

COMMENTARIES

## John Holden's *Capturing Cultural Value: How culture has become a tool of government policy*

There is growing opinion within the cultural sectors on both sides of the Atlantic that new and convincing methods must be found to reaffirm its importance.

In the US this was the subject of a recent Rand report, *Gifts of the Muse, Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2005), which evaluated arguments in favour of the instrumental approach to the benefits of the arts in arguing for support of the arts. It proposed a new approach based on a more comprehensive view of how the arts create private and public value which underscore the importance of the arts' intrinsic benefits. Its publication was followed by a week-long discussion on the Internet run by the daily e-newsletter, *Arts Journal. com*, 'Is there a Better Case for the Arts'.<sup>1</sup>

John Holden's *Capturing Cultural Value: How Culture has Become a Tool of Government Policy* (2004), published by the think-tank, DEMOS, takes the debate forward in the UK. It too proposes ways of valuing culture other than the instrumental, drawing on disciplines as diverse as brand valuation by accountants and the language of sustainability used by environmentalists. This Introduction and the seven commentaries that follow explore various issues raised by Holden's pamphlet.

In England, the issues of identifying and creating cultural value have been at the centre of a debate about justifying subsidy to the cultural sector. New Labour's rhetoric has typically focused on the instrumental educational, economic and social benefits of cultural activities and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's five-year plan, *Living Life to the Full* (DCMS, 2005) complies with that tradition.

However, despite its emphasis on the 'real difference' that the department can make, it has generally failed to provide robust evidence of what difference its funding has been making up to now, and has ignored what is sometimes described as the 'intrinsic' qualities of the arts and culture.

Estelle Morris had taken stock of this within a few months after becoming Minister for the Arts:

I know that Arts and Culture make a contribution to health, to education, to crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being, but I don't always know how to evaluate or describe it. (Morris, 2003)

As she implied, there is a fundamental difference between believing in the transformative powers of culture, and producing the kind of evidence required by the Treasury's *Green Book*,<sup>2</sup> or which might satisfy the criteria by which DCMS itself theoretically judges the 'robustness' of data (DCMS, 2003b). Indeed, DCMS itself has commented on the lack of robustness in the evidence on cultural activities generally in relation to wider social and economic policies (DCMS, 2003b, p. 37) and on the relative absence of hard evidence as to the regenerative impact of the arts in particular (Policy Action Team 10, 1999).

Demonstrating the impact of activities to combat social exclusion is not easy, and that it may be some time before the benefits are fully evident. (DCMS, 2000, p. 27)

Even beyond DCMS's immediate funding stream, there are gaps in local authorities' cultural services' evidence-base. As Coulter (2001, p. 1) found, the 'good stories to tell about the performance of cultural services' tend to be based on anecdote 'rather than hard evidence through monitoring and evaluation'.

If DCMS knows that it is not providing sufficiently robust evidence to meet its needs, what has been going on? Is it that the department is not nearly as serious about data collection as it would have had us believe? Or, is it that it is just not as committed to an instrumentalist agenda as it gave out? The think-tank, IPPR implies that it is simply not very effective, and that the case for the arts needs to be better made through a more robust evidence base (Cowling, 2004, pp. 129–142). However, reading between the lines of ministerial speeches and other writings suggests that DCMS's attitude emerges as far more ambivalent than one might have suspected.

Since leaving office, the former Secretary of State, Chris Smith, has acknowledged 'unashamedly' that he deployed instrumentalist arguments specifically to get more funds into the sector (Smith, 2003). Some of his critics regard it as perverse to have set up expectations about the effectiveness with which cultural provision would deliver on a social and economic agenda, since these might be much better addressed by other areas of activity (Ellis, 2003, p. 7). Other writers suggest that the instrumentalist agenda is no better than a form of political displacement activity:

If we want to improve our children, our schools, our inner cities, and the lives of the marginal, the elderly, the impoverished, then we should do so directly, rather than argue for an injection of 'more arts'. (Jensen, 2002, p. 2)

There is also something profoundly irrational about the assumptions as to what happens to us when we are 'exposed' to high culture. As the American sociologist, Joli Jensen, puts it:

We assume, ludicrously, that the effect is embedded in the cultural form itself, released when it is 'consumed'. If this were true, then it would be relatively easy to give each of us doses of good culture, making us into model citizens. Few carry faith in cultural effect that far. Yet the popular accounts of the Mozart effect implied just that—a dose of a sonata would improve brain wiring and math ability. (Jensen, 2002, p. 4)

The current Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport recognizes that politicians are caricatured as interested in mass access above all else.

