



## THE PLATFORM: VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

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### ARTICLE

#### China's New Cultural Revolution

By Elizabeth Casale

China's cultural sector is growing rapidly in size and scope and sophistication in parallel with that country's staggering pace of economic development. There has been much talk in the arts community about the Chinese government's intention to build 1,000 new museums across the country by 2015. While the number may seem exaggerated, it is not. The State Administration of Cultural Heritage, the government bureau in charge of China's museums nationwide, indeed has announced such a plan, adding that this unprecedented state investment in cultural infrastructure will, among other things, ensure that every mid-sized and large city in the country has at least one museum. How officials arrived at the fantastic-sounding figure of 1,000 starts to become clearer once one internalizes the fact that China currently has approximately 100 urban areas with a population of 1 million or more.

Beijing alone is planning to add at least 32 new museums by 2008. Already underway is a \$220 million expansion of the National Museum of China that will double the exhibition spaces, and, in a move that reflects a new emphasis on visitor services and earned income generation, complement them with a museum shop, café and cinema. And museums are not all. The new National Grand Theater, a \$325 million performing arts complex designed by French architect Paul Andreu has broken ground and when complete will boast a 2,416-seat opera hall, a 2,017 seat concert hall, theatre and gleaming new patron spaces as well. Establishing the theatre was a personal priority of



President Jiang Zemin, who wished to see Beijing's deteriorating theaters replaced with a new cultural landmark before the 2008 Olympics. Other new facilities opening in time for the Olympics include Herzog & de Meuron's "birds' nest" National Stadium, PTW's National Swimming Center, and Sasaki Associates 2,800-acre Olympic Green. The price tag for these projects alone is at least \$854 million, on top of the estimated \$214 million spent between 1995 and 2000 on cultural facilities in the capital.

For its part, Shanghai – seemingly engaged in a battle to unseat Beijing as China's cultural capital – now has cultural facilities that, according to many, surpass Beijing's in quality and quantity and stand on par with the best venues internationally. The city has also stated an ambition to open more than 100 new museums by 2010, when it will play host to the World Expo; recent developments include the \$100 million Shanghai Art Museum, a new museum of antiquities, a \$200 million science museum, the \$150 million Shanghai Grand Theatre, and renovations and expansions to practically every existing concert hall, theatre and arts centre in the metropolis of 17 million people.

China's investment in cultural infrastructure is geared toward international standards of excellence. But building trophy facilities is not the only manifestation of China's new interest in the cultural sector, and international sporting events not the only driver. In addition to the extraordinary capital investment, government officials are actively encouraging the development of the cultural sector on other fronts as well.

In addition to constructing and renovating individual venues – and another example of China's predominantly "place-based" cultural strategy – the government is encouraging the development of broader arts and cultural districts, ranging from a Soho-like gallery district in Beijing to the upscale planned live/work/entertainment district Xintiandi in Shanghai to the 100-acre West Kowloon Cultural District in Hong Kong (a project with which AEA is involved). In some cases, the size of these initiatives has led to a courting of private investment: Xintiandi was developed privately by multimillionaire entrepreneur Vincent Lo, and, in what is perhaps a harbinger of things to come, the \$3 billion West Kowloon Cultural District is being developed as an enormous Public Finance Initiative in which, in return for development rights to the adjacent district, the chosen developer will be expected to finance the building and running of museums and performing arts venues in the district.

Beijing is also demonstrating a new openness to the import and export of cultural activity and ideas. While the government continues to organize selected cultural events in order to present an official image of Chinese cultural output abroad, more and more individual artists, scholars and organizations are connecting with the international arts and cultural community, and such international exposure appears to be welcomed by government. Chinese artists are now visible, important and celebrated players on the international art scene, gaining increased exposure through participation in art fairs, biennales and festivals worldwide. At home, similar high-profile events are proliferating and gaining international recognition. The young Shanghai Biennale, for example, is the latest and



trendiest destination for the art collecting jet set, and contemporary Chinese art is one of the hottest new collecting areas.

The preservation of cultural heritage is another area in which government is taking a more aggressive stance. Last year a fund for cultural heritage protection was established, new efforts have been launched to document intangible heritage, and China now ranks third behind Italy and France in terms of the number of properties inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List (29, all but six of which have been added since 1990). Skeptics, however, wonder if the new attention paid to cultural heritage has to do with genuine concern for preservation or with exploiting the tourism potential of such sites.

