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EDITORIAL

Is There a Better Case to be Made for the Arts?

Adrian Ellis

Last month, along with ten other people trying to hold down day jobs, I was a guest blogger on ArtsJournal.com. The blog was prompted by the new report from RAND, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Benefits of the Arts*, and our moderator, ArtsJournal's editor Doug McLennan, set us off with the following question:

[...]A new RAND study, commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, "Gifts of the Muse..." argues that basing so much of the case for the arts on their claimed external benefits - their utility in addressing public issues and concerns - has drawn us away from the true power and potential of the arts, and weakened the long-term position of the arts in the public mind.

Recently, the social good and economic impact arguments may have begun to wear thin, and government support has not recovered from sharp cuts made in the last few years. At the same time, much of the arts community is so focused on bottom lines that some argue that in some cases art and creativity have suffered in the struggle to grow and keep up. Indeed, some might argue that basing so much of the case for the arts on economic benefits has made it more difficult to make a compelling case for the arts.

Has the emphasis on practical benefits warped our arts infrastructure, and caused us to neglect the need to strengthen demand for the arts? Have we neglected what "Gifts of the Muse" terms the "missing link": the individual, private experience of the arts that begins with early engagement and intense involvement, and that is the gateway to other, more public benefits? Is there a better case to be made for the arts?

And then off we went yammering away for five days, and with us, over 100 postings from



others following the chase. I found the debate extremely stimulating, and it helped to clarify my own thinking on the subject.

I took away four conclusions:

First, our discussion reinforced my conviction that policy wonks like me should be better able to define a “vibrant cultural community” than we are. And we should have a better analytical understanding of what the drivers of such a community are: why capital investment is unhealthy, for example, unless it is matched by operational funding, like carbohydrates without vitamins; why there needs to be a balance between investment in amateur and professional activities; what levels of investment in arts education is needed for a balanced cultural ecology. We still lack the causal models that help other policy communities hone and explore areas of agreement and contention. The data we collect always seem to be for advocacy rather than analysis, leaving advocacy under-served by the absence of analysis.

Second, there seems to be a consensus that lobbyists and advocacy bodies need to find a more compelling language to describe the core experiences that we who love the arts know are what draw us towards cultural activities and that also engage funders.

Wonks and lobbyists alike know that much of the current language of legitimation is pretty thin. A language that more accurately reflects why cultural activity engages is also more likely in turn to engage decision makers. The less authentic it is, the more likely it is to generate expectations than cannot be fulfilled, and risk a backlash.

Third, arts funders, both public and private, should be more responsible and more attuned to the long term impact of different forms of cultural support. Public funding agencies and private foundations, who are supposed to be among society’s thought leaders, could lead the way on more of this stuff. I do not necessarily mean commissioning more ‘gray’ literature – the term for the research reports that make it to the web or to pdf status but never acquire an ISBN number. Rather, I mean thinking through overtly the long term impact of different forms of investment on the sector’s ecology. In particular, they should think through the infantilizing impact of overly directive funding, the destabilizing impact of the emphasis on program funding rather than core activities, and the resulting under-funded expansion.

Fourth, arts administrators should not be as easily seduced as they have been by the trappings of the civic agenda; have the self-discipline to remain focused on their core mission; and be a little more leery than they have been of seeking roles and responsibilities (and a scale of operation) that diminish their ability to take the risks that the creative endeavor requires.

The blog in all its sprawling glory can be found at <http://www.artsjournal.com/muse/>.

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CONFERENCE REVIEW

“Should We Junk Collections?”

Elizabeth Casale

The Institute of Ideas hosted a panel discussion on May 16, 2005 at the Wallace Collection in London titled provocatively, “Should We Junk Collections?” Moderated by Tiffany Jenkins, the panel featured Andrew Burnett, Deputy Director, The British Museum; Maurice Davies, Deputy Director, Museums Association; James Fenton, poet and essayist; and Anna Somers Cocks, General Editorial Director and Group Newspapers Editor, Umberto Allemandi & Co.