Giles Waterfield parodies it beautifully in *The Hound in the Left Hand Corner* with a dashing museums Director spending every hour filling in forms for the Department of Culture, which was to be renamed ACCESS! How we got here is well charted; how we get away is not so easy. (Jowell, 2004, p. 10)

But there appears to be ample evidence of Secretaries of State and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport having laid the ground for having it both ways.

Chris Smith, for instance, admits that his approach to the Treasury had its shortcomings. It ignored what he refers to as ‘the fundamental life-force of the cultural activity that gives rise to educational or economic value in the first place’, and he knew that ‘any measurement of numbers, quantity or added value by figures was necessarily going to be inadequate’ (Smith, 2003).

Whatever its explicit objectives, DCMS professes to have always supported ‘intrinsic value’.

Although not listed as key projects for the purposes of this document, we and our NDPB’s undertake a range of core functions . . .

This work has value in its own right and we shall continue to nurture and sustain it in recognition of its importance as our core business which underpins all our work and is at the very heart of what we do. (DCMS, 2003a, pp. 7 & 21)

Various statements issued by the present Secretary of State support this. For instance, at the 2002 Labour Party conference, Tessa Jowell described how, ‘in addition to being a way of achieving our promises, our policies and our values’, investment in the arts is ‘an end in itself’.<sup>3</sup> In June 2003, after the Cabinet Office had begun to consider the concept of ‘public value’ (Kelly & Muers, 2003), she was publicly speculating about how her department’s policies might revert to supporting ‘core’ cultural values.<sup>4</sup> In 2004, in a personal essay, *Government and the Value of Culture*, she described DCMS as ‘doing more’ than just delivering on the ‘utilitarian agenda and the measures on instrumentality’.

Too often politicians have been forced to debate culture in terms only of its instrumental benefits to other agendas—education, the reduction in crime, improvements in wellbeing—explaining—or in some instances almost apologizing for—our investment in culture only in terms of something else. In political and public discourse in this country we have avoided the more difficult approach of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself. (Jowell, 2004, p. 8)

Jowell defines the kind of ‘culture’ that she is talking about as ‘making demands’ of its performers as well as its audiences and, by doing so, attempts to distinguish it from ‘entertainment’.

However much she professes to break with political convention, the Secretary of State never entirely lets go of the instrumentalist agenda. So having appeared to have aligned herself with ‘arts for art sake’ arguments and to have found favour with the likes of playwright, David Edgar,<sup>5</sup> her ambition remains steadfastly about

facilitating ‘personal value’ (Jowell, 2004, p. 5), the ‘key to real transformation in society’ (Jowell, 2004, p. 9), and wanting to reduce the ‘poverty of aspiration’. So, she still perceives culture as ‘transformatory’. Moreover, accounting for the extent to which it transforms individuals, and society as a whole, remains an issue. As she puts it: ‘How, in going beyond targets, can we best capture the value of culture?’ (Jowell, 2004, p. 18). In short, how might DCMS square the circle?

The notion of ‘cultural value’ was initially raised at a conference called *Valuing Culture* organized by a consortium of consultants (AeA), a think-tank<sup>6</sup> (DEMOS), and a couple of national cultural organizations (National Gallery and the National Theatre). They wanted to prompt a debate about the degree to which cultural organizations should be obliged to use instrumental arguments to justify public funding. Indeed, Jowell’s essay on *Government and the Value of Culture*, refers back to a paper that she gave at that very conference.

John Holden of DEMOS, one of the organizers of *Valuing Culture*, has since published a pamphlet called *Capturing Cultural Value: How culture has become a tool of government policy* (Holden, 2004). Closely related to research reports written for the Heritage Lottery Fund and VAGA (Hewison & Holden, 2004a, 2004b) it seeks to answer Jowell’s question: ‘How, in going beyond targets, can we best capture the value of culture?’ Holden’s response starts by questioning the assumptions that underlie our current institutional structures and funding methodologies. He proposes radically rethinking what the public funding of culture could mean.

