

Letter

To Bruno Latour

I have a complaint. I guess there is no such thing as a timely death, but Bruno Latour's struck me as particularly untimely. Even though his writing on sciences and modernity have been widely circulating in academia and the art world since the 1990s, in some ways this was his moment. In recent years his publications had become more urgent and more engaged with the rapid succession of short pamphlet-like books such as *Down to Earth*, 2018, *After Lockdown*, 2021, or most recently, in collaboration with Nikolaj Schultz, *Mémo sur la nouvelle classe écologique*, 2022.

Thus the 2020 lockdown was the occasion to give a practical extension to the proposition made in *Down to Earth* to have a 1789

moment, not the revolutionary one, but just before, with the filling of grievances throughout France in the ledgers of complaints. This is because, Latour argued, we need to generate alternative descriptions: 'How could we act politically without having inventoried, surveyed, measured, centimetre by centimetre, being by being, person by person, the stuff that makes up the Earth for us?' And the lockdown, with its almost total cessation of all activities, offered an opportunity to list and sort the things that mattered most to us and those that perhaps we could do without.

In turn, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its conflation of two forms of territorial conflict - of war and extractivism - with oil and gas as the curse upon our house, was an occasion to attempt a definition of what an ecological nation might be

like. For the French elections earlier this year, Latour pleaded for a new ecological class. The memo addressed to the Green Party pointed out that political ecology remarkably succeeds in simultaneously 'panicking minds and making them yawn with boredom'. Reminding us that being right is not enough, scientific facts, useful as they are to develop new descriptions, do not constitute a political imaginary. Time and again his propositions have helped to make sense of our often-bewildering present, so, upon hearing of Latour's death I can only echo the complaint formulated by the *Liberation* editor-in-chief Thomas Legrand: 'you tell us that we have to sort out what matters, that politics has to find new channels to pass through, "thank you for the gift, Mr Latour ... you tell us all that and then you leave."'

Michaële Cutaya

Artnotes

Let's Level

On 4 November, ACE announced the results of its 2023/26 National Portfolio funding scheme, England's flagship programme of investment in regularly funded organisations. The announcement had been due on 26 October, but suffered a delay caused by the resignation of Liz Truss as PM and the subsequent appointment of Rishi Sunak on 25 October; no doubt ACE's funding was called into question but chancellor Jeremy Hunt's own delayed Autumn Statement postponed the worst effects of his Austerity 2.0 budget cuts until 2025 - conveniently after the next scheduled general election.

Presumably the newly announced National Portfolio funding is safe, for a little while at least; during the austerity programme that George Osborne launched when he became chancellor in 2010, ACE passed its in-year budget cuts directly on to funded organisations, reducing the amounts they had previously been awarded. It might be remembered that Osborne's austerity regime was rationalised to the public by citing the principle that the UK must at all costs maintain its top credit rating on the international monetary markets. But squeezing public finances in a weak global economy slows growth and prolongs the economic pain for those who can

least afford it. In the end, Osborne's austerity policies led to Brexit and, eventually, Trussnomics, which left the UK credit rating four notches below the top rating. So much for all that pain from a decade of public finance belt-tightening - why not try it again in a couple of years?

So to ACE's investment announcement which delivered, as promised, a raft of newly funded organisations and a rebalancing of national expenditure, but which also made deep cuts to some flagship institutions and axed regular funding for many others. The headline figures for ACE's 2023/26 funding are as follows: there will be £446m per year invested across 990 organisations, compared with £410m across 828 organisations at present. About 10% of the funds (£43.5m) will go to organisations in the government's Levelling Up for Culture Places, almost doubling the investment in those areas and supporting 89 newly funded organisations. There will be 21.8% more investment outside London than there was at the start of the previous funding round in 2018/19, but even with this rebalancing London will retain a third (34%) of the overall investment pot (£152m) while being home to one-sixth (16%) of England's population, although many of London's arts organisations are national institutions that reach audiences across the country.

Before the government instituted its Levelling Up for Culture

initiative, which focused only on areas outside the capital, ACE had developed its own Priority Places initiative, which identified places that had received little previous funding, a number of which were in the capital. Using ACE's Priority Places optic, 9% of the funding (£39m) will go to these areas, of which 16% (£6.3m) will go to London councils that had previously received little investment. The government's so-called Levelling Up agenda fails to recognise that local authorities are far from level within London itself.

Former culture secretary Nadine Dorries instructed ACE to move £24m per year out of its budget for London (Artnotes AM455) and, rumour has it, was also keen for ACE to forcibly move a number of organisations out of London. ACE's solution was to create a Transfer programme, giving existing London-based National Portfolio organisations the option to voluntarily move out of the capital, thus potentially saving themselves from the budget cuts coming to the metropolis. This transfer scheme has resulted in two dozen London-based organisations remaining in the National Portfolio while they arrange to move out of the capital in the coming couple of years, five of which are from the visual arts category: Film and Video Umbrella, Furtherfield, Modus Arts, National Association for Gallery Education (Engage) and Shape. As a result of the significant reduction in spend