To start the conference each panelist gave a brief introductory statement, which was followed by questions from the moderator and the audience. Maurice Davies began by making a plea for collections not to be “junked”, but to be displayed and used more intensively. He stressed the need for museums to worry less about perpetuity and even posterity, and more about today. Keeping thousands of items in storage is serving neither current nor future generations of either museum visitors or researchers effectively. Why not see then if there might be opportunities to display some of these works—the “B” list stuff, duplicates, works slightly out of synch with the focus of the collection etc.—at alternative venues such as schools, libraries and hospitals that might consider them jewels? If structured thoughtfully, such an arrangement could benefit both organizations. Notably, Davies did not expressly make a case for that bogeyman known as deaccessioning.

Anna Somers Cocks made the important and often overlooked point that collections of contemporary art and artists are disadvantaged by a museum’s default responsibility to steward what are often outsized and disproportionate collections from the past.¹ Predictably, the other panelists did less than argue persuasively the case against “junking” collections but simply invoked the mantra about a museum’s role, which is fundamentally and first rooted in its obligation to steward the items that have been entrusted to them. The standard cautionary tales about deaccessioning followed, including reference by one panelist to “dodgy” deaccessioning practices of American museums. While one could argue the anti-American dig may have been gratuitous, the warnings about thoughtless deaccessioning are critical and merit repeated articulation.

The problem is that this mission is essentially indisputable and thus when articulated – especially in a context such as this one – it becomes a conversation stopper. The tautology goes something like this:

¹ I am thinking of a recent *New Yorker* article that mentions the daunting task of making a high-resolution digital image of every collection item in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a job estimated to take 25 years and exacerbated by “an endless quantity of scarab beetles from Egypt” that happens to reside there. http://www.newyorker.com/printables/fact/050411fa_fact.



1. Primary purpose of museums = Stewardship
2. Stewardship = Retaining objects in collection
3. Retaining objects = Storage facilities bursting at the seams
4. Storage facilities bursting at seams = Proof of good stewardship
5. Proof of good stewardship = Mission fulfillment

The discussion at The Wallace Collection was ultimately frustrating, because all of the panelists except one (Davies) and the majority of the audience were reluctant to engage the substantive issues that lie at the heart of the matter:

1. As Davies described, millions of collection items are in storage in museums around the world, often uncatalogued, in poor and declining condition, and, importantly, not being viewed or utilized either by the public at large or by scholars and researchers. What is the point, ultimately, of these objects if a) no one knows they exist; b) no one sees, studies or elucidates them and c) they are deteriorating? This is ugly territory, and there are no easy answers.
2. What defines effective stewardship, and how can the sector secure the enormous sums necessary to catalogue and care properly for every collection item? Given the imbalance between the funds needed to maintain collections and the availability of that funding, and assuming continued acquisition and the relentless effects of time on both buildings and objects, how can museums truly fulfill their responsibilities of preservation, access and education? Are there new models – networks, partnerships, distributed collections, commercial strategies, etc. – that might help?

Nick Merriman, Curator of Museums and Collections at University College London, tried to get a discussion going about these questions – presumably the reason for holding such a symposium in the first place – by calling for a mature dialogue that would address fundamental long-term issues surrounding collections and move toward articulating a more sustainable collections model. Merriman’s comments followed my own unpopular observation that collections might end up junking themselves if the museum community doesn’t begin to explore creative new solutions to the dilemma sometimes referred to as “too much stuff”. Let’s hope the report to be issued this month by The Museums Association after an 18-month inquiry into the future of museums collections in the U.K. will serve as a step in this direction.

But Merriman’s argument was not picked up, a pity as an honest dialogue about collections planning and sustainability is needed indeed. A recent article in the *Washington Post* about the Smithsonian’s conservation crisis caused by having over 300 million objects in buildings in various states of disrepair was a dramatic reminder.² Museum leaders need to stop denying the magnitude of the problem for many

² Don Oldenburg, “Smithsonian Inundated With Leaks, GAO Reports” *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2005, p. C01. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/26/AR2005052601748.html?sub=AR>.



institutions for fear that they may be seen as not fulfilling their stewardship obligations. Like the audience member who suggested that tales of storage crunches are hyped up and are merely a “red herring” for something else, which she didn’t articulate. I suppose she was envisioning a bunch of swashbuckling American “bursars” with dollar signs in their eyes and plenty of empty, climate-controlled secret chambers in their basements. I have a few museum registrars I’d like her to meet.

