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One Amazing Day. . . ? The Millennium Dome

The Millennium Dome was a major public event, and it was the first and the largest national public project and building to be predicated on funding from commercial sponsorship. Sponsorship would shape the ethos, the design and the contents of the Dome. The Millennium Exhibition (as it was termed in its early stages, with a nod to the Great Exhibition) may have taken place over a decade ago, but it stands (still) as a paradigm for a national building and event that was the product of a 'mixed' economy, in which sponsorship was integral; a model that would later shape London's staging of the 2012 Olympic Games. The Dome, like the Great Exhibition and the Festival of Britain before it, had been intended as a public exhibition of Britain's culture and industry and a display of national identity, but in the year 2000, it was initially championed as a bigger, more modern and technologically more sophisticated version than either.

While the design and naming of the Dome itself echoed the Festival of Britain's Dome of Discovery, the Dome and its displays were firmly distanced from the era of the welfare state. Like Winston Churchill, who had no wish to celebrate the successes of the post-war Labour government and demolished almost all traces of the Festival of Britain, so Tony Blair erased any suggestions of Old Labour in the shiny new Millennium Dome. The Millennium Experience placed far more emphasis on individual and corporate enterprise than had the regional and public spirit of the Festival of Britain. The 14 zones of the Dome each referenced forms of public life that Britain and New Labour could be proud about, but in almost every case, it was the corporate sponsor who was credited. Of all the absences in the Dome, the most significant was the contributions of the welfare state to the State of Britain in the new millennium.

The past was coded throughout the displays as quaint and old fashioned, an unenlightened history from which New Britain, and by implication New Labour, would emerge. In each zone, most vividly in the Work and Learning displays,

there were visual references to an 'old' world of grey tedium, defined against the contemporary pastel and neon colours that signified a brave new world of technology and enterprise. Each zone presented a narrative of progress in which every area of life would be improved by new technologies (and by the products of the sponsors). The only reference to the Festival of Britain found at the Millennium Dome was a 'veteran' red bus which had once taken the Festival around the country, it sat, hidden and neglected, beneath the shining new Ford cars of the 'Journey' zone. This was a statement that the municipal socialism of Old Labour had been supplanted, along with the faithful London Transport bus. The festival bus was relegated as an old-fashioned form of transport and denigrated in the guidebook as unspectacular in comparison with the scale and technology of the Dome: 'The bus is a startling reminder of the scale of our surroundings, it would take eighteen thousand buses like this to fill the Dome' (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 70).

The Millennium Dome was an emblem of New Labour, which both dramatized their economic model and (inadvertently) displayed their ideological frame. In the words of the introduction to the Millennium Experience guide book: 'The experience of visiting the Dome can open people's eyes to new ideas and to new products and policies at work' (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 9). The Millennium Experience underscored the distinct differences between the Festival of Britain, a product of the welfare state which had celebrated social and state provision, and the contents of the Millennium Dome, a product of New Labour's alliance with the private sector, which promoted the incursion of the private sector into the public domain.

The Millennium Experience (as it came to be named) looked resolutely to the future, but despite its forward-looking rhetoric, the Dome's attractions were more in the spirit of Victorian rational recreation than the twenty-first century, visitors were instructed and shown how to be good citizens and responsible consumers. The overall effect was a worthy and rather dull experience, rather than the promised 'amazing day'. The repeated emphasis on enterprise and technology situated the Dome within a frame of progressive modernity; the Dome was surprisingly lacking in any elements of post-modern culture; there was a relative absence of wit, pastiche and playfulness in most of the attractions (with the honourable exceptions of *Self Portrait*, and *Living Island*, which had both involved the public and community groups in their designs). The opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympic Games was in marked contrast to the spirit of the Millennium Experience, with its collective energy, its respect for

history and its pleasure in the carnivalesque, highlighting what the Millennium Experience might have been but was not.

The Millennium Experience claimed to offer an image of Britain poised for a new millennium, united in its diversity as a nation with confidence in the creativity and inventiveness of the British people. In the Dome, however, it was the successes of public governance, and particularly the achievements of the Labour Party itself, which were striking in their absence, almost entirely airbrushed out of the 'inspiring vision'. The Dome instead offered a vivid case study in the remaking of Labour into the New Labour project and the reconfiguration of the contemporary understanding of the state and its relationship with corporate capital. The embrace of commercial sponsorship marked a transition from a Labour Party committed to a welfare state to one that was entirely comfortable with corporate power; as McGuigan put it:

The Dome was an incoherent vehicle for old delusions of national grandeur allied to corporate power in a neoliberal world. In toto, though, in complex and variable ways, it represented New Labour's 'Third Way' politics – the reconciliation of 'social-ism' with market forces. (McGuigan 2010, p. 57)

The building of the Dome, its financing and the choice of its exhibitions were organized, under the 1997 Labour Government of Tony Blair, by the New Millennium Experience Company. Tony Blair had given a speech in 1998 in which he outlined his vision of the Millennium Exhibition: 'In this Experience I want people to pause and reflect on this moment about the possibilities ahead of us, about the values that guide our society . . . It will be an event to lift our horizons. It will be a catalyst to imagine our futures' (Blair, quoted in Carling and Seeley 1998, p. 5). The Millennium Company commissioned the innovative architect Richard Rogers to build a large tent-like structure on the Greenwich Peninsula. What went inside, however, was almost entirely determined by the funding process; the thematic structure and the contents were not decided until commercial sponsorship was in place.