And while not necessarily the most visible, perhaps the most surprising reflection of a new cultural revolution is the Chinese government's evolving stance toward artistic expression. The Communist Party no longer holds exclusive control over the cultural and media sectors and has eased censorship restraints. As a result, today provocative exhibitions and performances considered scandalous even by Western standards are held frequently, and bureaucrats for the most part turn a blind eye. In addition to a relaxed attitude to content, newer fields such as modern dance, performance and cutting edge architecture are being explored and encouraged, as well as a revival of traditional Chinese arts forms, such as Chinese opera (*xiqu*) and ink painting, which were almost eradicated during the Cultural Revolution.

Finally, one of the most important and encouraging developments is the burgeoning interest in the professional education and training of arts administrators, in response to recognition of the fact that China's cultural sector lacks skilled professionals in many core areas of administration, including collections management, exhibition display, marketing and fundraising. To address the gaps, training and exchange programs are being developed with leading institutions such as New York University, The British Museum, and The Asia Society. The establishment in 2001 of the Beijing Museum Ordinance, the first local statute on museum management in China, similarly reflects increasing stature and professionalization of the museum sector.

But what is driving this new cultural revolution, and will it last? The reasons run deeper than the Olympics, which are just a catalyst for and a symbol of a much deeper impetus and longer-range plan. Indeed, the fact that the Chinese government made aggressive bids to lure such games – and won them – is evidence not only of its desire to compete in the new high stakes game of global cultural competition, but of its willingness to pay the price to win them.

One reason is symbolic. As art and culture are now seen worldwide as symbols of a modern, progressive society, China is making a significant and strategic investment in the cultural sector to affirm its status as a bona fide member of the community of first-tier nations, countries whose leading cities are considered "world-class" capitals of culture. The government has a strategic ambition to propel Beijing and Shanghai in particular into this echelon, one undoubtedly linked to its rapid industrialization and desire to join



the exclusive Group of Eight wealthiest nations. Indeed, China has listed the cultural industry in its "10th Five-Year Plan (2001-2005) for National Economic and Social Development," and experts expect it to become one of the country's pillar industries in the 21st century. As Jonathan Napack wrote in the June/July issue of *Art in America*, China's leadership, "determined to join the club of 'advanced nations,' has begun to see contemporary culture as a potential status symbol." He reports further that President Jiang Zemin is so intrigued by how the French government exploited its country's reputation for modern art to burnish its image in the last century that he invited professors to tutor him on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of a more advanced economy such as Hong Kong's, China's new cultural strategy can also be seen as a necessary corollary of the city's shift in its economic base from a manufacturing to a service economy. As manufacturing jobs continue to move north to the mainland, launching a "creative industries strategy" to lure more white-collar workers with sophisticated entertainment and leisure tastes has become a local government priority. Linked to this is an aggressive tourism strategy, especially cultural tourism that brings visitors with high "spend rates." In a reversal of sorts that has had an irksome effect on Hong Kong's ego, the city is actively courting middle class and wealthy tourists from the mainland, whose numbers have been propelled by the recent relaxing of travel restrictions on them.

Perhaps the main driver behind all this new investment in culture, however, is not a government economic or political scheme, but Western-style consumer demand. The recent emergence in China of a class of wealthy, highly educated urban denizens has spurred a new demand for art and cultural experiences. With newly-minted millions and international exposure, China's new moneyed elite are eager to signify their socio-economic status to the outside world through participating in cultural events and even collecting art. And, increasingly, they want the freedom to be kept abreast of cultural trends worldwide, and to choose the type, timing and tenor of their cultural engagements. It is perhaps the emergence of this powerful new market of cultural consumers that is responsible for the growing sophistication of the cultural sector in China, and the force that will propel the country's new cultural revolution inexorably forward. And new cultural venues will meet their demands only in part.

For better or for worse, a city's international stature is now inexorably linked to the vitality of its cultural life, and buildings – as tangible, expensive, cutting-edge showcases – are invariably seen as the most effective reflection of a city's cultural offer. Recognition of this fact – and an expressed desire to "catch up" with leading cultural capitals worldwide – has led China to emphasize a "place-based" cultural strategy that favors buildings as a symbol of cultural sophistication over one that bolsters the other components necessary to both a vibrant cultural life. In contrast to the substantial investment in the "hardware" of culture, less has been done to support the "software" side – that is, developing in

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Napack, "Young Beijing," *Art in America*, June/July 2004, p. 143.



parallel a “people-based” strategy that focuses as much on the development of cultural producers, products and consumers as the places in which they interact.

