ARCHITECTURE, ART AND ACCOUNTABILITY
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I want first to reflect upon where architecture stands and has stood in the past in the cultural territory of our society, dominated by accountability and cost and not imagination and value, particularly in relation to the public sector. Then I want to consider how that territory may be changing and how the polarity, which I define in my opening argument, may be being subverted by the way in which the UK's culture and economy are developing, and where architecture fits into this changing situation. This is, of course, an area of concern with which CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) is deeply involved.

The history of architecture tells us about buildings as great cultural artefacts, deeply linked to the other visual arts of the day. The architect William Chambers was a founder member of the Royal Academy with Joshua Reynolds. Architecture schools and architectural historians continue to promote architecture in this way. Yet the Egan report, perhaps the most important policy document for the building industry in this Government's term of office so far, does not refer to architecture and refers to design only in relation to constructional efficiency.[1] This is because it considers building as part of the means of production in the economy. This is not a new challenge for architects. Two hundred years ago, at the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the symbolic role of architecture began to be challenged by the quantifiable, factual world of science, engineering and commerce.

St Pancras Station has been seen to represent the division between the aesthetics of nineteenth-century architecture and the pragmatics of engineering. I want to suggest it represents a deeper distinction between construction as cultural product and construction as part of the means of production. It represents the distinction between the art-historical perception of architecture and the Egan report's perception of building. So we can see the St Pancras Hotel as cultural artefact, the station shed as part of the commercial infrastructure of the railway.

The Modern Movement itself and British 'high tech' in particular aimed to overcome this duality by an elision of product and production in the aesthetics of construction. This continues to be a brilliant proposition. but arguably, it limits the significance of architecture – but that is another debate.

Historically, a consequence of the Industrial Revolution was a fundamental shift in the balance of sponsorship of construction away from the institutions of the state and the landed establishment towards the vastly expanding requirements of commerce and industry. Aesthetic values, which had been bound up with the symbolism and propriety of the old order, were challenged by this new materialism. Pugin and Ruskin set out to redefine and defend these values by an alliance of art and truth - aesthetics and ethics - an attempt to create a moral resistance to materialism, capitalism and machine manufacture.

Though architecture has continually transformed itself since the early nineteenth century, I think that, broadly, it continues to be subject to this tension between its cultural role and its obligation to commerce. This divide, which may also be seen as a consequence of the Enlightenment's distinction between imagination and reason, can be expressed with two clusters of words:

humanism	science
imagination	reason
personal experience	objectivity
value	cost
idea	fact
art	commerce
feeling	knowledge
inventiveness	accountability
quality	quantity
recreation	work

and so on.

This is not a question about choice. It is an attempt to define the territory of the modern world with which architecture is bound up. The schools of architecture and faculties of the history of art are preoccupied with the terms on the left-hand side, whereas the prevailing climate of our society makes us accountable to the right-hand side, which is seen as administratively and politically manageable.

We must think very carefully about this, particularly in relation to architectural education, which I believe needs to be rooted in the real accountable world. This is because our privilege and capability for standing for what lies to the left must be grounded in our engagement with what lies on the right. Colin St John Wilson has written of the act of design as “the achievement of such a mastery over necessity that a position of freedom is won, which will allow the transforming powers of art to act upon the exigencies and importunities of use”.[2]

However, we must justifiably ask which other professionals in the industry represent the intangible values on the left side, particularly on those occasions when it seems that armies of project managers and value engineers have been trained specifically to erase anything immeasurable. This has been my experience of the private finance initiative (PFI), in which cost-cutting processes drive out architectural quality in even the smallest details. The apparent precision with which construction can be costed of course makes this easy and tends towards a meanness of outcome in projects driven only by cost and specification.

One of the ironies of PFI is how utterly insignificant construction cost reductions can appear in relation to the whole bid. Construction cost should not be considered in isolation but be considered in the context of lifecycle costs. Egan’s arguments should be seen in this context as well. In a paper published by the Royal Academy of Engineers, *The Long Term Costs of Owning and Using Buildings,* it was proposed that the relationship between construction cost and the maintenance of buildings and their systems and ‘people’ costs for office buildings is in the order of 1:5:200 over a thirty-year period.[3] An increase in envelope cost of say 10 per cent would have an almost infinitesimal effect in the long term when looked at in this perspective. Yet such an increase in envelope cost might achieve substantial energy savings yearly, or it might be the difference between banality and an immeasurably special experience of aesthetic quality.