The Dome itself was designed as a giant tent, but the Millennium Experience had to wait for commercial sponsors before any of its contents could be decided, and what the Experience was to be remained mysterious until the opening. The 1998 Research Paper outlining the development of the Dome commented: 'Arguably the aspect of the Dome about which least is known is what will be put in it . . . ' (Carling and Seeley 1998, p. 43). A Select Committee's response to the planning of the Dome's contents was: 'From what

we know so far, the Millennium experience is . . . a journey into the unknown' (quoted in Carling and Seeley 1998, p. 43). Even Peter Mandelson, in charge of the Dome project, later admitted 'there was no central creative vision' (Mandelson 2010, p. 260).

The Dome was first conceived as Britain's focus for the Millennium celebration by the post-Thatcher Conservative Government led by John Major, and was taken over, after much contentious debate, by the 1997 Labour Government of Tony Blair. The planning of the Dome came at a pivotal moment in British politics; the momentum had gone from the original Thatcherite agenda, Thatcher herself had been ousted by her party, and the Conservatives were riven with tensions and rivalries. Under the label 'New Labour' Tony Blair seemed to have reinvented the party, on his election as party leader, Blair had ousted Clause IV of the Labour constitution¹, and was bent on a 'Third Way'² in politics and the economy, which attempted to steer an uneasy path between social democracy and neo-liberalism. A commitment to a mixed economy of public and private capital had become integral to both parties' economic and social policies. The effects of the 'private/public partnerships' that were so central to New Labour's policies of state expenditure were very visible both in the funding structure and in the displays of the Dome, most clearly in the embrace of commercial sponsors.

The minister for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Chair of the Millennium Commission, Chris Smith, made it very clear in his introduction to the official guidebook that this was not a project funded by taxation: 'The Dome was built without a penny of taxpayers' money, but nonetheless, you may have helped fund the project. Most people play the National Lottery at some time or another; that is where the bulk of the money has come from' (Smith 1999, p. 84). The official souvenir book of the Dome, published before its opening, proudly echoed Smith, 'Not a penny of the £758 million budget comes from tax revenue' (Wildhide 1999, p. 11). As with other forms of sponsorship in the same period – the relative investment of sponsors was much less than the amount provided from public funding. McGuigan points out that 'Lottery money . . . is a kind of public subscription' (McGuigan 2010, p. 53) and calculated that:

Sponsorship eventually amounted to less than one fifth (around £150 million) of the amount of public money spent on the Millennium Experience (in excess of £800 million, including £628 million of Lottery money), yet corporate sponsors had a decisive impact on the exposition's focal concerns, design and management. (McGuigan 2010, p. 48)

The state-franchised National Lottery had been launched by John Major in 1994, and was a means of funding big capital projects without recourse to taxation. According to the Dome's official biographer, it was not entirely a coincidence that the Lottery was launched under a Conservative government, facing the need for a millennial event:

There is good reason to suspect that the idea of a millennial celebration and the idea of a National Lottery were not entirely independent in conception. The Conservative government was committed to low taxation and tight controls of public spending. With no money likely to be forthcoming from tax revenue and the end of the century fast approaching, the launch of the Lottery was certainly timely . . . (Wildhide 1999, p. 20)

The New Labour government did not depart from this model and made full use of the lottery funding. The Dome was financed by £449 million from the National Lottery, over half the budget, while sponsorship contributed £150 million, the sponsors nonetheless had a disproportionate influence on the contents of the Dome. While Camelot, the company awarded the Lottery franchise in 1994 (and again in 2001 and 2007), had only one exhibit (Shared Ground), far more visible were the commercial sponsors, who to a very large degree determined the design of the exhibition and its themes and contents. As the official guide book expressed it:

The designers were working under direct contract with the sponsors, with whom they had close professional relationships . . . Often . . . the pairing of zones with sponsors has proved creatively and technically productive. Major firms, such as GEC and BT, with their immense technological expertise, have had important contributions to make to the way different zones could be realized. (Wildhide 1999, p. 164)

This official narrative of the Dome's inception does express some anxiety about the role of the sponsors – but this is rapidly assuaged and is hardly referred to again throughout the souvenir book:

The whole issue of sponsorship – the notion of the commercial world getting its foot in the door of a national project – has always aroused a widespread degree of public suspicion, a suspicion heightened by the unprecedented amount of sponsorship required. There was simultaneously an anxiety that not enough sponsorship would be found, and an anxiety about how that sponsorship, if it were found, would manifest itself in terms of the content of the exhibition. (Wildhide 1999, p. 163)

That sponsorship was found, with the assistance of the International Management Group (IMG), who were contracted to find £150 million in sponsorship. It was not just a case of the commercial world getting 'its foot in the door'; the doors of the Dome were flung wide open to sponsorship. The Conservative Michael Heseltine had lined up British Aerospace, British Airways, British Telecom (BT) and GEC as 'corporate supporters', and the final group of 'founding partners' of the Millennium Experience included Manpower, Sky and Tesco, who each contributed £12 million. All were very visible presences at the Dome (see Carling and Seeley 1998, p. 25). In the case of BT, along with Ford, their sponsorship allowed them not only to promote their products, but also to effectively design and shape their own 'zones', as McGuigan explains:

An obvious motive for sponsorship was commercial promotion of the companies to the public. This was manifestly evident in the cases of BT's Talk Zone and Ford's Journey Zone. Both companies were able to negotiate 'turnkey' contracts with NMEC, which meant that they were allowed to design, build and run their own zones, in effect, with minimal interference from NMEC. (McGuigan 2010, p. 48)