Despite significant improvements, China’s cultural sector still contends with low levels of cultural participation, art education, private support for the arts, and a poor public perception of the intrinsic value of art and culture on the part of both citizens and policymakers. These elements are critical to a successful long term cultural strategy, including one that has explicit economic development goals connected to it. Yet government has focused less on developing them than on achieving its ambitious building goals. Indeed, government funding for artistic and cultural activities is drying out at the same time as dazzling new venues are being erected – venues that require audiences, of course, and programming that will attract and maintain them. A 2001 piece in the *People’s Daily* noted that ten professional performance groups in Beijing had been “stripped of government funding and left to fend for themselves,” that audiences were down from a combination of poor programming and high ticket prices, and that, while “Beijing has mapped out plans to become an international city, [it] needs first-class cultural performances as well as first-rate infrastructure.”<sup>2</sup> More recently, stories have been circulating about the Shanghai Grand Theatre often half-empty for lack of interesting programming, or of state-of-the-art equipment that few employees know how to use.

The news out of China is exciting. The government’s commitment to world-class quality in the venues themselves plus the sheer scale of public investment that signifies art and culture is a government priority will in turn highlight the need for ‘content’. The steps taken toward greater artistic freedom, defining and protecting cultural heritage, articulating the role of museums, and developing arts leaders are especially bright trends.

But China’s cultural sector is grappling with dramatic change, and the country still has a long way to go to solidify its status as a country with world-class cultural capitals. If this is a genuine aim, then China will need to develop a long term cultural strategy that invests in more than buildings as a means to an economic end. Ultimately, the aim of such a strategy should be to nurture an environment where art and artists can flourish, and to cultivate cultural participation and appreciation for the arts among all of its citizens, not just the new moneyed elite. Over time, China will need to invest substantially in “software” in addition to “hardware,” that is, in the people, programs, ideas and interactions that serve to fire the imagination, frame an indelible experience, animate a museum, cultivate and celebrate a people. And this will require a deep and authentic commitment to freedom of expression. Over time, China’s new middle class will demand no less.

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<sup>2</sup> “Door to Art and Music Open Wider in Beijing,” *China People’s Daily*, February 7, 2001.



## SURVEY REVIEW

### Are museum careers no longer affordable?

By Magnus von Wistinghausen

*Pay in museums*

UK's Museums Association, March 2004

[http://www.museumsassociation.org/asset\\_arena/text/04/policy\\_salarysurvey2004.pdf](http://www.museumsassociation.org/asset_arena/text/04/policy_salarysurvey2004.pdf)

The UK's Museums Association recently published the results of the first comprehensive survey on museum sector salaries in 15 years. *Pay in museums* makes predictably disturbing reading but also demonstrates the value of properly conducted sector-wide research to inform debate and policy making. Many of the findings confirm what anyone working in the sector knows. But beneath the headlines they expose some important nuances. Not everyone has fared equally badly, or rather some have done much worse than others.

Below are some of most telling findings:

- Front-of-house staff fare better than any other staff category reviewed: current salary levels are most closely aligned to comparable jobs (e.g. in libraries, security services); they increased well in excess of inflation, showing real increases of about 50% across the 15-year period reviewed, and have a London factor with salaries in the capital a third higher than those elsewhere;
- Conversely, curators have done worst of all: they earn 45% less today than university lecturers. Pay progression has not matched inflation in the last fifteen years, leaving them 10% worse off in terms of purchasing power (based on retail price inflation, i.e. excl. the cost of housing) and there is no discernable difference between London and regional pay levels. As a result median curator salaries in London are now a mere 11% higher than those of front-of-house staff;
- Education and conservation staff have not done much better. Median education staff salary is 40% lower than that of secondary school teachers who saw 50% above inflation pay increases compared to 1988, most of which presumably as a result of recent New Labour policies. Conservators earn 20% less than engineering technicians. Both just about managed to secure inflation adjustments;
- Pay progression between entry and senior positions is very narrow. In curatorial, conservation and education jobs, this amounts to no more than £7-8,000.



Progression rates lag well behind those in comparator jobs (that's across all job categories);

- Museum directors' pay varies greatly between local authority/independent museums (£30-32,000), university museums (£45,000) and national museums (£85,000), but at median level is 40% lower than that of a school head teacher (£55,000);
- More generally, national museums offer far better pay prospects and progressions for curatorial positions than local and independent museums, with university museums half way between the two. No wonder regional museum find it nigh impossible to recruit national museum staff into mid-career and senior posts;
- Staff turnover is low and with an average of 8% p.a. - half the national average. A third of respondents reported no staff turnover at all.

These are of course highly aggregate data with a sample dominated by small and mid-sized organisations – only four national museums responded to the survey. And the survey excludes important 'new' job categories about which one would have liked to know more, such as marketing, fundraising, finance and administration, i.e. jobs for which museums have to compete with other sectors for professional talent.

Be that as it may, what these findings are telling us in no uncertain terms is the following:

- Museums increasingly rely on staff – their core organisational resource – earning less than their peers in broadly comparable professions;
- In other words, there is an increasingly large hidden subsidy in the form of 'foregone life income' which supports the economics of museums;
- This hidden subsidy seems to be particularly large (and rising) amongst the traditional museum professions, i.e. the core guardians of institutional missions.