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ARTICLE

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Alexis Frasz

Movie ticket to see *Star Wars* in New York City: \$10.75

The Brazilian Girls new album: \$13.49

The Office, Box Set: \$41.94

Downloading them all for free from a p2p network: priceless³

To start with an obvious statement, technology has enabled communication like never before. It has facilitated the growth of networks that have quite literally transformed the world into a “global village” where people can share information with complete strangers on the other side of the world in seconds. This expanded capacity for communication has brought multiple and well-documented benefits to millions of people spanning many spheres; from social services to political activism to education to commerce to culture, to name just a few. In the world of culture, technology has facilitated access to a broader range of content by artists and the general public; enabled new modifications of existing works; provided an additional creative medium; and become an alternative marketplace for the distribution and sale of creative work.

One of the most well-known examples of this extended network of content sharing is peer-to-peer technology (p2p), which allows internet users to download audio or video files off other computers free of charge. Once content enters the network it can be downloaded by an unlimited number of users for free without the purchaser (assuming there is one to begin with) actually sacrificing his or her access to that content. It appears that you can, in this system, have your cake, eat it, and share it with all of your friends’ friends (around 50 million people in America alone use p2p), as long as you are able to stomach a little guilt in the process. But as beautifully simple as this system for “sharing” appears at first glance, it manifests the complex challenges facing intellectual and

³ Disclaimer: This is not a MasterCard Ad. MasterCard has no connection, implicit or otherwise, with the content of this paper. AEA is not affiliated or endorsed by MasterCard in any way.



creative property in a world of increasingly advanced technological capabilities.

Understandably, the loudest opposition to p2p networks is coming from the U.S. entertainment industry, which argues that these technologies severely jeopardize creativity by insufficiently protecting intellectual property rights, thereby making it too risky for creators to put their work into the marketplace. The Federal Communications Commission, the Motion Picture Association of America, and several major entertainment companies recently argued in the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals for a regulation that would have made it illegal for any manufacturer to make or sell digital electronic devices, from televisions to PCs, that did not recognize signals that would make it technologically impossible for users to copy, use, store or distribute protected content. These groups argued that enhanced digital rights management technologies, such as these "broadcast flags", are needed to give artists and distributors the comfort that they need to continue to create and distribute high-quality content.

Although the broadcast flag was struck down, the entertainment industry is continuing to seek greater copyright protection via Congress and the Supreme Court. Congress is currently considering the *Inducing Infringement of Copyrights Act* which would make inventors and manufacturers liable if their technology "induces" people to commit copyright infringing acts. To date, the courts have upheld the precedent set by the 1984 "Betamax Case", in which the court was asked by the entertainment industry to outlaw the VCR because it could be used to infringe copyright. The court ruled that although the VCR can be used illegally, it is not inherently liable for such uses because it also has a substantial legal function. Opponents of the "Inducement Act" argue that it would preclude similar advancements in technology in the future.

The entertainment industry is challenging the Betamax precedent in the Supreme Court as well. In March of 2005 the U.S. Supreme Court heard a lawsuit (*MGM v. Grokster*) brought by twenty-eight of the world's largest entertainment companies against several p2p networks for the illegal behavior of their users. The case should be decided this summer.

The premise underlying these arguments, that creation will stop because creative ideas and products will become worthless in such an anarchic marketplace, is frightening. But is the picture given by the entertainment industry really accurate?