The Festival of Britain had firmly and explicitly repudiated commercial interests in its planning and in its contents. The Director General of the Festival of Britain, Gerald Barry³, commented at the time of its planning:

Always before, large scale national exhibitions had been organized in trade sections . . . Space was sold to firms to display their own wares in their own way. This time we were going to dispense with all that. We were going to tell a consecutive story, not industry by industry, still less firm by firm, but the story of the British people and the land they live in and by. There was no space to let. (Barry, quoted in Banham and Hillier 1976, p. 15)

The Millennium Dome, however, could be seen as nothing but a space to let. In the words of an advertisement for the company 3Com in the official guidebook, the Millennium Dome was 'a showroom now open'. The Dome was a showroom for all its sponsors, who were, along with their products, presented in a very positive light and championed as beneficent partners of the Millennium Experience Company.

The themes of the South Bank exhibition of the Festival of Britain had been outlined in the Festival Booklet and clearly related to those areas of national life of which Britain could be proud:

The theme of the exhibition will be developed through sequences which correspond with certain activities illustrative of British life; for example,

Exploration and Discovery, Industry, Transport, Rural Life, the Home, Sport.
(Festival of Britain Office 1951, p. 5)

While the Millennium Experience was originally intended to follow a similar pattern, in the zones of the Dome, the theming was repeatedly changed to accommodate and to affirm the links with sponsors. The 'zones' of the Dome shifted with the requirements of various sponsors, right up to the last minute; as Wildhide explains:

The exhibition pavilions had originally been themed in a more or less standard way around topics such as sport, the arts, leisure and so on. What was needed now were subjects that were more inspirational and that could both be expressed within the context of 'making a difference' and provide a more obvious means of linking with sponsorship. (Wildhide 1999, p. 158)

Chris Smith effusively thanked the corporate sponsors in his foreword to the official Guide to the Dome: 'Without their generous help, what you see around you could not have been built' (Smith 1999, p. 84). That generosity, however, was not without self-interest, and it was not offered without strings. The sponsors not only shaped the theming of the Dome, they made clear demands about their visibility at the exhibition, they had a direct impact on the management of project and they framed the final 'zones' of the attractions. The education section proved so popular with sponsors that it was divided into two, at the last minute: 'As it was becoming clear . . . there were also sponsors keen to be associated with education, two days before the launch, Work spawned Learn' (Wildhide 1999, p. 16). It was the sponsors who demanded the sacking of the first chief executive officer of the Millennium Experience, Jennie Page, when visitor numbers were not as high as expected. Along with the conspicuous identification given to each sponsor in the guidebook, the sponsors' contributions bought a prominent presence throughout the site, a site that was inevitably going to be heavily promoted across the media. McGuigan strongly suggests that some sponsors of the British Millennium Dome were awarded significant government contracts, or advantageous legislation, in exchange for their sponsorship:

It may all be just coincidence, but it is reasonable to infer that sponsorship of the Millennium Experience was more than just a publicity exercise . . . the role of corporate sponsorship was not only about behind-the-scenes deals but also had consequences for the construction of meaning at the Dome. (McGuigan 2010, p. 50)

It was anticipated that sponsorship of the Dome would bring considerable kudos and esteem to its sponsors, if that was misplaced (the final judgements on the Millennium Experience were not kind), it did afford them extensive advertising. The official biographer of the Dome does express some concern about the extent of this branding at a state-sponsored event and recognizes that the Millennium Experience could have been funded entirely by the state rather than involving the private sector in its planning. Here she acknowledges the extent to which sponsorship had become part of the cultural life of the nation, but still recognizes that it is not entirely welcomed by the public:

While it has become more familiar to see corporate logos attached to what were formerly wholly state-run enterprises over the past few decades, such public and private sector marriages still have the capacity to provoke unease. For NMEC, the stakes were high. Excessive branding on the part of any sponsor would ruin the spirit of the exhibition; at the same time, without recognition, major corporations would be unlikely to come on board. As sponsors were found and paired with zones, broad issues of branding had to be thrashed out at contractual level, right down to the small print, to keep commercial messages to a minimum. (Wildhide 1999, p. 164)

The sponsors' logos may have been required to be discreet, but they were everywhere apparent, both inside and outside the Dome.⁴ Posters and screens advertising the sponsors' products were there to greet visitors as soon as they arrived at the North Greenwich underground; the walkway to the Dome was similarly adorned with advertising. Under the leadership of Pierre Gerbeau, who took over from the first chief executive, Jennie Page, sponsorship increased its presence and was structured into the visitor experience. As McGuigan explains:

Gerbeau knew whom he had to please first and foremost: the sponsors. He redefined them as 'partners.' Under the Gerbeau régime, large placards were erected in front of sponsored zones, making the corporate beneficence quite clear to the visiting public. Access to the Dome's main entrance was cordoned off in order to route visitors through 'the sponsor's village' of shop units. (McGuigan 2010, p. 46)

The official Millennium Guidebook featured prominent full-page advertisements for each sponsor. Tesco and McDonalds were the official catering suppliers, and their products alone were evident in every restaurant and refreshment area. A similar arrangement with sponsors would shape the catering at the 2012 London

Olympics, where McDonalds was the official 'fast-food' and Coca-Cola the official 'soft-drink' suppliers, cutting out any rival brands.

