report (ABC National Television) and noted,

The announcements this week provide clarity - clarity about the small-to-medium sector... No company has been defunded. All companies on a regular basis go through a competitive process. (Grybowski: May 13th, 2016 7.30 Report)

Further in the Sydney Morning Herald he is quoted saying,

I'm so... proud and in many ways pleased about this (Grybowski: qtd. by Cuthbertson in the *Sydney Morning Herald* May 13th, 2016).

As one artist observed however,

We will lose a lot of companies, jobs will be lost, artists will not have opportunities and they will seek work either in other industries or they'll go overseas and the brain drain and the creative drain on this country will be felt for generations (Katrina Douglas: May 13th, 2016 7.30 Report).

What is the future?

Since the formal establishment of the Australia Council in 1975 the principle of arm's length funding had been more or less followed by all governments and ministers. The Australian model of arts funding has ostensibly been based on the English model and more recently influenced by the aspects of the Canadian model. Minister Brandis's action in both taking already committed money from the Australia Council budget and then telling them how to spend their remaining budget, had never previously occurred. F. Scott Fitzgerald used the term 'carelessness' when describing the actions of privileged people who mindlessly destroy the lives of others. When reflecting on the actions of the Coalition Government over the past 12 months in relation to the arts sector, this same word comes to mind.

The recent events in arts funding in Australia are not unlike what happened in the United Kingdom in the period 2010-2014, with arts organisations being defunded and whole areas of cultural activity being cut (Harvie 2015). Further the use of the name 'Catalyst' seems to be a direct take from the English 'Catalyst Endowment programme' where there is an emphasis on getting private sector engagement with the arts funding model which preferences the larger organisations by default (Harvie 2015). The direct intervention of an arts minister in the funding model though has not been witnessed previously in Australia. However the Trainor /James Report of the Australia Council commissioned under the previous Labor Government, in a sense, invited such an event to occur with its recommendation of a closer relationship between the Arts Minister and the Council.

An odd aspect of this story is the reaction by the Australia Council itself to the events of the past two years. While it was evident that the Council was unaware of the decision by Brandis to take part of their on-going budget, their responses since that event have left the arts sector confused and somewhat dismayed. For instance no public statement has been made by the Council or its staff condemning the action of the cuts to the Council in mid 2015. While there was an early suggestion that members of the Council would resign in protest, none did. Further when asked in a Senates Estimates Committee if he had a response to the Arts Budget cuts, the CEO Tony Grybowski said he had 'no response'. He was then accused by a Labor Senator

...of being out of touch with the arts sector and of rolling over in the face of budget cuts that - reduced his agency's discretionary funding by a third (Boland 2016).

Prior to his appointment in 2013 as CEO of the Australia Council, Grybowski had held management roles with the Victorian Arts Centre, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Musica Viva Australia as well as the Australia Council itself. So his own background was from the major arts organisations' sector. Further in early 2016 despite the cutting of funding rounds and the atmosphere of doom in the sector, senior executives at the Australia Council awarded themselves bonuses for jobs well done.

Executives at the Australia Council for the Arts received bonuses worth a combined \$150,000 last year amid funding cuts to the agency (Westwood 2016).

There seems to have been a 'disconnect' internally in the Council about the impact of the cuts to the sector in 2015 and how the Australia Council should respond. While the Australia Council has always been regarded as part of the arts ecosystem in Australia, their recent actions in the midst of the arts funding crisis would suggest that they see themselves in a separate and different space. Their determination to continue with policy changes although they did not have the resources to adequately support them, would suggest further that they have been operating in an alternative reality. Further the public reaction by Grybowski to the cuts in the sector on May 13th suggests that he is 'blind' to the feelings in the sector about the impact of the cuts. Indeed it could also be concluded that the Australia Council has identified itself with the major organisations rather than the entire spectrum of arts activity. This is somewhat ironic in the context of the rest of the arts sector mobilizing itself to fight for the integrity and independence of the Australia Council. This begs the question of whether the present Australia Council has lost the respect and trust of many in the arts community as an outcome of these events?

Conclusion

The actions of the former Arts Minister George Brandis and continued by the present Minister Fifield have caused philosophical and practical divisions in the arts sector over the past two years. While major organisations have been protected from cuts and given in fact access to additional funds through the Catalyst program, many small to medium arts organisations and individual artists have had their funding reduced or cut completely. There is continuing tension within the arts community because of this between sectors, artists, arts organisations and the Australia Council.

The coming election will determine if the status quo remains or if there is another iteration of this arts funding and cultural policy story. The present Shadow Minister for the Arts, Mark Dreyfus, has promised to return the money taken by the Coalition Government to the Australia Council if the Labor party wins office at the election (Dreyfus 2016). While the political future will become clearer after July 3rd, it is likely the damage from the previous actions will continue for a longer period of time within the arts community.

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