Another way of reflecting on where as a profession we have come from and where we are going is to look right back to the 1958 RIBA Oxford Conference. As a consequence of that conference, architecture was taken out of the art schools and into the universities, to become ‘scientific’ or ‘sociological’, with requirements for A-level maths and physics. Many university

schools of architecture are still incorporated into faculties of social science. I think this was part of a crisis of confidence in the place of the humanities in education; and the continuing tension between the values of the arts and sciences in higher education parallels the tension I have been describing in our own industry. Education is constantly challenged to redefine its relative commitments to growing the economy or developing sensibility and intelligence.

Richard Llewelyn Davies, socialist peer and Professor of Architecture at the Bartlett, University College London, in the 1960s, saw architecture as entirely utilitarian. He wanted architecture to apply science and what was referred to as "a body of knowledge" for the greatest social good (appropriately perhaps, for the founder of Utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham, was also founder of University College). I remember in this milieu of rather spurious objectivity an extraordinary episode. A student had conceived the design of a primary school as a series of classrooms cantilevered, like Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, over the Grand Union Canal, and he talked eloquently of reflections of water on the ceilings, and their vibrancy. But present at this project review was a psychologist and member of staff who stated that there was no evidence that children enjoyed water. In this intellectual environment there had to be a piece of objective research - a PhD to ensure a factual basis to underpin such a proposition - rather than a resort to human experience, to what architecture and the arts are about.

A consequence of this was that students at the Bartlett at the time were loath to express opinions or make personal judgements. There was a kind of tyranny, a closure of the aim of liberal education to awaken individual sensibility and the confidence to make personal judgements about what can be experienced and shared, but cannot be known in any objective sense.

There was even, at the time, a Young Fabian pamphlet entitled *Architecture: Art or Social Service,* as though 'Art' would drive out social responsibility.[4] I recently looked up the *Architects' Journal* leader accompanying the obituary of Frank Lloyd Wright, which expressed the same political position, a disbelief in the power and authenticity of individual insight:

> Wright was a genius, but a genius of the past. He was a master, but not a master of architecture as a social art and science as it has now become. He and his school at Taliesin were dedicated to an essentially individual interpretation of an art, to the production of sculptural works in which mankind, or the wealthier sections of it, were permitted to live.[5]

Maybe what I am now going to say is obvious, but the creativity of the culture of Britain today is largely made up of activities outside conventional measurement. On any night of the week, innumerable music venues and concert halls are packed with audiences enjoying experiences which have no logical explanation and about which there can be no meaningful argument. The same can be said about the visual arts, with an extraordinary range of exhibitions attracting a greater number of visitors than ever before. Visitors to the London Tate Galleries have grown from about one million to over 4.5 million a year since the opening of Tate Modern. Now we may take all this for granted, but I think we should regard it as a remarkable characteristic of our time that such large numbers of people seek these kinds of shared experience. Maybe 'art' has superseded 'belief', as we seek to be reassured by the constant redefinition of what we subjectively experience and by the sense that other people at a concert, at an exhibition of paintings or experiencing architecture have similar feelings and a sense of intellectual exhilaration. Whatever is happening is not confined to a 'high- brow'

metropolitan elite. It involves a more widely educated, articulate and intellectually engaged society than ever before. More people go to art exhibitions than to football matches.

Architecture should be the most manifest part of all this. But how can its subjective value be seen as equal to the measurable and utilitarian issues that politicians and administrators can more readily grasp? It is difficult to see how qualitative matters can be seen to have political consequence, unless they can be seen to have real economic and social implications.

And this brings me to draw on a remarkable paper given as the New Statesman Arts Lecture in 2001 by Lord Evans, who currently chairs the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. His paper has the kind of title one wishes one had thought of oneself, "The Economy of the Imagination". This, he argues, is the part of the UK economy which includes the music business, broadcasting, film, art, craft, architecture and design. Unlike industries which deal with physical resources, including the building industry, its activities are in the mind and so do not readily represent themselves in a world in which productivity is conventionally thought of in terms of physical output, not the value of ideas. But the facts are very surprising; these activities - art, architecture, design, music, broadcasting, film - now employ more than the traditional industries of shipbuilding, steel, car manufacture and textiles put together. But the significance of this is very difficult to convey, because, as we know, there is a mind-set out there, our puritan inheritance perhaps, which sees these activities, of which architecture is one, as 'add-ons', not real or tangible.