The Dome's attractions were organized much like the Disney parks (which Peter Mandelson visited in his capacity as Minister of the Dome and Chair of the Millennium Commission⁵). From a central hub (which featured a daily acrobatic display⁶), the 'zones' of the Dome branched out. With the exception of the Living Planet zone, each of these was sponsored by one or two commercial sponsors. A mission statement from each sponsor, along with their logo, was sited at both the entrance and exit for each attraction, and so it was the sponsors who framed and anchored the narrative of each exhibit. These statements served to attach the contents and connotations of the exhibit to the sponsor and also suggested that the sponsor's generosity was entirely responsible for the attraction. In every zone, the sponsor's name repeatedly appeared in the text, writing them into national narratives of transport, education, health, the environment and work.

Of the 14 central areas of the Dome, only two did not promote forms of work, travel or consumption and were designed entirely for entertainment and relaxation; neither found a sponsor. The 'Rest' zone was a 'relaxation chamber', which offered no attractions other than looped music and lighting effects. 'Play' was directed at children and offered interactive digital games, none of which were terribly impressive to those with a personal computer. For adults, throughout the 14 central spaces of the Dome, leisure was entirely predicated on consumption and technology, and both were written into the narrative of each zone. At the exit of each display, the visitor was siphoned into an arena which offered interactive computer games. These games were structured to produce a preferred response which promoted the sponsor and their products; corporate sponsors were in each case represented as the solution to the problems of changing patterns of work, travel, ageing and communications in the new millennium.⁷

Work

The Work zone was sponsored by Manpower Group, an American employment company, who currently describe themselves as:

... the world leader in innovative workforce solutions, creates and delivers high-impact solutions that enable our clients to achieve their business goals and enhance their competitiveness. With over 60 years of experience, our

\$22 billion company creates unique time to value through a comprehensive suite of innovative solutions that help clients win in the Human Age. (www.manpowergroup.com, accessed July 2012).

The exhibit that they funded promoted 'flexible' work, an exciting new world in which 'old certainties have disappeared . . . work patterns have undergone a revolution' (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 34). A secure job, and union protection of that job, belonged in the narrative of the Work zone to the dull past, flexible working was the new and exciting mode and Manpower presented themselves as the organization to manage the nation's workforce through this transition.

This narrative was vividly dramatized in the exhibit, which was divided into two sections. The first, titled 'The Old Work of Work Ltd', presented a wall of hamsters contained in cages, a display of a Kafkaesque grey world of filing cabinets, reams of paper, punch in clocks and time sheets. Old black and white television sets repeatedly showed looped images of a slave ship. This *mise en scène* depicted 'old' modes of working as alienating, time and place bound; in the words of the guide book: 'Work begins by reminding us that the supposedly "good old days" of a job for life often led to a lifetime of boredom' (*Millennium Guide*, p. 34). A large ticking clock counting down the hours of an average working life evoked Orwell's Big Brother. 'A job for life' was here represented as grim subjection to faceless authority, routine and alienation, a mode of working that was firmly located in the past.

The 'new' world of work was approached through a corridor which led from the drab grey world of 'old work' to a bright and coloured new world of flexible working. The entrance to this world was adorned with the Manpower logo and the slogan 'We can change things', in an echo of New Labour's 1997 victory slogan 'Things can only get better'. This change was imaged in another wall of hamster cages, now turned from grey to neon colours, and from which the hamsters have escaped. A wall of neon post-it notes referenced a contemporary office; many of the handwritten notes directly referred to the sponsor, one read: 'John - Manpower can help you', while other notes invoked fictional companies in search of temporary staff, or extolled the advantages of 'flexible' working: 'I can try consultancy . . . and marketing!'; 'I can resign today and start again tomorrow'. A wall of pastiche office signs continued to trumpet the benefits of flexitime and short-term working contracts, while another wall displays the 'oppression' of the old working culture, with time sheets and holiday request forms. A corridor

full of signs advocating the necessary attributes of the new world of work: 'Communication, IT, Numbers, Teamwork, Solutions, Skills' led into a room marked 'Flexible Working'. Here, a bank of screens, all marked with the Manpower logo, showed slogans which advocated the desirability and the modernity of flexible work patterns: 'Choose when to work', 'Job Sharing', 'Mobile Working', 'Part-time Working', 'Multiple Jobs' and finally, 'Temporary Work Forces are Welcome'. This rhetoric of 'Choice' fitted neatly with the policies of New Labour, and particularly with the position of Labour advisor Anthony Giddens, whose plan for the 'Third Way' had advocated flexible working patterns.

These screens made explicit the narrative of the earlier displays of hamsters and grey time sheets and filing cabinets; job security, unionization, work benefits and limited working hours belonged to the 'old' mode of working, the way forward would be short-term labour contracts (managed by Manpower). The Work zone constructed a world of work that was directly in the interests of employers, while presenting it as attractive and necessary to the work force. A display of mock road signs issued dire warnings of the consequences for workers who failed to adapt to new conditions of work: 'No parking: State employees will be retrained and moved on', 'Warning: Deep excavations for unskilled workers'. The final display featured an electronic screen with rolling job advertisements and details of Manpower branches. The sponsor's final mission statement was almost redundant, for its points had been already repeatedly made in the exhibition: 'Why we have sponsored Work: Work is our business. . . . We give you access to the new technologies, new choices, new opportunities'. The British workforce is shown that it must adapt to new modes of working, and Manpower is shown to be the means by which this neo-liberal new world of work will be managed. Manpower is thus inextricably linked with the future of the labour market in the new millennium; outside the space of the Dome, the company went on to gain the contracts for over half of the Employment Zones across the country.