DEMOS’s argument is based on the notion that documents like *A New Cultural Framework* (DCMS, 1998), in which DCMS set out its reform of the cultural infrastructure based on existing institutional structures and funding methodologies, have merely served to encourage a culture in which individuals and organizations have learnt to become more fluent in the jargon of public policy. What they have ended up doing is to tailoring their outputs to meet the latest round policy priority. But, according to Holden, this misses the point.

Artists and institutions do not see themselves as creating outcomes. Cultural experience is the sum of the interaction between an individual and an artefact or an experience, and that interaction is unpredictable and must be open.<sup>7</sup>

In *Capturing Cultural Value* he starts from a completely different perspective. He begins with the assumptions underlying the public funding of culture, in other words, with the range of values expressed through culture, which may or may not complement each other. Like Morris (2003), he calls for ‘a language which is capable of reflecting, recognizing and capturing’ those values. Recognizing the difficulties of talking about the intrinsic value of culture, or ‘art for arts sake’, which in today’s world sound patronizing, exclusive and undemocratic, he calls for a language which would recognize the affective (and quantifiable) elements of cultural experience and accommodate:

- assessments of the broad public value (or loss of value) resulting from the decisions made by cultural organizations;
- unchanging public goods such as equity and fairness in order to create a context in which goals like social inclusion and diversity could be understood;

- the promotion of a strong culture confident of its own worth, rather than one that is tied to the production of ancillary benefits;
- challenges to policy makers, cultural organizations and practitioners to adopt a new concordat with the public to maximize public good; and
- the integration of culture with the rest of public policy.

Reshaping the cultural infrastructure from the bottom-up rather than the top-down suggests extreme change, but one which might point the way to DCMS resolving the dilemma it currently faces about the relationship between cultural value, instrumentalism and accountability.

The following commentaries explore these and other issues raised by *Capturing Cultural Value*.

Sara Selwood  
City University  
s.selwood@city.ac.uk

## Notes

- [1] I am grateful to Adrian Ellis, AeA, for bringing both to my attention. *Arts Journal.com*'s discussion can be found at <http://www.artsjournal.com/muse/> (retrieved April 13, 2005).
- [2] This provides guidance to public sector bodies on how proposals should be appraised before significant funds are committed and how past and present activities should be evaluated <http://greenbook.treasury.gov.uk> (retrieved December 17, 2003).
- [3] Tessa Jowell, Speech to Labour Party conference cited on the Demos website, <http://www.demos.co.uk> (retrieved June 13, 2003), and by Cowling (2004, p. 1).
- [4] Unpublished keynote speech to for *Valuing culture* (DEMOS, 2003).
- [5] See, for example, Edgar (2004); Fenton (2004); Lister (2004).
- [6] Defined here as an organization that carries out research and makes policy recommendations concerning current social and public issues, and may be non-profit making. Not all think tanks are necessarily independent and many are also associated with performing a public relations role by serving political parties and generating results that serve the advocacy goals of their sponsors. See, for example, [http://www.disinfopedia.org/wiki.php?title=Think\\_tanks](http://www.disinfopedia.org/wiki.php?title=Think_tanks) (retrieved 19 October 2004).
- [7] <http://www.demos.co.uk/catalogue/culturalvalue/> (retrieved February 12, 2005).

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## Commentary 1

In *Capturing Cultural Value* John Holden identifies the shortcomings of the ways in which we commonly evaluate work in the public cultural sector. In doing so he makes significant points about the assumptions that are made about the value of cultural activity, and who decides what is valuable.

The problems that John identifies were also evidenced during a sustained action research project that I conducted (Hall, 2005). For example, it was apparent that an

emphasis on predefined outcomes and criteria could squeeze out the 'valuable' part of a creative process, undermining the potential for meaningful engagement.

Criticisms of quantitative approaches to evaluating cultural activities are often concerned with perceived flaws in methodologies. However, as *Capturing Cultural Value* highlights, it is not just the methodologies of such measurement that are inadequate, but the approach itself.

