Valuing Culture

Professor Robert Hewison

"Money for Values"

When Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to repaint the Sistine Chapel in 1508, he didn't have to get planning permission. No inspectors from Papal Heritage came to shake their heads, nor did he have to submit a business plan to the Papal Lottery Fund that demonstrated the economic viability of the project as a result of uplift in visitor spend resulting from the increased access to this tourist offer. He carried out no risk assessment, environmental impact study, or health and safety audit. Nor did he have to demonstrate to the Holy See's Social Exclusion unit how the project would meet the relevant targets covering health, crime, education and employment. The ceiling was indeed being repainted for "ornamental purposes", but unlike a modern university, there was no need to show how it would enable the Papal economy to deal with the rapid process of global change.

The Pope was not an equal opportunities employer.

But he wasn't doing it for the sake of Michelangelo's health. There was a contract, for 15,000 ducats, and Michelangelo – who only took the job because he was unable to get funding for another project – knew to whom he was accountable. As for Pope Julius, he was accountable to God.

The point I am making is that patronage, public or private, individual or collective, has very rarely been disinterested. There have always been strings attached, and creative people have always accepted that they are accountable to those that fund them – even if

the expected outcome is the glory of God – or Pope Julius - rather than urban regeneration.

It appears that countries that have retained the tradition of princely patronage descending from the divine right of kings – notably France – have had fewer problems with justifying the patronage of the arts. The United States has gone to the opposite extreme, treating patronage as an individual matter – though making that possible through a liberal tax regime. Since the 17th Century, Britain has fallen between. The tradition of royal patronage was knocked on the head by the execution of Charles I, while the closure of the theatres introduced a Puritanism that has never gone away. Politicians find it difficult to believe that the arts are serious, and don't think the state should be responsible for public entertainment.

The British state's approach to culture has essentially been governed by two principles, the first of which is regulation. That prominent figure of the Elizabethan stage, the Lord Chamberlain, continued to censor the theatre until 1968. The creation of the BBC in 1927 was the public regulation of the private monopoly created with the British Broadcasting Company in 1922.

The second principle is utility. The founding father of British cultural institutions, the British Museum, was created, not by the Crown, which turned down the offer, but Parliament, which saw the point of the argument in Sir Hans Sloane's will that his botanical and antiquarian collections "may be rendered as useful as possible, as well towards satisfying the desire of the curious, as for the improvement of knowledge, and information of all purposes."[1] The British Museum Act of 1753 also reminds us of the reluctance of the State to spend its own money even on useful knowledge – the project was funded by a Lottery.

As the Enlightenment progressed into the Industrial Revolution, knowledge was increasingly understood and encouraged as an economic resource. The libraries and museums founded in the 19th Century were to be sources of useful knowledge – the Victoria and Albert Museum for instance was intended to improve industrial design - and

their philanthropy was combined with social regulation. Free museums and libraries would keep the working classes out of the pub.

Adult education and unemployment among actors and musicians were two of the justifications used to persuade the Board of Education in 1940 that in wartime it was essential "to show publicly and unmistakably that the Government cares about the cultural life of the country."[2] The modern period in the history of state patronage began then, with the formation of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts. But even this imaginative act had its motive in propaganda. By the time CEMA was transmogrified by Royal Charter in 1946 into the Arts Council of Great Britain, the anti-metropolitan, pro-amateur, bottom-up principles with which it had started had been turned by Maynard Keynes into the mandarin, metropolitan, high art values sustained by the BBC's Third Programme, formed at almost the same time. The Arts Council became part of the welfare state settlement, a minor but acceptable part of the post-war consensus. Indeed, you could argue that its utilitarian purpose was the manufacture of a deferential consensus that the arts were generally a good thing – a proposition that Charles Samaurez Smith has suggested was taken for granted, and remained unexamined for too long.

The consensus was made possible by the slow, but steady expansion of cultural provision. Lord Goodman, in charge during the 1960s, talked in terms of keeping people happy by always having enough to cover the table, with a bit over to satisfy new comers. The shape of the table was never in question.