So what are museums, individually and collectively as a sector, to make of these findings? Accept them as a *fait accompli* and gloss over the issue by extolling staff commitment and 'hard work' in Director' and Chairmen reports, speeches and the like? This seems to be the prevailing attitude.

However coy this particular comfort blanket may still be, it seems time to throw it off and start to address this sorry state of affairs and its already too apparent consequences. For anyone who cares to see, the corrosive impact of low pay is only too apparent:

- On staff morale and motivation levels, particularly at/beyond mid-career level (i.e. amongst staff with management responsibility);
- On recruitment, in particular at mid-career and senior management level; and
- On succession planning at senior curatorial, management and directorial level.



The fact is that museum careers in the UK are becoming less and less affordable for anyone with even fairly modest life style expectations and a family to raise in a world of soaring cost of education, health and retirement provision. Add to this the cost of property (not just in London) and anyone starting off on a museum career today is almost guaranteed a pauper's existence. Are traditional museum jobs imperceptibly returning to be the preserve of the privately wealthy or otherwise financially independent, with a sprinkle of inveterate believers in the cause happy to 'pay' for their careers with a garret existence? However polemical this may sound, there are serious issues at stake here:

- For boards and senior management who need to replenish the pool of talented and highly motivated professionals capable of running operationally, financially, politically and culturally increasingly complex organisations.
- For funding bodies and politicians who expect museums to be equal opportunity employers and to grow a workforce more representative of society's social and cultural mix;
- For all of us who believe in the role and mission of museums in contemporary society as a 'public good' and should therefore care about an equitable deal for those entrusted with running them.

Museum jobs are, if anything, more demanding than they have ever been. As with everything else this eventually comes at a price, but that price has so far been eschewed and ended up being carried as an 'opportunity cost of employment' by those least able to let market forces act on their behalf. Tellingly the survey results and regular job adverts in the papers tell us that where museums have been forced to go out into the market place and compete with others employers for finance, marketing, IT and fundraising recruits money has had to be found – or low caliber appointments and/or high staff turnover accepted.

Over time, the same is bound happen with the core museum profession – only that trends tend to take much longer to manifest themselves, and to reverse. The perceptible decline in student numbers in history of art or archaeology since their heydays in the 1970s and 1980s must in part at least be a reflection of the nature of career prospects. International competition, notably from better endowed North American institutions (but also from the booming Middle and Far Eastern museums sector as well as increasingly the leading Continental European institutions who are opening up senior posts to overseas candidates) is also likely to cream off locally nurtured talent.

What is at stake, therefore, is no less than the future life-blood of museums as public institutions, and the need to face up to the challenge of planning for the future generation of museum professionals. Leadership and other HR development initiatives, however important, are unlikely to deliver their impact unless accompanied by improving pay prospects.



In the first instance, this will require more homework in terms of cross sector benchmarking. The MA survey only scratches the surface and only intimates the level of 'hidden subsidy' in different job categories. International benchmarking also needs to be brought into the equation.

At some point however, creative thinking will need to set in as it seems highly unlikely that government will be persuaded to sign a blank check for wholesale salary increases as it recently did for nurses and teachers. That said, the sector would do well to look more closely at the lobbying campaigns that delivered these.

Facing up to the funding gap of low pay is likely to require a deeper look at the ecology and operational structure of museums, the nature of museum jobs and the deployment of workforce - in a way that even the more radical museum restructurings in recent years (all of which primarily focused on cost cutting) have failed to do. This will mean living up to the simple fact is that most museums do too much on an increasingly frayed shoe string. Addressing staff pay within the context of limited additional public (and philanthropic) funding will therefore require institutions to contemplate the option of 'doing less but better'. After decades during which growth (physical and programmatic) constituted the main measure of institutional health and success, this will be no less than a paradigm shift.

Making better pay affordable will also require looking with fresh eyes at the notion of institutional partnerships, in terms of staff/post sharing (e.g. for curatorial and conservation expertise, or in finance and IT). There should also be scope to review the structure of staff compensation packages and introduce greater flexibility in terms of non-financial benefits (e.g. leave of absences, sabbaticals etc.) to improve the work-life balance. Creative HR thinking will be called for and should be informed by looking at innovative practices in other sectors which have been better in investing in the development of their workforce.

Do not expect a sector wide initiative to take the lead on this. As with with any halfway radical agenda, this will have to come from a few institutions willing to take the plunge and demonstrate it is indeed possible to break out of the vicious circle of 'ever more' through rampant staff pauperisation. There is still time to do this, but it is now fast running out.

