

## **IDeoGRAMS Research Seminar**

**June 29th 5.30-6.30 Ken Edwards Seminar Room 324, University of Leicester.**

### **A cultural shock doctrine? Public funding for culture in an age of austerity**

**Jack Newsinger, Department of Media and Communication, University of Leicester.**

The cuts to public expenditure initiated by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 have included large reductions in levels of public funding for culture. As well as reductions to the budget of the Arts Council and the abolishment of the UK Film Council, many smaller and lower profile organisations and initiatives have found their patterns of funding restructured, diminished or cancelled altogether. While the coalition claims to be pro-culture, for many commentators these measures threaten to do long-term structural damage to the British cultural sector built up over the previous ten years, and have been opposed by campaign groups such as Save the Arts.

This paper, which represents work in progress, seeks to understand the political economy of the cultural cuts and the prospects for publicly-funded culture in Britain. It argues that there have been three main justifications for the restructuring of cultural funding: firstly, as the dismantling of the bureaucracy associated with the cultural management mechanisms of New Labour; secondly, as an opportunity for an increasing role for private business in the cultural sector, particularly through patronage and sponsorship; and thirdly through a discursive reliance on right-wing dogma to attack politically progressive cultural policy initiatives. The paper reviews the evidence-base for each of these justifications. Finally, it is argued that while they rhetorically draw upon a number of genuine policy debates, the development of an austerity cultural policy has its roots in a tradition of free market Conservatism ideologically opposed to publicly-funded culture.