Evaluation that culminates in the production of numerical data adheres to processes that are commonly understood to have a closer relation to objectivity than we might ascribe to more qualitative approaches. This is problematic because of the inter-subjective nature of cultural activity, for:

The visual world is not just to be correctly perceived and replicated: it is the source of many disputes we have with one another about the nature and character of the world around us. (Stanley, 1996. p. 96)

The implied limits of existing models of evaluation led me to focus on the development of more pertinent means of evaluation. I developed a process-generated approach to evaluation. Young people involved in the research continually redefined the parameters of the evaluative criteria for their work to acknowledge their shifting aims. Their aims shifted, not in any arbitrary way, but in ways that reflected a development and refinement of ideas. This reflective and dialogic approach to evaluation establishes (and reflects) a clear sense of value for the experiences, priorities and development of all involved.

Evaluation is an integral part of the creative process, by which practitioners continually reflect on, and develop, their work. By documenting this process, and its consequences, a project can be considered as a 'case study'. As John Holden argues, through reflecting on, and analysing, case studies, the wider relevance of an encounter/exchange/scenario is extrapolated, and its value is revealed. This way of working also nurtures ongoing consideration, which supports the development of work in relevant directions, rather than along predetermined routes. It thereby contributes to the development of distinct practices, rather than an adherence to formulaic approaches.

*Capturing Cultural Value* indicates the need for organizations and funders to revisit the assumptions on which current evaluation processes are based. Two questions, 'whose culture?' and 'whose values?' are pivotal to this reassessment of current structures and practice.

The debates, and consequent changes in practice and structure, which *Capturing Cultural Value* promises to stimulate, will benefit the development of multifarious forms of cultural engagement, that have greater pertinence for those engaged, than those that are developed in response to currently dominant frameworks and criteria.

Roz Hall  
The Public, West Bromwich, UK  
rozhall@thepublic.com

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## Commentary 2

John Holden's 'new paradigm of cultural value' merits serious discussion. Holden demonstrates effectively how the notion of cultural value can be enriched from discourses as varied as environmentalism, anthropology, the language of 'intangibles' used by economists and investors, and the wider debate about 'public value' that is emerging in government circles. For example, cultural policy makers and funders have something to learn from environmentalists—the concept of ecology can usefully be applied to culture and cultures.

In considering 'cultural value', definitions of culture and their applications need to be explored and related to each other. There are three broad definitions of culture:

- the Matthew Arnold definition: 'contact with the best that is thought and known in the world';
- the 'government' definition: in the UK this roughly equates with those areas of public life that are the responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport;
- the anthropological definition: the whole way of life of a community.

It is modish to dismiss the Arnoldian definition, and Holden is quick to do so. In his over-assertive and unsatisfactory discussion of qualitative assessment, he throws out the baby of what he calls 'intrinsic values' (itself too limited a term to capture the unique qualities of the arts) with the bathwater of 'patrician and patronizing attitudes'. Postmodern questioning has its value but it has also fed the craven relativism, reductionism and populism that have become so pronounced in the last two decades.

The cultural sector needs expert judgments and a continuing full-blooded debate about standards and 'intrinsic values'. It is not enough, indeed it is untrue, to say, as Holden does, that 'all judgments have become relative, suspect and tainted'. Just as in any other profession, there are many practitioners, critics and decision makers in the cultural sectors whose development and exercise of judgement has earned and deserves respect. High quality professionals exercise judgement and are able to provide convincing explanations of those judgements. They cannot all be written off in the glib phrase 'subjective opinions'.

Another aspect of this stimulating pamphlet needs to be called into question. Holden announces that the language of cultural value *will have to* 'overturn the concept of centrally driven, top-down delivery and replace it with systemic, grass roots value creation'. Hold on a moment! What is 'systemic, grass roots value creation'? Whatever the precise meaning of that extraordinary phrase, it is only to a limited extent that culture in Britain is generated through 'centrally driven top-down delivery'.

The UK is a state that is more politically than culturally centralized. In such circumstances, it seems improbable that the 'centrally driven' is going to allow itself to be overturned in the foreseeable future and, in any case, more interesting and more culturally fruitful are those areas where 'top down' cultural policies engage with the realities of 'grass roots creation'. As Holden himself points out 'fecundity occurs in places where differences meet'.

Robert Hutchison  
*Oxford Inspires, Oxford*  
 robert.hutchison@said-business-school.oxford.ac.uk

### Commentary 3

Many of my colleagues in local government are working really hard to find mechanisms to measure the impact of what we do, because without that evidence we really do run the risk of having funding reduced or withdrawn completely. The public library service, which is uniquely a statutory cultural service in local government, faces a real threat: if it does not come up with the hard evidence to justify its existence, then (some would argue) it no longer deserves the levels of public funding that it now receives. It is not inconceivable that the current legislation dating from 1964 would be swept away as part of the modernisation of local government.