By 1975, however, economic and social change, which had its cultural expression, meant that the post-war consensus was breaking down. Mrs Thatcher arrived in 1979 determined to roll back the state, and by rolling back public spending, people in arts started, in the words of one of her arts ministers, Richard Luce, "to be weaned from the welfare state mentality."[3]

With shrinking core funding, the arts now had to prove their utility through their cost-effectiveness, but they were not alone in experiencing the impact of what became

known as New Public Management. As Michael Power explains in his excellent study *The Audit Society*, "One might put the New Public Management ideal very simply as a desire to replace the presumed inefficiency of hierarchical bureaucracy with the presumed efficiency of markets."[4] Entirely new government relationships were being created, with new institutions such as the Audit Commission in 1982 and the reformed National Audit Office in 1983. The National Audit Act of 1983 enshrined the principle of Value for Money, which would be judged by the three E's: economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This was a profound cultural shift whose effects are still being worked through, one that people in the arts have been aware of and protested against, but not, until now, properly addressed.

In 1992, under John Major, the Department of National Heritage was brought into being to regulate and make more effective the ragbag of cultural responsibilities that had previously been spread across half a dozen ministries, in the process becoming what David Mellor called "the big beast" that, following the inexorable logic of institutions, would seek to expand its bureaucratic space. Major's Citizen's Charter, as Catherine Needham has pointed out in her recent pamphlet, furthered the process of turning citizenship into consumerism.[5] The National Lottery introduced new bureaucratic procedures and opportunities for regulation, its supposed independence from government has been steadily eroded in the interests of public policy objectives, of which the Olympics is only the latest example.

In 1993 the government switched to resource-based accounting, which made departments think much more like businesses, and the Treasury began to develop the system of Public Service Agreements between itself and other departments, which in turn led to the development of funding agreements between the DNH and the cultural quangoes it supported. Having rolled back the state, the government proceeded to fill the vacuum with corporate plans, performance indicators and other forms of measurement, which could be summed up by the Education Secretary Charles Clark's recent phrase,

“targets, tables and testing.” The utility of the arts was economic, the audit society abolished trust.

The next stage in the emerging contract culture came with the conversion of the DNH into the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 1997, and the publication of its Public Service Agreement, which set six major objectives, and 21 PSA Targets. While promising “quality and excellence” for “the many not the few” – an another example of an unexamined proposition - the DCMS adopted what has become known as “the new agenda”, addressing issues of social inclusiveness, access, crime and education. At the same time, the old economic agenda has not gone away, and indeed has been added to, with the recognition of the economic importance of the “cultural industries”. Target 14 stated that “Funding of Non Departmental Public Bodies to be conditional on quantified improvements in outputs, efficiency, access, quality promotion, income generation or private sector funding, monitored by a new independent watchdog.”[6]

While that watchdog, QUEST lived on this earth but a little time, this is the regime that the history of British state patronage has brought us to. Its principles are still those of regulation and utility, except that the need to demonstrate both economic and social utility has become so demanding that it is become in itself an oppressive form of regulation. I began by saying that accountability has always been an accepted part of the patronage relationship. The problem we now face is to work out how that accountability can be accounted for.

There are encouraging signs – of which perhaps this conference is one. At Education, David Milliband has started talking about the three C’s: culture, creativity and community. Last November the Cabinet Office’s strategy unit produced a document *Creating Public Value*[7], which, though it makes no mention of the arts, does suggest that Public Value might be more than Value for Money. The measure of Value for Money is Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness, but you can only judge the economy and efficiency of a work of art once you know its intrinsic, rather than instrumental effectiveness. Effectiveness in art is not measurable by targets, tables and testing. In the

arts, there is no equivalence in the implied equation, Value for Money, when value is moral, not monetary, expressive, not instrumental, aesthetic, not utilitarian. There needs to be a new accountability, not of value for money, but money for values.

Notes

1. Quoted in J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum: a case study in architectural politics*, Pelican, 1973, p.47
2. Quoted in F.M. Leventhal, ' "The Best for the Most": CEMA and State Sponsorship of the Arts in Wartime, 1939-45', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol 1, No.3 (1990), p.293
3. R. Luce , Office of Arts and Libraries Press Release, 8 July 1987
4. M. Power, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*, Oxford University Press, 19995, p.43
5. C. Needham, *Citizen-consumers: New Labour's Marketplace Democracy*, The Catalyst Forum, 2003
6. See S. Selwood (ed), *The UK Cultural Sector*, Policy Studies Institute, 2001, p.186
7. Gavin Kelly and Stephen Muers, *Creating Public Value: an analytical framework for public service reform*, 2002, available on Cabinet Office website.