On the contrary, according to intellectual property lawyer Lawrence Lessig in *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. He argues that the current trend is toward greater protection for copyrights and intellectual property than ever before through a combination of laws that extend copyright terms, expand the scope of what copyright covers, increase technological barriers to copyright infringement and provide more widely reaching punishments for anyone that copies, or even facilitates copying, protected content. Lessig argues that the real threat to culture is actually many of these intellectual property "protections" themselves: "When you add together the effect of changing law, concentrated markets,



and changing technology, together they produce an astonishing conclusion: Never in our history have fewer had a legal right to control more of the development of our culture than now".⁴

As creative content has become increasingly valuable in our "Creative Economy", ideas of what is ownable (and thus sellable) have expanded far beyond what property laws, physical or intellectual, were originally developed to manage. This has resulted in the dramatic expansion of ownership rights various types of intellectual property. Some of the more ludicrous victims of copyright/trademark expansion include: ancient yoga poses (Bikram), the concept of something being "priceless"⁵, and the phrase "Freedom of Expression". Sales on Ebay also reflect this trend, notably someone's soul and a grilled cheese sandwich with an image of the Virgin Mary (selling for \$1,325 and \$28,000 in real dollars, respectively).

The massive vertical and horizontal concentration of media in the hands of the very few makes this trend significantly more insidious. In what law professor James Boyle calls "an exponentially expanding intellectual land grab",⁶ major media companies are accumulating as much intellectual property as they can, hoping it will be profitable in the future, regardless of whether they intend to use or provide access to it currently. In recording, radio, film, TV and print media less than 5 companies receive between 75% and 99% of the revenues.

The effect of these trends upon production of and access to creative works has already been dramatic. In the music world, where the media has most vehemently cast the conflict as a battle between the artists and the intellectual property thieves, musicians themselves are turning to the p2p networks because of their overwhelmingly negative experiences with record companies. For the band Wilco, who released their album *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* online only, p2p was a way to preserve their artistic integrity and get their music out after Reprise Records dropped the band when they refused to make changes that the record company insisted upon for release. (Unprompted, Wilco fans raised \$15,000 to show their appreciation to the band for taking a stand; the band donated the money to charity).

Examples of artists whose work is compromised by the profit motive of their managing company are plentiful. Even more troubling, however, are the cases where an album, film, article, etc. cannot be shared with the world because the "owners", who are often not the creators, do not find the work potentially profitable or otherwise "legitimate". Often contracts stipulate that the work cannot be released to the public at all, even on the

⁴ Lessig, Laurence. *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. Penguin Press. New York. 2004. 170.

⁵ In 2000 MasterCard sued Ralph Nader for his use of the priceless concept in a presidential ad over corporate corruption claiming potential customer confusion and lost resoundingly. It is uncertain whether the outcome would be the same today.

⁶ Boynton, Robert S. *Righting Copyright: Fair Use and "Digital Environmentalism"*. Bookforum. Feb/Mar 2005. www.bookforum.com/boynton.html



artist's own dime, until the record company grants permission. Instead it must sit waiting for the manager to determine a more opportune moment for its release. In this sense, Wilco may have been lucky to have been dropped.

Culture does not depend only on the supply of ever more works and innovations; it is also a continuing dialogue between the audience or consumer and artists and the works themselves. Meanings are continually renegotiated and adjusted through this dialogue. The current conflict has cast audiences as mere consumers of product, something that Jeff Tweedy of Wilco argues misinterprets the distinction between intellectual or creative product and other kinds of property: "Treating your audience like thieves is absurd. Anyone who chooses to listen to our music becomes a collaborator. People who look at music as commerce don't understand that. They are talking about pieces of plastic they want to sell, packages of intellectual property"⁷. This view of the audience as "collaborators" is a perspective on the nature of art creation which may fit in with art scholarship, stewardship and criticism but which is far removed from the sensibilities of most of corporate media.

A facet of this consideration of access and ownership that is often overlooked, but no less important for that fact, is that artists also need access to existing content to stimulate new creation. A T.S. Eliot quote is a variation on a theme expressed by many artists: "Good poet's borrow, great poets steal". As much as they need compensation for their work, artists and innovators do not create from nothing and they must have access to the public domain, or "commons" from which to draw. Boyle argues, "our art, our culture, our science depend on this public domain every bit as much as they depend on intellectual property"⁸.

Although the technology that has sparked the current debate between ownership and access is new, the conflict that it highlights is one that has been negotiated within and between cultures throughout every century of human existence. Copyright law is fundamentally the process of finding the appropriate balance between those things in our culture, whether tangible or intangible, which are shared by and protected for the community and those which we allow to be privately owned. Ownership is not an absolute right in any culture; neither is access. It is a negotiation between the "right" of an individual or group of individuals to call something their own and to receive the exclusive benefits of that ownership, whether psychological or financial, and the "right" of the community as a whole to make use of that thing.