I have argued for many years now that some things in life can be measured sensibly but some things in life cannot. The value of culture needs to be debated further upstream from where the argument has been taking place in recent years. *Capturing Cultural Value* is a most timely contribution because it seeks to shift the discussion to a higher level. If our argument is that cultural services in local government contribute to an improved quality of life then the only important issue is whether or not local people recognize an improvement as the result of what we do. This is not to say that we merely conduct polls. We need to develop a more sophisticated process that captures the shift in value that local people attribute to having a local cultural infrastructure and programme of events and activities available. They are the ones who ultimately must place a value on what we do.

It will be a difficult task to find a way of helping them to do this. We need something that is light years beyond the fleeting clipboard survey in the street, or on the doorstep. Whatever their shortcomings, focus groups can at least encourage a more considered discussion to take place, which in turn helps to engage people in critical thinking about the subject. But if we are going to continue to 'push the envelope' of cultural development then we need to recognise that some of these assessments of value will change over time as more people see the value in work that is initially more challenging. Once again the current system works against us because the budgetary and performance managers tend to look for convincing evidence before committing funds, and then want to see evidence of results in the short term. Much of what we do has a long-term cumulative effect which is notoriously difficult to measure. In Gateshead Council we have embarked on the pursuit of longitudinal evidence. More importantly, in Gateshead we have politicians and senior officers who believe in the value of culture

without having to have hard evidence all the time. That is where we need to go with this argument, upstream to the place where decision makers choose to make their value judgements about the benefits of any public spending. It is the subtle difference between political economy and economics. At some stage we all need to make a choice about the value we place on culture.

Bill Macnaught  
County Durham  
macnaught@btinternet.com

#### Commentary 4

*I think the enemy of creativity is society's obsession with accessibility and education in museums and galleries; there's a kind of desperate notion that somehow you've got to meet people halfway.* (Mark Wallinger, *The Observer*, September 22, 2002)

*Capturing Cultural Value* aims to resolve the tensions between the 'arts for arts' sake' lobby and the 'instrumentalist' tendency in both Thatcherite and New Labour governments. The solution proposed is for a 'strong culture', confident of its value qua culture, which recognizes all its multivalent dimensions, cultural, symbolic, spiritual, economic and educational, which accepts measurement of key aspects of its performance and which is accepted by the wider society as creating cultural value which in some important ways cannot be measured. The paper does not question the assumption that the current funding regime is really target-based and takes at face value the complaints that it inhibits creativity and risk taking. As a result, while it helps with the undoubted difficulty of articulating subtle cultural values and the engaging with the populist philistinism of New Labour, the proposed paradigm does not take into account the power struggle which is going on underneath the apparent mutual incomprehension.

The targets required by bodies like the DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport), SAC (Scottish Arts Council), ACE (Arts Council England) and HLF (Heritage Lottery Fund) relate to fairness and equity in publicly funded services provided to citizens. Most of the major cultural organizations receive revenue calculated not in relation to these but to their historic funding levels. These levels are maintained as long as some effort is made to comply with the new requirements. Far from being 'unchanging', 'universal' social goods, fairness and equity are often regarded as irrelevant to the central purposes of such institutions—'political correctness (gone mad)'. Compliance is achieved through the creation of education or outreach departments, behind which 'core' activities continue unchanged. Even when these education services are quite large, they form only a marginal proportion of the organizations' funding (the DCMS target percentage for national museums' spending on education is 5 per cent) and do not really resolve the crisis of legitimacy with which cultural institutions are faced.

While audience-related targets may be inappropriate for individual artists seeking public funding, it is hard to see how some form of measurement is inappropriate

for cultural institutions, who have had some 25 years to suggest how they think their work should be evaluated. They have not done so because their objection is less to inappropriate measurement, and more to assessment and accountability per se. The HLF, for example, demands an Audience Development Plan based on research and consultation, supported by evidence that the organization's overall policies are consistent with its claims. Yes, it requires that citizens from minority ethnic groups or with disabilities or with a poor education be taken into account. The implication that major cultural organizations might object to such basic planning when applying for public funds (perhaps running into tens of millions of pounds) reflects on their definition of competence as much as on their commitment to accountability. Artists may need complete autonomy, but the kind of creativity required to run publicly funded institutions is about negotiating an area of initiative within a framework of accountability. Holden sets out the terms of the framework very clearly, but doesn't engage with the forces preventing its emergence.