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**ARTICLE**



## Academics', Consultants' and Practitioners' Perspectives on the Cultural Sector

By Adrian Ellis

*"Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back... Sooner or later, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil."*

--John Maynard Keynes

Consultants live in a nether world between practitioners (arts managers, public officials and, yes, occasionally even artists) and academics. The latter are Keynes' 'scribblers', whose hypotheses and hunches and, on rare occasions, full blown theories we reduce to the pat shorthand of our trade: concepts such as Baumol's cost disease, creative clusters, social capital....

Arts practitioners are often so close to their problems, and so emotionally attached to particular solutions, that they find it difficult to see that these problems form part of a larger pattern. But one needs to understand that pattern if the 'solution' is to be anything other than a very short term palliative or even a placebo. An injection of emergency cash into a theater is not a solution to a financial shortfall that is caused by some emerging imbalance between income and expenditure in turn caused by changes in the demographic base on the community from which the audience is drawn. Cash may seem like the answer, but if the causes are systemic then the gap will obviously reappear unless those underlying causes are addressed. Equally, when a strong director moves on, having created an organization in her own image, and an organizational culture that is an extension of her own personality, her board may be bewildered by the fragility of the organization when she is taken out of the equation. There is a pattern, with known causes and effects, and even some remedies. But you cannot discern the pattern from a sample of one.

People running arts organizations are pinned down by the weight of daily events. Devoting the financial and emotional resources required to push through one's instinctive explanatory defenses to the underlying problem is difficult. It's easier to write it off as a short-term blip...the aftermath of 9-11'... the weather... The difficulties are compounded when there are so few answers that are 'actionable' – that is, known prescriptions that have a high probability of working and that are within the financial and organizational reach of the organization in question.

In other words, many experienced, hard-pressed arts professionals face problems that the sum of human knowledge in and about their sector does not satisfactorily address. They may therefore be excused a degree of skepticism when a consultant claims to have an 'answer'. The reality is that arts organizations, arts policy makers and their consultants are currently faced with many challenges that they do not have the tools to solve; at least on terms that would not involve compromises regarded as outside the



boundaries of an acceptable solution – compromises to quality, to scale of operation or to internal conditions of employment that would involve either breaches of faith or collateral damage to the culture of the organization.

There are two broad sets of reasons for this.

The first is rarely addressed in either the field or the academy or indeed anywhere in polite society. There is a structural imbalance between the number and scale of non-profit cultural organizations that there is the available cash to support and the number and scale of organizations that exist. Because the sector is, for compelling reasons, protected from the competition in the capital market, supply and demand are not brought into balance in the same way as in a free market. The adjustments back to some sort of equilibrium between supply and demand are slower, more awkward and more politicized than in a situation where there is a market in capital resources. The non-profit cultural market can sustain prolonged periods of adjustment in which relatively inefficient and, perhaps more important, artistically questionable organizations continue to absorb resources that might be better deployed elsewhere in the sector, despite their inability to serve their missions effectively. (The academic scribbler here is of course Adam Smith.)

If there is basically insufficient demand for the product – even latent, unstimulated, demand – then a better run, better capitalized organization, with more professional marketing and development and enjoying a higher level of capital investment is *still* not going to fly. Many well paid consulting assignments to which funders and arts administrators are collectively party are premised on a well-meaning conspiracy of denial of this fact. More so when consultant and funder are fluttering around a struggling organization with a distinguished history, strong civic backing and strong attachments of sentiment with a community of stakeholders. The existence of such assignments, and consultants' willingness to take them on despite their underlying dread instinct that the organization is kaput, is one of the reasons that the reputation of arts consulting in the arts world is not all that it might be.

The second reason that there are so few viable answers concerns not the inherently insoluble nature of the problem under consideration so much as its *contingently* insoluble nature. That is, the knowledge to solve it is either 'out there' or can be assembled with a bit of digging and due diligence; but the question then is: where out there?

Practitioners again, are the first port of call. Someone, somewhere, has confronted this problem before and tried and either failed or succeeded in addressing it. (Failures are as useful as successes in this context.) Find that person and talk to them. Scour the relevant literature – the journals and websites of the specific arts form and their trade organizations and the conference reports and endless PDF files buried on the sites of foundations and funding agencies.

The second port of call is the academic world: management theory and its burgeoning non-profit management subfield; planning and urban policy; cultural economics (Lefties



such as Baumol and Throsby in polite tension with righties like Frey and Tyler Cowan); futurology (for long term impact of demographic change, technology, the rise and fall of the leisure class etc. etc.); and occasionally museum studies. (Actually, in truth, this last voluminous field comprises for the most part an avalanche of indignant, painstaking rediscoveries of the simple truth that museums embody values as well as facts, and generally they are the values of the people who pay for them. Well, duh!)