Learning

Education was the most popular area for sponsors, dealing as it did with young people, but it was the supermarket Tesco which won the sponsorship; Tesco had a precedent in sponsoring educational activities through its 'Computers for

Schools' voucher schemes which had been running for some years by 2000.⁸ Tesco's mission statement at the entrance read:

Tesco . . . since 1992 has focussed its community investment on supporting education. Through Tesco Computers for Schools, over half the schools in Britain have benefited from £50 million worth of computer equipment. . . . As Official Education Sponsor at the Dome, we want to show how the barriers are now breaking down for everyone.

A montage of book titles covered the exterior of the display, but the great works of English Literature were not to be found inside, the emphasis was entirely on new technologies in schools. Like the Work zone (which had developed out of the Learning zone at the demand of the sponsors), this zone was organized around a sharp distinction between the past 'bad old days' of the state and a brave new system which was happy to embrace commerce. Education in this construction was about fitting the population with the skills required in the new future of work and echoed the lessons of the Work zone. In the words of the guide book:

Technological advancements and the changing face of work mean that employers need employees able and willing to acquire new skills. As the job for life has disappeared, so the idea of lifelong learning had taken hold. (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 39)

A battered school corridor, representing the state school system as it once had been, was policed by a fierce school master in full regalia of mortar board and gown; this was a figure from the Bash Street Kids comic strip, a teacher who belonged to the 1950s. The state education system was thus represented as one of shabby authoritarianism, not something to be celebrated, but relegated as oppressive and unfit for the 'changing world'. Visitors were ushered into an auditorium to witness a film, 'The Magic Seed', extolling the joys of education for every member of a family; a mother learns new skills through the Open University, a brother trains as a pilot. At the end of the film, the screen (literally) opened up into what the guide described as an 'infinite orchard'; a room full of computer screens, each offering games emphasizing the necessary skills for the new world of work. Every game ended with Tesco's logo, and the strap line 'Tesco - Every Little Helps . . .'. This was Tesco's advertising slogan, which was also found on every Computers for Schools voucher.

Throughout the Learning zone, there was no mention of the Department of Education (beyond a very small acknowledgement that they had provided

some information), of the National Union of Teachers, nor of the 1944 Butler Education Act. Learning might have acknowledged the provision of a universal state education system, but this belonged to the bad old days of the welfare state. Instead, Tesco was presented as a provider of educational opportunity; their sponsorship meant that a supermarket could assume all the credit for educational innovation and for the provision of new technologies in schools.

Body

The Body zone claimed to be 'a spectacular, thought provoking zone, instilling a sense of wonder at our bodies and at the prospects for health and well-being in the new millennium' (*Millennium Guide*, p. 19). With sponsorship from the French cosmetic company L'Oréal and from Boots the Chemist, 'well-being' was here constructed in terms of 'beauty' rather than health, and health care became a matter of new technologies and products rather than of lifestyle or a national health service.

As with the attractions of Home Planet and Work, the scale of the sponsorship allowed for an extravagant display, and the Body zone was one of the more spectacular sites in the Dome, with two outsized male and female figures inviting visitors to tour through their bodies. An area dedicated to 'medicine and health' did not reference the National Health Service at all, but presented instead the development of new commercial drugs and medical technologies. A display on 'lifestyle and health' did champion the importance of diet, exercise and 'holistic wellbeing', but health here became entirely a matter of individual responsibility, rather than anything related to the social or economic domains.

A popular interactive display demonstrated the effects of ageing and suggested that products from L'Oréal and Boots could delay the process. At the end of the exhibition, a bank of screens presented images of 'beautiful people'. These 'famously attractive people' proved to be the models then used in L'Oréal advertising campaigns; the faces of Claudia Schiffer, Kate Moss, David Ginola and Andie McDowell were among those employed as images of an unchallenged 'beauty', their statements on what 'beauty' meant for them were supplemented with quotes from Keats and Shakespeare on the 'beautiful', so attaching contemporary celebrities and L'Oréal to the greats of English

Literature. The Body zone might have paid tribute to the achievements of the British National Health Service, instead, it celebrated the products of L'Oréal and Boots.

Faith

The Faith Zone was the source of much controversy and failed to find a major sponsor. The Faith Zone represented nine different faiths and was developed with the Lambeth Group, a group set up in 1996 specifically to advise the Millennium Coordinating Group on 'religious sensitivities',⁹ and the Inter-Faith Network. The Millennium Experience was itself a very uneasy Christian phenomenon, the Millennium itself marked a Christian calendar date (as the Dean of King's College London noted in his statement for the Guide), at the same time the Millennium Experience attempted to be inclusive of all faiths. 'Faith' in the Millennium Experience was nonetheless anchored in Christianity, with the Queen as Head of the Church of England and a representative of the Church of England present at the opening ceremony. In his address to the Millennium Guide, the Dean endeavoured to embrace the diversity of belief in contemporary Britain, but simultaneously asserted Christianity as the national creed:

A millennium birthday party: it's all a long way from the birth of the baby Jesus, yet he continues to have this impact. Christians believe he is the son of God; Muslims revere him as a prophet, while others – including Sikhs and Hindus – respect him as a religious leader. Many of no religious belief are inspired by his human example of teaching, healing and liberating (Burridge, 1999).