In *Capturing Cultural Value's* hypothetical example (an education space used by community groups rather than the schools targeted by the funders, who do not value the community use) the lack of basic planning is clear. An Audience Development Plan would have revealed the problems faced by schools and the latent demand in the community, and worked out ways to provide for both audiences. Museums (mostly local authority—perhaps that is why Holden suggests they are given to 'funding mediocrity') which have embraced the HLF requirements, have found that it changes them from defensive to learning organizations and systematizes thinking about audiences. Above all the processes involved in creating a real (as opposed to a merely compliant) Audience Development Plan are fundamental to combining creative and scholarly leadership with sensitivity to audience needs and interests.

Resistance to targets and access often extends beyond staff to board members, regular users and Friends organizations, who, while they may indeed enjoy the cultural experience for its own sake, also relish the feeling of exclusiveness. The outrage they feel about facilities required to orient and welcome novice visitors (aka dumbing down) may be due to a fear that people may think the implied lack of knowledge or appreciation applies to them, or that the museum may communicate that just about anyone can visit without passing what Kenneth Hudson has referred to as the 'secret exam'.

Social inclusion is not about simplifying difficult things. It is about providing points of entry for people whose education or background has not equipped them to approach difficult works that they might in fact be interested in. It is not about determining a response, but about sharing an enriching experience. To suggest that accessibility is 'the [sic] enemy' of creativity expresses a profound failure of empathy with people who may feel that culture is 'not for the likes of us' for a myriad of reasons—poverty, poor education, discrimination on a variety of grounds. Until educational opportunities are genuinely equal, cultural institutions, in the interests of fairness and equity, need to provide second-chance points of entry, even if it they are restricted to people who are as intelligent as Wallinger. *Ulysses* is indeed a nourishing work, but this is only partly due to its technical virtuosity. What makes it great literature is the

combination of linguistic brilliance with an incredible range of human empathy and insight. Holden avoids the issue of aesthetics, but it is central, not so much in relation to works of art, but in the way institutions apply it to people, a process through which groups which are not already cultured are deemed not good enough to partake of Culture. It may be moving to read about Leopold Bloom, but would one want to be accosted by him in an art gallery?

Holden dismisses issues of class as ‘old intellectual tramlines’. Whatever instruments one uses to analyse the increasing divisions and inequalities in Britain today, the theory of cultural value will realize its potential to transcend the current polarization only when it acknowledges the association between high culture and power, between prestige arts (and the experts who manage them) and dominant groups in society. Targets and measurement can be refined, but what can be done about the profound sense amongst these groups of entitlement—entitlement to having their cultural recreations funded without being troubled by the values of a wider society based on democracy, accountability, equity and fairness?

Mark O’Neill  
*Glasgow Museums*  
 mark.o’neill@cls.glasgow.gov.uk

## Commentary 5

Government-supported culture always has been a tool of government policy. Since government exists to enact policy this is hardly surprising. All would be well if the government appointees pulling and pushing on different handles could agree what they wanted to achieve and if they took the differing cultural values of different sections of the public fairly into account when deciding what sort of subsidized cultural product to turn out.

Other forms of culture exist in a parallel, unofficial cultural universe unsupported by government and only tentatively explored by government agents. Government does not have a cultural monopoly. ‘*The cultural sector*’ is a fiction. There would be more than two terms in a properly constructed ‘funding equation’. As well as funders and the funded we would want to include unfunded artists and unfunded audiences, very large numbers of whom simply disappear when they are multiplied by zero subsidy. Nevertheless, those people are real enough, as is their spending on commercially-produced art and their willingness to spend time being or watching or listening to arts amateurs.

Most artists are free to pursue their own missions and visions without having to worry about targets set by funding bodies because the funding bodies do not fund them. They are entitled to ask what difference funding is supposed to make, to ask what they would have to do to qualify for a share and to make representation through normal democratic channels if they feel hard done by. By way of answering them, government or the government delegates handing out subsidies would need to define their policy objectives, make their priorities clear (ordering and where necessary weighting priorities, not just listing them), and ought to assess the achievements of established clients with reference to the same criteria or just admit that

different rules applied to old friends. Lower standards of decision-making integrity and public accountability are not acceptable; they are not what politicians have promised via innovations like the Freedom of Information Act. They are certainly not what the arts world ought to be trying to get away with. Special pleading undermines the funders' political legitimacy when they resort to it, and that is very dangerous.