So what does the field of arts management and policy have to offer? How useful is this to the jobbing consultant? In 1990 Pankratz and Morris edited a survey of academic writing about cultural policy and management called *The Future of the Arts: Public Policy and Arts Research*. A new volume revisits the territory fourteen years later with many of the same contributors – some eighteen articles divided into seven broad subject areas<sup>3</sup>. The emphasis is more on cultural policy than on the management of cultural institutions although there is one rather abstract article on ‘Administering the Culture of Everyday Life’. And within the field of cultural policy, as Alberta Arthurs’ short piece points out, the focus of attention is placed overwhelmingly on patterns in arts funding (predominantly that sliver that comes from federal sources and the relative and growing importance of state and local funding). There is also a great deal of definitional wrangling in the volume – what constitutes high and low culture; much hand-wringing about the lack of reliable data-runs; and introspective ruminations on how the field of cultural research is and should be articulated.

What is disturbing is how little robust theory or hard data to support or repudiate that theory appears to have been generated by the field in the past decade, as opposed to data generated to support pitches for funding. The same criticism has been leveled, savagely, at the UK cultural policy field by Sara Selwood.<sup>4</sup> If and in so far as the book represents an overview of the American academic scene – and from this reader’s weather eye on the sector it does – there has been precious little theory or data generated to help solve the sorts of problems that consultants are asked to solve.

This got me wondering why.... What is the connection – or rather the disconnection – between the consultants’ need to understand what renders either vibrant or congested the heart of cultural life and the literature reviewed in this volume?

My reluctant conclusion was that much of the research in the field suffers a fundamental deficiency: the absence of a theoretical underpinning of any sophistication or an overt dialogue about that model (or those models) that clarifies points of contention, and allows one to establish which assertions are founded and which unfounded.

This complaint is, I realize, uncomfortably similar to Richard Posner’s diatribe against ‘public intellectuals’ who make their assertions in articles and books that are never

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<sup>3</sup> *The Arts in a New Millennium: Research in the Arts Sector*, Valerie B. Morris and David B. Pankratz Praeger, Westport, 2003. ISBN: 0-275-97013-2

<sup>4</sup><http://www.psi.org.uk/publications/UKCultSectorsumm.pdf>



subject to the traditional rigor of academe. The result is a not a dialogue but a series of unconnected monologues, not a Kuhnian paradigm but a series of atomized, largely unexamined endeavors.

Data garner their strength from their place in a causal model, whether implicit or explicit. Monetarists in their heyday used to track indicators like M1 and M2 (narrow money) because they had an underlying model of the way the economy worked in which these measures had causal significance. Keynesians and neo-Keynesians use other indicators and the tussle between competing indicators is a proxy for a tussle between alternative versions of how the economy works. Empirical evidence without a causal model is random - evidence of what? - while a theoretical model without evidence is unproven. To edge understanding forward you need both.

So...where is the equivalent intellectual debate in the cultural sector about the relationship between investment in the arts and various sorts of benefits? Well, there is some systems-theory work that looks at the impact of balanced portfolios of investment in different sorts of cultural expenditure – audience development, education, participative arts versus ‘up-holding the canon,’ revenue funding versus capital expenditure, non-profit versus for profit etc. etc. – but this emergent field has not as far as I can tell had any influence on the development of thinking about the sector, beyond perhaps John Kreidler’s incisive and much quoted critique of the long term impact of the Ford Foundation’s funding strategies<sup>5</sup>.

Last year I wrote a polemic called Valuing Culture for a conference Demos ran.<sup>6</sup> The basic argument was that cultural policy has been ‘hyper-instrumentalized’. That is, our preoccupation is with what culture can do for, *inter alia*, tourism, inward investment, educational standards, and job creation. The arts community deserves some of the blame for this – in their efforts to appropriate the budgets of adjacent policy areas, they have developed extraordinarily ingenious arguments about the efficacy of culture as a policy instrument. However, the empirical basis for the claims is often dangerously thin and the cumulative impact may be an over-extended, thinly capitalized, organizationally weak arts sector with an underlying ‘legitimacy crisis’ as its imperial ambitions come to be seen as based on shaky, self-serving foundations.

A single quote will give you a sense of how far removed from a secure grounding instrumental rationales for cultural expenditures have become:

"This conference aims at advancing the role of multicultural music and art celebrations in child abuse prevention through knowledge synthesis and dissemination. The discussions will bring together a cross section of representatives from child abuse prevention community, arts organisations,

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/lost.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.aeaconsulting.com/site/assets/pdf/valuingculturepdf.pdf>



musicians, DJs, volunteer organisations, state and local agencies and councils to assist Africamix's volunteers, board and staff members in developing specific strategies to promote understanding of utilising volunteer arts and music celebrations in helping to combat child abuse and neglect."