Yet the fact is that this cultural economy now constitutes about 6 per cent of the UK's gross domestic product and is growing very fast at a rate of 16 per cent a year - far higher, obviously than the economy as a whole. The design business of which architects are part is now a world leader, with business worth over £17 billion a year, of which architecture revenues account for nearly 10 per cent.

Here, then, is evidence of a growing function of imagination in our society, which suggests that the polarities with which I opened my argument are being subverted. The intangibles - creativity, imagination, aesthetics - now underlie a fast-growing sector of twenty-first-century economic production, in which culture and production have become interdependent. Perhaps a new economic engine of the twenty-first century is being forged between imagination and information technology, just as the nineteenth-century engine was forged between science, engineering and industry.

There is a growing awareness that the frames of mind engendered by creativity are important not just to the arts but also to the ways in which we need to respond to innovation and change in business, science, research and many other areas of economic activity. These frames of mind are essentially positive, optimistic and intellectually ambitious; they convert old problems into new opportunities, and seek outcomes which amount to more than the sum of the parts. The disciplines of lateral thought, and the resolution of highly disparate issues characteristic of creative thinking, seem to me to be as relevant to the political and administrative world as the more common disciplines of law and accountancy.

There is a direct relationship between architecture and a culture and economy which values and depends upon creativity, innovation and intelligence, because real architecture declares these very qualities. Good design is intellectually exhilarating.

Highly creative businesses, such as the BBC, need no convincing about this. They have witnessed the negative effect of low-quality 'design and build projects', conceived as low-cost commodities, not inspirational assets, and their staff know when their buildings are not equal to their own aspirations and intelligence. So the BBC is now committed to a series of ambitious

projects with the conviction that there is synergy between creative environments and the creative potential of their people. They want buildings which attract high-quality staff and recharge and amplify the worldwide image of the BBC projected by Broadcasting House in 1932.

The regenerative power of art and architecture so spectacularly inaugurated at Gateshead with Antony Gormley's Angel of the North is now evident in an unprecedented post-industrial regional renaissance, which has changed images and local economies from Salford and Manchester to Walsall, Liverpool and Glasgow. All this signals an enormous cultural water-shed in Britain, with architecture and the other visual arts asserting an importance in the public consciousness that would have been inconceivable a generation ago. We are in a new cultural territory.

Yet we really need to wake up to the idea that, in this new economy of the imagination, public sector buildings could be conceived as inspirational assets rather than cheap necessities. Is there a connection between the low morale of parts of the public sector which should be especially valued, education and health for instance, and an attitude to the provision of buildings which is deeply uninspired and managerial? Why, for example, should not UK schools be regarded as regenerative icons for local communities in the same way as the Baltic Mill or Walsall Art Gallery are icons for their larger constituencies? They need cost no more, and to deny this possibility may be inadvertently a form of social exclusion.

Construction in the public sector is, astonishingly, running at £25 billion a year! Yet architects are, on the whole, merely used as pliant subcontractors in procurement processes which result in depressing schools and hospitals where the potentiality to enhance life through design should be paramount.

With the Prime Minister's Award there is now a sense that the commitment to quality has been inaugurated. To raise the ambitions of the public sector architecturally would be a declaration about humanism and excellence, a heightening of public expectation, and a projection of Britain as a twenty-first-century society of imaginative production.

I am going to conclude with an anecdote which illustrates, in an unexpected way, something of what I have been trying to say. I had been asked by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to show Baroness Blackstone the Jubilee Line station we designed at Southwark. We were taken on a tour by the station manager. Ascending the escalator from the lower concourse he remarked that the blue glass 'cone wall', designed with artist Alex Beleschenko, reminded him of a theatre backdrop. I was interested in this comment, because I had always had in mind Schinkel's setting for the Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute,* which is not something you tell the average project manager. But the station manager went on to say that the London Sinfonietta now performs in the concourse and plays an especially composed piece entitled "Up the Line"!

Notes

[1] Egan 1998
[2] Wilson 2000
[3] RAE 1998
[4] Thompson 1963
[5] Atkinson 1959