I share Holden's distrust of 'intrinsic value' arguments, for roughly his reasons. But what he thinks is 'the key to reconciling these and other tensions' associated with cultural value (tensions surrounding the recognition or attribution of cultural value) I see as the cause of the problem. Without targets—clear and communicable understandings about the sorts and levels of public service expected in return for public subsidy—decision makers exercising unchecked 'professional judgement' are free to fund whatever they like.

The Arts Council is and will remain 'fiercely independent in making individual decisions' chairman Sir Christopher Frayling reminded us recently (Frayling, 2005). His neo-Keynesian vision for the future of English arts funding is radically unlike John Holden's, and it faces government with an awkward choice. If different public-sector agencies are intent on 'Creating Public Value' rather than weakening or destroying it through un-joined-up-ness (pushing policy agendas based on value premises which openly conflict) they will have to learn to work together. As yet, says Sir Christopher, the Arts Council has 'no sensible mechanism with which . . . to work across government—with Education, with Health, with the Home Office' or (worth adding) with the BBC. This is a shocking admission in the Arts Council's 60th birthday year. But is fiercely independent decision making really the way to get on with partners?

Holden offers a number of stimulating suggestions. How practicable will be hard to tell until his suggestions have been worked up in greater detail. That is unlikely to happen unless government insists. There are signs of pressure mounting: Holden adds to it. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has 'developed an alarming tendency to replicate Arts Council structures' (Frayling, 2005) and, along with the structures, new levels of in-house rather than arm's length expertise. A final, really radical recommendation seems to follow from Holden's others but he stops short. If we want a debate about government cultural policy . . . should we not be having it with government? For the clearest possible communication between individual artists or organizations and government does it really help to have a buffer in between?

## Reference

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Andrew Pinnock  
 University of Southampton  
 A.J.Pinnock@soton.ac.uk

## Commentary 6

‘Poesie is an Art of Imitation’, said Sir Philip Sydney, writing in 1575–80. It is ‘A speaking Picture, with this end: to teach and delight’.

If we add our contemporary concerns for access and diversity, the phrase ‘to teach and delight’ still provides an elegant summary of the value of culture. The word ‘delight’ encompasses both entertainment and the experience of beauty. The word ‘teach’, interpreted in a non-didactic, postmodern sense, describes what we gain from experiencing a work of art in terms of increased knowledge of humanity and the world in which we live.

John Holden’s paper makes a useful contribution to the current discussion of cultural value, particularly in the way that it emphasizes the value of cultural activities for their essential rather than incidental benefits and brings in insights from anthropology, ecology and accounting, reminding us that we are not the only ones to face the challenge of valuing the intangible.

John’s examples of how to capture cultural value from a funder’s point of view brings a useful set of cultural, social, economic and public management indicators to bear on the value of cultural activity. It also provides a helpful reference point in the development of concepts and metrics for establishing cultural value.

One must ask, however, whether government has already arrived at, and is poised to move beyond, the point at which the paper arrives. In its dealings with government—Treasury, Inland Revenue and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)—over the past two years, the UK Film Council has gained a clear impression that the core rationale for the funding of UK film is the promotion of a lively UK film culture, in which films that receive taxpayer support reach and are positively received by the UK public. Incidental benefits such as the tourism attracted by UK film are interesting, but not the prime motivation. Economic arguments (focused on tax receipts and industry sustainability) also have a place, but only where it can be clearly established that the activity is additional to the UK economy, as in the case of tax incentives that lever Hollywood investment into the UK film industry. It is possible that the film industry is somewhat distinct, in this respect, in that it has a relatively large interaction with the commercial marketplace compared with some other cultural sectors. The specificity of each cultural sector is, therefore, an important consideration in the construction of a framework for assessing cultural value.

The main challenge, we would suggest, is to discover the appropriate metrics to apply to the various forms of cultural value that John identifies as potentially of interest to funders.