Meanwhile, our obsession with side-effects has left the heart of the issue neglected. The heart of the issue is: "What constitutes a vibrant cultural organization or community and what do we need to do to ensure we have one?" rather than "Why do we need one?" This means that relatively little attention is being paid to issues affecting the internal dynamics of the sector as opposed to its effects on other sectors.

My candidate list would include:

- The impact of low levels of capitalization on organizational effectiveness;
- The impact of changing funding criteria on the pattern of arts activity;
- The impact of technology on patterns of cultural consumption and production;
- The impact of changing demographic on attendance patterns;
- The impact of changes in school curricula on levels of amateur participation;
- The circumstances most conducive to artistic innovation, including the management of artistic risk;
- The impact of the vertical integration of the commercial entertainment industry on non-profit provision...

Each of these will have a profound impact on cultural provision over the next decade. You may have other candidates. But our thinking about cultural policy and the management of cultural institutions appears still to treat 'the arts' as a black box, measuring – or at least asserting – its impacts without lifting the lid off the box and working out how the machine itself works. This represents a major omission and a disservice by the academic community to the practitioner. Maybe consultants should have a go ...

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## ARTICLE REVIEW



## 'Art? We can't compete...': Is this really the case?

By Katharine Housden

*Art? We Can't Compete*

Judith Flanders

*The Daily Telegraph, March 22, 2004*

In February of this year, *The Art Newspaper* published its annual ranking of exhibitions based on the average size of daily attendance.<sup>7</sup> The corresponding article discussed the decline in the number of visitors to museum shows on both sides of the Atlantic, and the outstanding success of 'Peter the Great' at the Hermitage. In March, an article by Judith Flanders in *The Daily Telegraph* titled 'Art? We can't compete' focused on the poor performance of London in *The Art Newspaper's* ranking.<sup>8</sup> This article cites these figures as 'humiliating reading for Londoners' as London made its appearance in the list at number 30. The core of the problem, according to Flanders, is the lack of spacious conditions for temporary art shows, equating them with a 'Tokyo subway.' This allegation of inadequate temporary exhibition space in London needs to be addressed.

At the outset some questions should be raised about the reliability of the findings upon which Flanders based her article. First, these figures were based on visitor numbers supplied by the institutions concerned, and were not certified by an outside body. Second, it is problematic that some museums do not sell tickets for temporary exhibitions. *The Art Newspaper* points out that those institutions that do not sell tickets still count individual attendance, but do not state the methods used. Third, *The Art Newspaper* itself was notified of a mistake that was rectified in the March edition. 'Peter the Great' at the Hermitage was initially ranked first in the list with 767,000 visitors, whereas, in reality the number was 450,000, making it third. Despite the publication's attempts to verify this huge figure for the attendance to the Hermitage exhibition, prior to the incorrect figure being published, the error does raise a question mark over the ranking, especially as the Tate Britain figures were totally omitted from the list.

Flanders, in her use of the exhibitions' data, makes some unjust generalisations on temporary exhibition spaces in London. We have all experienced the difficulties of crowding at popular exhibitions, but to say that this deems all temporary exhibition spaces in the capital unfit is a distortion. Flanders comes to this conclusion by drawing a correlation between low turn-out at exhibitions and her experience of crowds - a methodologically suspect line of argument. Her own experience is anecdotal and she offers no evidence of a correlation between overcrowding at exhibitions and falling visitor numbers.

A number of examples of popular, successful exhibitions in London can be cited, such as 'Aztecs;' 'Pre-Raphaelite & Other Masters: The Andrew Lloyd Webber Collection' at the

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<sup>7</sup> The numbers were calculated by dividing the total number of visitors by the number of days the exhibition was open.

<sup>8</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2004 'Art? We can't compete' Judith Flanders



Royal Academy; 'London 1753' at the British Museum; and 'Gainsborough' at Tate Britain. All showed a wide variety of art and accessed a diverse audience. The overwhelming triumph of Tate Modern and the success of free admission to national museums indicate that London is on a cultural high. In the year since free admission was introduced, the V&A, for example, saw a 111% increase in visitors; the Science Museum showed a 100% increase.<sup>9</sup> These figures provide a snapshot of the cultural thirst of the city.

In many ways temporary exhibition spaces in London reflect the character of their institutions by bringing a charm, atmosphere and context to their exhibitions that add to their unique appeal. A couple of years ago the luxurious boudoir feel of 'Painted Ladies' at the National Portrait Gallery was enhanced by the situation of the gallery, and the intimacy of the space. The temporary exhibition gallery at Sir John Soane's Museum is small, but the exhibitions which complement, and draw on the Soane collection work well in the space. At the other end of the spectrum, the recent 'Edward Hopper' exhibition at Tate Modern excelled in the temporary gallery. The extent of the space was such that 'Nighthawks' was given a room of its own. In 'Constable to Delacroix: British Art and the French Romantics', at Tate Britain, 'The Raft of the Medusa' was also given its own individual display area to great effect.