The Faith zone was eventually made possible by 'generous donations' from the Laing Trust (an organization committed 'to furthering the Christian tradition'), the Hinduja Foundation,¹⁰ the Garfield Weston Foundation¹¹ and the Jerusalem Trust, another organization committed to 'Christian education . . . projects supporting Christian mission and evangelism in the UK' (www.charitycommission.gov.uk). Unusually in the context of the Dome, which had offered so many an opportunity for self-promotion, several sponsors of Faith chose to remain anonymous, credited only as 'three other trusts and organizations associated with the Christian faith' (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 26). That anonymity suggests a deep unease at the construction

of 'Faith' in the context of a multi-faith nation and of a project developed by a Labour government which had famously said 'we don't do God' (see Chapter 7, Education, Education, Education).

Self Portrait

Self Portrait was one of the very few spaces in the Dome that referred at all to the past, and that was largely because it was organized around individual statements from members of the public as to what it was that 'Britishness' meant to them. Marks and Spencer, the sponsors, had recruited its customers to produce images of the 'one thing (that) best represents Britain to you' which were then displayed in a collage. Among the images were the Queen and characters from children's literature (both of which would later feature strongly in the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony). Self Portrait was one of the very few spaces which offered some respite from the otherwise unrelenting modernity and optimism of the Dome, with its commission of some refreshingly vicious satirical sculptures by Gerald Scarfe. These were permitted, according to the Guide, as 'in the tradition of British satire', but nonetheless provided some welcome dissent from the upbeat messages of government and corporate sponsors. Marks and Spencer was, nonetheless, no less concerned than any other sponsor to promote itself and its products. It used its display to position the company as one of those 'things' that best represented Britain. Their mission statement displayed at the entrance and exit of the zone read:

Marks and Spencer touches the lives of people right across the UK. By sponsoring Self Portrait we are helping to reflect and celebrate the great diversity of people and cultures that make up Britain.

With our associated Millennium Experience Programmes, Children's Promise and Voices of Promise, we have given everyone in the country a chance to mark the millennium in a special way.

Marks and Spencer believe that people throughout the UK deserve the highest standards in life.

In this construction, the display of the 'best of British', and the associations with 'Britishness' that were most deeply held in the public affection become inextricable from Marks and Spencer – a company which, it is strongly suggested, will deliver the 'highest standards' to its customers. If this was one of the few attractions in which the public participated directly, the only means by which

the British people were able to produce a 'Self Portrait' was under the auspices of its sponsor, Marks and Spencer.

Mind

The Mind zone was designed to celebrate the possibilities of new technologies, and was sponsored by Marconi, the telecommunications company and BAe Systems, one of the world's largest arms manufacturers. Unlike other zones, the sponsors' core businesses were not directly related to the display, which the guide book vaguely described as 'Mind explores the nature of our perceptions' (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 22). Instead, the guide makes much of the innovative architectural space of the zone, designed by Zaha Hadid¹²; as multi-national corporations, BAe and Marconi were able to afford one of the Dome's 'most architecturally daring zones' (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 22).

Marconi equipment was repeatedly referenced in the display and cited in the captioning of exhibits; one read: 'It is through advanced communications technology provided by companies like Marconi that more minds can be linked than ever before.' The mission statement from Marconi read:

Almost a hundred years ago, Marconi's founder successfully sent the first transatlantic wireless message and changed the way we communicate forever. Mind gives Marconi an opportunity to celebrate our heritage of vision and image and look forward to a new millennium as innovators in communications, IT and the internet.

The opportunity was not taken to celebrate a British or American heritage of telecommunications innovation, Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison are not referenced at all, instead Marconi (referencing, like Disney, both the individual and the corporation) is presented as having single-handedly developed the possibilities for global communications. The Mind zone might have celebrated Britain's considerable achievements in engineering and IT. In 1999, the year of the Dome's planning, *Time* magazine had named the British scientist Tim Berners-Lee,¹³ developer of the World Wide Web, as one of the most significant figures of the twentieth century, and he would later appear as a central element in the London Olympics opening ceremony. Berners-Lee had consistently resisted any privatizing or monetizing of the Web, arguing that it 'belonged to everyone', which may explain why there was no reference to him at all in Marconi's celebration of the 'the role of communications technology'

(Millennium Experience 1999, p. 22). Instead, their sponsorship gave Marconi and BAe all the credit for innovations in British technology in the new millennium.

According to McGuigan and Gilmore, Marconi and BAe had considerable vested interests in contributing to the Mind zone, they argue that BAe had reason to have concerns about New Labour's foreign policy and its impact on their business, while Marconi, they suggest: 'is said to have been motivated to sponsor Mind by a rebranding exercise, renaming itself from GEC (General Electric Company). . . .' (McGuigan and Gilmore 2002, p. 7). In 1999, Marconi had sold its wireless assets to British Aerospace, to form BAe Systems. BAe's mission statement reads:

BAe Systems has a dedicated work force . . . they use their skills to innovate and expand the world's understanding of science, technology and engineering. They have helped create the Mind Zone to enrich all our lives.

BAe Systems inspires young people to become the scientists and engineers of the new millennium. (authors' transcriptions from the Dome site)

There is here no acknowledgement of British universities' contributions to the 'world's understanding of science, technology and engineering', instead, knowledge and understanding become entirely a matter of skills developed by commercial interests rather than a state educational system; it is BAe Systems which 'inspires young people', not schools, colleges or universities. And how those skills are deployed in the context of BAe remained resolutely vague; there was no reference at all to British Aerospace's history in the manufacture of military equipment,¹⁴ or to BAe's global interests in defence and security.