As technology has changed to allow creative content to be more easily distributed and modified, it is only appropriate that the law change to protect the owners of creative content accordingly. The problem, as Lessig, Tweedy and others argue, is that the law has gone so far in the name of "protecting content owners" that this "protection" itself

⁷ http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,65688-2,00.html?tw=wn_story_page_next1

⁸ www.bookforum.com/boynton.html



has become one of the biggest threats to art, culture and innovation today.

Some attempts at a solution have been offered. From Creative Commons, which offers creators a more flexible, "some rights reserved" system for protecting and sharing their work, to "digital environmentalism", a movement which seeks to reverse the shrinking of the "commons" through raising public awareness and lobbying for legal changes, there are those who are promoting alternatives to a "locked down" culture.

Museums, performing arts organizations, libraries, schools and other non-profit stewards of the cultural commons have a critical role to play in this struggle. So do artists, innovators and others with an interest in maintaining a supportive environment in which creativity and innovation can thrive. But at its most basic, this debate is relevant to anyone who has reservations about living in a society where our collective creative and intellectual patrimony can be owned and controlled by a small number of large companies who are primarily motivated by their own profits.

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WHITE PAPER REVIEW

"Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life -The Value of Museums"

Marc Jordan

Review of a consultation paper from the Museums and Cultural Property Division of the Department for Culture Media and Sport. The paper can be found at:

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/ronlyres/31419198-35C1-4A00-8C12-CB0572EC9B57/0/UnderstandingtheFuture.pdf>.

Museums matter. But who is arguing why they matter depends on the historic moment and the political perspective of the person or group addressed. As Chris Smith, former Secretary of State for Culture, pointed out in his recent keynote address to ALM London on the Future of London's Museums,⁹ the Victorian founders of most of our national and regional museums had clear notions of their purpose and importance. Museums were important as repositories of the physical objects that represent the history and achievements of mankind and the wonders of the physical world in which he lives. They had two primary purposes – to provide stewardship of and access to their collections and to contribute to public education through scholarship and its dissemination.

⁹ ALM London: Towards a Regional Museums Strategy (Conference held at the Royal Institute of British Architects, 11 March 2004)



The Victorians probably got it about right, though the particular ways in which they realized these two purposes would now seem rather old-fashioned. Somewhere in the middle decades of the 20th Century, however, the concept of public benefit seems to have got lost in many institutions. They began to look inwards far more often than outwards to the public realm. Stewardship became in effect the holding of material by the few for the benefit of the fewer. The concept of public education became lost in a world of rarified scholarship that was sceptical of the value of communication to a wider audience.

In the late 1990s museums found themselves, along with other cultural institutions, under pressure from government to act as instruments of policy for the delivery of a variety of social, economic and political agendas being pursued throughout the public services. Since the most prominent of England's museums receive the majority of their revenue funding either from central government or from local authorities that are obliged to share the agenda of central government, the museums' own agendas were effectively imposed by a set of key performance indicators set out in increasingly complex and contractualized funding agreements. In other words, funding was predicated on the delivery on a set of largely quantitative targets for, among other matters, the increase in attendance of children, people from social categories C2DE, and black and minority ethnic groups. Now a similar set of values also permeates the grant assessment criteria of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the principal source of money for capital works and acquisitions.

Few who work in museums would question that aspiring to the increased social inclusiveness represented by such targets is a good, or that institutions in the public realm who receive public funding should deliver public benefit to the widest possible constituency. Many have, however, questioned two things. First, some question the degree to which quantitative measures capture either the broader (and necessarily diffuse and long-term) qualitative value of what museums contribute to civil society, or the nature, degree and sustainability of impact that museum visits have on individuals in general and under serviced constituents in particular. Second, many question whether the emphasis on the delivery of government mandated targets designed to contribute to the achievement of social policy has shifted attention and resources away from core areas such as collections and scholarship. The question is increasingly asked: how can a museum deliver vibrant and meaningful social impacts if the stewardship of collections is neglected and the intellectual capital of the institution is eroded?