London has a number of significant temporary exhibition spaces, such as those at the Barbican (2,436 sqm), Hayward (1,483 sqm) and Serpentine galleries.<sup>10</sup> There are also unsung temporary exhibition spaces such as the Atlantis gallery on Brick Lane; the rather macabre 'Bodyworlds' was shown there last year and drew 840,611 visitors. This shows, that regardless of where the venue is, if the exhibition is significant, the public are willing to attend. These galleries might not attract record-breaking audiences, but such places are intrinsic to the character of London, and its cultural appeal. Other venues such as Sir John Soane's Museum, the Dulwich Picture Gallery, and the Whitechapel Art Gallery (576 sqm) have smaller exhibition galleries but with a different feel, providing historic and beautiful display areas.

It is also worth noting, that in 2002, London had two exhibitions in the top ten of *The Art Newspaper* ranking: 'Matisse/Picasso' (fourth) and 'Andy Warhol' (eighth), both at Tate Modern. The former was the first exhibition dedicated to the relationship between these two painters and was billed as a unique collaboration between major museums in London, New York and Paris. The popular appeal of these artists helps to explain the exhibition's success. It is a vindication for London that 'Matisse/Picasso' earned London fourth position on *The Art Newspaper* list in 2002, but in the 2003 figures, it gave MoMA in New York only sixth place. The publicity around 'Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman,' which topped the 2003 list, could also explain its success. It was publicised as 'The first comprehensive survey of Leonardo da Vinci's drawings ever presented in

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<sup>9</sup> *The Guardian* 1<sup>st</sup> January 2003 'Free Museums a resounding success' Maev Kennedy

<sup>10</sup> These figures are the total sqm available for temporary exhibitions at these venues. The space is broken down into several smaller exhibition spaces.



America...'<sup>11</sup> The universal renown and appeal of the artist helps to explain its triumph. The low position of London on the list in 2003 could be due to the dearth of big blockbusters, with big names that appeal to a mass audience; it will be interesting to see where the 'Edward Hopper' exhibition at Tate Modern is ranked in the 2004 list.

Although the initial visitor figures were incorrect, the 'Peter the Great' exhibition at the Hermitage still came third in the 2003 list. Part of its resounding success was because the exhibition was intrinsic to the tercentenary of St. Petersburg which itself attracted millions of visitors. The Hermitage and the Louvre (which came fourth in *The Art Newspaper* list) attract visitors partly because of their history as royal palaces, and the link to the cultural heritage of their countries. In London we do not have royal palaces exclusively as galleries to draw upon, but we probably have the greatest number of historic galleries. Fine examples of these are the Dulwich Picture Gallery, which was the first purpose-built art gallery (1811), the British Museum (1753), and the National Gallery (1824). London has very high quality permanent collections which draw huge crowds every year; in 2003 the National Gallery alone had 4.3 million visitors.

The underlying assumption of *The Daily Telegraph* article is that the international museum community is in competition. This does not sit easily within the current climate of cooperation and collaboration.<sup>12</sup> Museums are not in competition; they share a common set of goals. We should embrace the richness and diversity of the architecture of these buildings across the world. Each city has its own unique appeal, and thus, so do their exhibition venues. Wouldn't it be a sad day if the international circuit of exhibition spaces became like a chain of cinema complexes, sanitised and devoid of all individuality?

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## WORTH NOTING

In June Adrian Ellis and Sonali Mishra of AEA were invited to draft a background paper for a seminar held jointly by National Arts Strategies and the J Paul Getty Foundation on the relationship between the for profit and nonprofit 'wings' of the cultural industries.

Our paper can be found at

<http://www.artstrategies.org/assets/ManagingTheCreativeBackground.pdf>. Andrew Taylor of the Boltz Center for Arts Management at the University of Wisconsin, and a compulsive blogger, subjected the text and the seminar to Talmudic investigations. These can be found at <http://www.artsjournal.com/artfulmanager/84547.php>.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.metmuseum.org/special/se\\_event.asp](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/se_event.asp)

<sup>12</sup> NMDC International Dimensions 2002



Also in June almost the entire AEA gang was co-opted into the Jerwood Foundation/Arts and Business/Clore Duffield Leadership Institute initiative called *Mission, Money and Models*. The background paper and case studies for which we wrote. These can be found at:

<http://www.aandb.org.uk/Asp/templateManager/render/sites/24/render.aspx?siteID=24&slD=52>