Journey

Journey was the zone dedicated to Transport, and as sponsored by Ford cars, the display was inevitably a celebration of the individual motor car rather than of public transport. The aged Festival of Britain bus parked awkwardly underneath the site confirmed the narrative that the private car was the way of the future, a subsidized national transport system was a thing of the past.¹⁵ The car was written into the Journey Zone as the most advanced and significant form of transport and every television screen in the display, of which there were many, carried the Ford logo. A wall exhibition told the story of transport from the invention of the

wheel, a history which foregrounded the car, and Ford's contribution, at every opportunity. Ford's sponsorship contract had allowed them to design and run the zone themselves.

All the key moments in transport innovation were linked to the company; a Model T Ford is represented as a milestone in the development of the car, and the latest Ford model was the culmination of the exhibition. Captions throughout the display wrote Ford into the history of transport rather more frequently than could be historically justified, as in the caption: 'The Model T Ford introduced and sets new standards in car design'. Rail and bicycle travel were briefly acknowledged in the history of transport, but swiftly passed over, overwhelmed in a celebration of the car. The dominance of the car was at no point challenged; while there were some displays of statistics recognizing the dangers of traffic gridlock and climate change, these were represented as surmountable problems which the power of Ford would be well able to address with improvements to their products. Ford was thus presented as the solution to any anxieties about the relationship between motor transport and the environment. As their mission statement put it:

Ford is eager to embrace and shape a better future for all of us. So we have scoured the world for the best ideas – from designers, scientists and governments to improve the quality of our journeys. Let your imagination run wild as we look at future journeys on land, sea and in the air. (authors' transcriptions from the Dome site)

'Imagination', however, was in this exhibition, entirely circumscribed by Ford; the future was itself embodied in a Ford product; the narrative of the history of transport ended with the display of the most recent Ford Ka, surrounded by a display of car designs from the Royal College of Art (where Ford sponsor a vehicle design course). Ford's latest product thus became the pinnacle of transport history and the hope for the future, the caption read: 'Imagine the near future. Ford Kas like the one on display will be available in Europe . . . a safer, cleaner car for the future'. It is strongly implied that it is Ford, in association with government, which represents the 'positive transportation future' (in the words of the guide book) and that the environment is safe in their hands.

The Journey zone could have acknowledged the public transport system (a new section of the Jubilee Line on the London Underground had, after all, been specially built to serve the Dome), but the bus, the underground and the railways were relegated to footnotes in a celebration of the motorcar. The Journey zone instead celebrated private motoring and, particularly, the technology of Ford cars.

Living Island

This was markedly different from any other of the zones, in that it was one of the few sites that allowed for nostalgia, it had contributions from regional and community groups and it was one of the very few spaces in the Dome not to be dominated by sponsors. Living Island was dedicated to the preservation of the environment; themed as a seaside resort and fairground, each attraction had an ecological message, with information supplied by environmental organizations, such as the Marine Conservation Society. Living Island was one of the only areas of the Dome to display a real wit; it was unashamedly old-fashioned, with its use of rude postcards and Victorian architecture, evoking celebratory memories of the British seaside holiday.

While the display did, unusually in the Dome, make openly political points, and was directly critical of supermarket packaging, air travel and industrial waste as serious problems, no companies were identified, making its critical edge somewhat blunted. While fast food restaurants, supermarkets, air lines and cars were implicated in the displays as contributors to environmental damage, McDonalds, Tesco, British Airways and Ford could not be targeted as in any way accountable for environmental problems; they were the 'generous' corporate partners of the Millennium Experience, who were themselves responsible for other displays in the Dome.

If there were references to the damage done by corporate industry, the overall emphasis was on individual responsibility: 'our behaviour is the cause of environmental problems, and if we do not improve our ways, disaster will strike' (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 62); much of the display was dedicated to the importance of recycling and preventing waste. As in the Body zone, the emphasis was on lifestyle choices; there could be no acknowledgement that the ecological system is more at risk from corporate industries than from domestic consumption. What was most interesting about Living Island was how little could be said about the ecological crisis; the very evident presence of the sponsors elsewhere in the Dome would not allow for any critical bite.

Home Planet

Like Living Island, Home Planet was directly concerned with the environment, but unlike Home Planet, it was very clearly sponsored, by British Airways. Despite the naming of the zone, the exhibition made no reference to the Department of

the Environment, but instead promoted British Airways as the British airline and as a responsible curator of the planet. Like the Body zone, the scale of the sponsor allowed for a relatively extravagant display, this was the only zone in the Dome that had a 'dark' ride, which approximated to a theme park experience. While British Airways were clear in their mission statement that their motive in sponsoring the zone was 'To inspire people to travel in the new millennium', there was a conscious effort to give the exhibit an ecological tinge. The 'pilot' who guided visitors through a ride which simulated 'intergalactic travel' was a mother alien named 'Gaia'. That there might be a contradiction between British Airways' mission to increase air traffic and the need to protect 'mother Earth' was not, however, acknowledged at all. British Airways' stated aspiration in their mission statement to 'provide 21st century airports for modern travellers, helping to bring people closer together' sat very uneasily with the warnings of the Living Island zone, which had cited air travel as one of the key causes for environmental damage to the planet (although neither British Airways nor any other airline could be mentioned by name).