Over the past eighteen months there has been a perceptible shift in government thinking on targets throughout the public sector, away from an almost exclusive reliance on quantitative indicators of performance towards recognition that the qualitative matters as well. To some extent, this has been the response of politicians and officials to apparent distortions in delivery of front-line public services, such as healthcare and education, in order to hit targets; and to a growing public scepticism about performance indicators. The cultural sector has been a beneficiary of this loosening up of government thinking. The current Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, published a pamphlet last year discussing the



value of culture¹⁰, which some interpreted as advocating a return to the “art for art’s sake” ethos in which culture has no obligation to demonstrate its extrinsic value. The argument ends, however, with a challenge to the cultural sector to propose ways of measuring and evidencing its value in ways more meaningful than the Department for Culture Media and Sport has yet devised.

This same challenge, as well as a variety of others, was put in front of museums by Estelle Morris, then Minister for the Arts, in a consultation document published by DCMS in February¹¹. In effect, this paper - which focuses on a set of key issues that will define English museums in the first decades of the twenty-first century - offers individual institutions and the bodies that represent them, such as the National Museum Directors’ Conference (NMDC), the Group of Large Local Authority Museums (GLLAM), the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Museums Association (MA), the opportunity they have been seeking to move beyond the narrow parameters of funding requirements and assert what matters for them and how they intend to deliver it.

Or does it? The themes and issues that the paper sets out and the questions to which it invites responses include many of those to which the sector needs to find clear answers if it is to move forward more confidently and coherently. There are questions about collections and their uses, learning and research, careers training and leadership, coherence and advocacy, and partnership and measuring value. The document has been informed by the thinking of small working parties of key figures in the sector, though written by DCMS officials. But it is an indication of the still fragmented state of the museums sector that it has allowed its sponsoring department, and undoubted enthusiasm of Estelle Morris for museums, to frame this important debate.

Leaving this aside, anyone who opens the document will be heartened by the extent to which collections and scholarship are once again put center stage as core responsibilities of museums, and by the extent to which it is clearly acknowledged that the appeal of museums to a diverse modern society and their ability to contribute to the learning agenda in schools and communities depends on collections as dynamic resources and research as a generator of new insights. Questions are raised as to the practicality of collecting in a continuously inflating market and with limited public funds, inviting the sector to consider the sharing of ownership nationally and internationally, the reform of the rules on the export of works of art, and the role of digital images and the internet.

Where the knowledge base in many museums has been eroded by years of underfunding and the freezing of curatorial posts, the paper opens up the debate about how intellectual capital can be preserved and enhanced. It suggests that the sector would do well to acknowledge that it is never again likely that institutions will be able to afford to maintain in-house the number of experts that they had for much of the last century, and

¹⁰ T. Jowell, *Government and the Value of Culture* (DCMS, 2004)

¹¹ *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life – The Value of Museums* (DCMS Museums and Cultural Property Division, 2005)



to move on to consider practical steps as to how a strong research culture can be built in partnership with the higher and further education sectors. The sector should also put forward its suggestions as to how research programmes that ultimately feed through into a better understanding at all levels of collections and their contexts can be devised and their value monitored.

Careers, training and leadership are rightly identified by the paper as keys to future success. Despite a number of highly thought of museum management and leadership initiatives, the sector is still fundamentally un-strategic in how it manages the talent at its disposal. The development of skills and confidence in individuals is a largely haphazard matter right across the workforce. The system is too rigid, with limited career development opportunities and little incentive for people to move between national and regional museums. In a diverse society museum staff and museum boards still remain unrepresentative of the communities they aspire to serve. There are many worthwhile but essentially localized or informal initiatives designed to address many of these challenges, but the sector needs to take a more coherent stance and pursue an economy of scale that makes many large commercial companies so successful at training and professional development.