Such metrics, if the evidence supports us, may assist the DCMS sectors win an increased share of government spending, or at least sustained increases in spending in real terms. In addition, they may provide a better way to assess the existing distribution of DCMS resources, something that remains in the realm of the mysterious. Decisions on the size and distribution of the cultural cake rest on intuitive political judgments rather than on the fruits of systematic research.

Given the trends in government income and expenditure, the fiscal environment is becoming tighter and more competitive. The challenge to devise better ways of

demonstrating cultural value is not only intellectually interesting but is essential and urgent from a practical point of view.

David Steele  
*Strategic Development and Monitoring Units, UK Film Council*  
david.steele@ukfilmcouncil.org.uk

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## Commentary 7

As *Capturing Cultural Value* suggests, there is a change needed. I believe that it is already taking place; it is simply not being seen for what it is.

The problem, as John reiterates, is to ‘find a new language’ for the process of justifying subvention support for cultural activity. The notion of ‘finding a new language’, which was raised at the June 2003 *Valuing Culture* conference (Holden, 2003) and has since been emphasized by Estelle Morris (2003), has become a cliché. But that does not make it any the less valid.

John focuses on the fact that the judgements are determined by evidence-based, target-directed decision making. It will always be so. What can change, and I think is already changing, is the nature of the evidence and the targets.

The new evidence comes from the cultural community itself and from its supporters, who are not necessarily its funders. It also partly reflects the fairly recent ascendancy of charitable foundations whose priorities are not financial. There are legion examples, and I pick some here more or less at random.

VocalEyes provides audio descriptions of plays. The blind theatregoer gets a headset through which he or she gets a live description of what’s happening on the stage, plus a cast list and the other necessary programme material. Theatre companies like it because it increases awareness of their work. VocalEyes also give their users additions, such as a theatre tour and a conversation with actors half an hour before the performance to get them orientated. All this gives these people for whom the theatre seemed to be a lost delight more than the performance, a sense of ownership. ‘You gave me the key to something I did not know I wanted’ one beneficiary said.

VocalEyes is partly funded by Arts Council England who have been impressed enough by the prising out of a new audience, however small, to maintain funding. The problem for the organization is that its grant is purely for maintaining an office and a tiny staff, whereas the real cost is in providing the theatre seats for not only a blind person but a necessary companion. Few theatres can afford to give these for free (although they do when they can). So the funder has an appreciation of the achievement, but apparently no understanding of the problem.

Of all art forms, architecture has the most direct relevance to living without having to be given a non-intrinsic purpose compared to, say, public art. John and Frances

Sorrell's 'joinedupdesignforschools' brings schoolchildren into direct contact with architects and designers in a creative process that brings art into the fundamental node of their community, the school. Its first purpose is to tackle 'sick school' syndrome by putting leading architects and designers into partnership with client teams of children from several hundred schools, so that a secondary purpose becomes more important: children aged from seven to 18 get first-hand experience of the design process as well as ownership of their working environment.

Even though this project fulfils several public funding aims—public involvement, ownership, education, improved living/working/educational environment—and although there is occasionally some money from public sources (inexplicably, nothing from Creative Partnerships), because this initiative is wholly devised by the Sorrells the scheme is not yet formally recognized.

The first grants distributed by NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) were for largely entrepreneurial projects. But it has since developed to embrace artistic and technical endeavour on the bases of 'inspiration' and 'invention', and on the recommendation of artists, designers and technicians working in science, technology and the arts. It works by using panels of practitioners to report on their own recommendations in detail, a system introduced by Russell Willis Taylor in rescuing Palumbo's Arts Foundation. It means the funder uses the creative community to find areas of development worth supporting. An example is the recognition of modern circus, thanks to the support of NESTA when ACE had turned its back on it.

Targets are less easy to define, because the new targets that *Capturing Cultural Value* points us toward are often vestigial, even negative. Art does not have to be *for* something to be valuable. It should not be seen as valuable for its socially reforming capabilities in the areas of crime, education and health. The target is that the presentation of art is more attractive to public perception. This does not mean that the arts have to be deliberately pleasing, simply that its exhibition is as advantageous to the public's connection with the art as possible. It needs to be more future focused rather than retrospective, and it needs to take into account professional expertise. These are all points that John makes. But they are also legitimate targets, and should be recognized as such.

Simon Tait

London

simon@staitarts.com

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