The paper also probes the impact of the administrative fragmentation of the sector on funding and advocacy. For the 2004 *Comprehensive Spending Review*, the national museums and MLA made common cause for the first time within a system that tends to encourage competition for scarce resources rather than collaboration. Collectively they fared better than Arts Council of England. Taken in conjunction with the one of the main strands of ACE's current *Review of the Presentation of the Contemporary Visual Arts*, the consultation paper's invitation for the museum sector to think about the advantages of a unified funding body for national and regional museums indicates a willingness to consider radical solutions. There are indications that the national museums are not as hostile as they have been in the past to losing their direct reporting relationship with DCMS, though some would question whether there is currently a government body that commands sufficient confidence to take on this new role.

In setting out the issues that government thinks are important to museums in England in the twenty-first century, *Understanding the Future* offers opportunities for those interested in the museum sector's future direction and vigor to put forward thoughtful, well-informed and pragmatic proposals as to how they should be addressed. Many of the questions and many of the answers will have resonance with museum professionals internationally. All of them have implications for how museums in England will develop, how they will be treated by government and perceived by the public. This is not an opportunity that the sector can afford to miss or fluff.

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LETTER

Russell Willis Taylor
President and CEO, National Arts Strategies

In the last Platform, Adrian Ellis wrote about the need for new kinds of thinking on cultural issues and operational challenges. While there is much in his article to applaud, its one shortcoming is to overlook those areas where new thinking is already being explored.

Without promoting the work of National Arts Strategies to the exclusion of others, it is incumbent on me as its President to begin by pointing out that we engage leading faculty from business schools and graduate programs around the country who teach conceptually based frameworks to arts leaders over two and three day programs. We do this for precisely the reasons Adrian enumerated: to help people shift the paradigm, move beyond the wearying insanity of trying to achieve different results with the same actions, and to generally broaden the view until new solutions to old problems appear on the horizon. Indeed, all of the topics listed in Adrian's proposed agenda or manifesto, save one, are the subject of seminars at NAS.

There is another reason for focusing on the root causes of problems and the conceptual framework that gives those challenges a context: limiting creative thinking to the artistic leadership of an organization is a sure-fire way to burn out the administrative leadership. Putting the art of management on equal footing with the creation of art is a risky business, and should only be done when leaders are prepared to think as rigorously, and creatively, about operational issues as artistic leaders think about the choices they make in repertoire or exhibitions. Sir Henry Irving, the great English actor manager, was once famously quoted as reminding young theatre professionals of the late 1800's "The theatre must succeed as a business, or it will surely fail as an art".

Most importantly of all, moving beyond the exhausted litany of operational problems related to resource, and subsequently raising the level of debate about the role and purpose of culture is the responsibility of all arts leaders. We are becoming marginalized as a field with disastrous results: programs such as Leave No Child Behind, which had its intellectual roots in the notion of addressing cultural illiteracy, have the practical effect of eliminating any form of arts training from the public school curriculum. These are the artists – and audiences – of the future, and we ignore them at our peril. To reclaim our place at the civic table, we need to deploy a new lexicon of larger thoughts and smaller complaints. Changing the way we think is the place to start.



WORTH NOTING

Show Me the Money

The site www.fundrace.org/citymap.php allows you to find out the political contributions (and inclinations) of a particular neighborhood or even building. Although political inclinations are only a small part of analyzing a profile of a community, they offer some fascinating insights. US-based readers, check out your neighbors.

Music Babes in Cyberspace

When a male colleague sent me www.beautyinmusic.com I looked and had a furtive frisson and assumed the web site to be a haunt for the prurient, especially as it was put together by an outfit called "tawdry pixel". When I showed it to a female colleague, her reaction was much more hard-boiled. "So this is where the A&R guys probably go to find the next batch of classical music babes to take to market". So to find out, we used a natty piece of software that Vicki Porter at the Getty showed us, <http://www.touchgraph.com/TGGoogleBrowser.html>, a simple and free device for finding out where your organization is located in cyberspace. (The answer is both.)

Consultancy Reports for Dummies

Finally, following Princeton philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt's polemic *On Bullshit*, try bullshit bingo www.perkigoth.com/home/kermitsstuff/bullshitbingo/ as a good way of generating a consultancy report quickly. Frankfurt defines bullshit as prose that may be true or false but whose merit is based on its capacity to serve interests rather than its veracity. In the arts that's called advocacy...oh dear.