Money

The Money zone was sponsored by a City of London consortium – and was an unabashed celebration of the financial world and its significance to the British economy. 'A million people are employed by the financial services industry in the UK', as the guide book put it. The Money zone took it upon itself to explain:

... the link between our financial lives and the financial world around us. It shows that what we do with our money affects both the world and the value of money ... yet most of us find it difficult to understand how money markets work. Generally we see our daily dealings with money as isolated transactions, without realising that our bank accounts, mortgages and pensions link us invisibly to a global economy. (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 50)

This was patronizing to a public audience in the year 2000, but in the aftermath of a global economic crisis, it reads as bitterly ironic. The attraction began with a (real) million pounds displayed in a glass corridor lined with £50 notes. An interactive game invited to visitors to spend their own imagined million pounds on outrageous luxury items – only to then confront them with the effects of an overheated economy, dramatized as a hellish financial meltdown. As with Living Planet, which had presented ecological damage as 'our' responsibility,

financial crisis was here represented as a problem caused by individual behaviour rather than the system itself. That the banks might have speculated rather more than a million, or that bankers themselves had indeed indulged in outrageous extravagance, was not in any way part of this agenda. The effects of undue fiscal extravagance (by the public) were represented in 'an enormous montage of images showing world events such as earthquakes, multi-national company mergers and peace agreements. This is mixed with images of the financial markets which cope with this unpredictable world' (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 52). The narrative of the Money zone reassured visitors that while economic catastrophe was possible, the banks and financial centres of the City of London had everything under control. That the banks and the financial services of the City of London would cope – that money was safe in their hands – was never in doubt. In 2008, in the wake of the global financial crisis, it was starkly apparent that not only could they not cope – but that the City of London had itself been instrumental in shaping government policy (both Labour and Conservative) to protect the banks and had virulently opposed any controls over the financial markets.

The Queen's official message had addressed the Dome's visitors as a united (if diverse) nation:

The Millennium Experience, in the same tradition as its predecessors, the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Festival of Britain in 1951, provides a focus for the nation's celebrations at an important moment in our history. (Millennium Experience 1999, p. 5)

The Queen referred to the Millennium Experience as a 'great national exhibition', but its national identity as 'British' was significantly compromised by the range of sponsors. While Michael Heseltine's original line up of 'corporate supporters' British Aerospace, British Airways, British Telecom (BT) and GEC, had all sounded reassuringly British, the final range of sponsors included companies which clearly operated on a global scale. The 'Official Suppliers' to the Dome (who were also sponsors) included Coca-Cola, Compaq, Kodak and 3Com. Their products were prominent throughout the refreshment and shopping areas, and each company was given prominent advertising space in the official guide.

McGuigan and Gilmore have argued that: 'At the heart of the Dome problem, and exemplifying its deeper dynamics is the role of sponsorship' (McGuigan and Gilmore 2002, p. 7). The Millennium Dome was widely denigrated in the press in the year of its exhibition and thereafter as a disaster; the press condemned it as a waste of public funds and a popular failure. Journals as diverse as the *New*

Statesman ('Curb Your Enthusiasm'), *Marketing Week* ('Why Marketing Was Not To Blame') and *Supply Management* ('The Fiasco of the Dome') were united in their vilification of the Dome project. Visitors fell far below the anticipated 12 million (as outlined in the Research Paper), at 6.5 million, fewer people than had attended the Festival of Britain. For McGuigan, sponsorship was central to the failure of the Dome to find any public affection:

Among the determining factors of the Dome 'disaster', the role of corporate sponsorship – economically, ideologically and politically – was decisive. It is an extreme case of the impact of corporate sponsorship on public culture, illustrating the inordinate power, symbolically as well as materially, of business in liberal-democratic politics today. For a small fraction of the public money spent on it, sponsoring corporations were allowed to have the loudest say in most of the Dome's thematic zones. (McGuigan 2010, p. 56)

The 'inordinate power' of the sponsors revealed that the Dome was itself a manifestation of a Britain and a government uncertain of its place in a global economy. It also revealed a Labour government that was insistently turning its back on the achievements of the welfare state and turning instead to the embrace of corporate culture. In a newspaper leader of 2006, *The Guardian* cited the Dome as one of the greatest failings of the New Labour government:

The struggle to fund the dome and the struggle to find something, anything to put in it – be it faith zone or casino – has twice distilled ministerial dealings with businessmen into a toxic essence that has corroded the government's credibility. In both cases the sense has been of something well short of proper procedure, a starry-eyed adaptability in the presence of serious money that has become one of the most unattractive hallmarks of New Labour. (*The Guardian* Leader, 07.07.06)

The future of Britain, the potential of new technologies and the achievements of the British people at the moment of the new millennium, were, in the Dome built to celebrate that, shaped in the image and interests of corporate capital, the citizen was recalibrated as a consumer whose needs would be met by the branded products supplied by the sponsors.

The political journalist Andrew Marr laid out the hopes for the Millennium Experience in a research paper published before the Dome opened:

It needs to pose hard questions about human futures, the choices and lifestyles ahead, the consequences of new technologies. . . . It doesn't need a state sponsored show to ask questions of course. But the authority and reach of the

state, even in these privatised years, is such that it can cause them to be asked and debated more widely than a private company could . . . It has the potential to be the grandest and most enjoyable act of public education any of us have witnessed. (Marr, quoted in Carling and Seeley 1998, p. 10)

The Millennium Dome did have enormous potential, but in those ‘privatised years’, the authority and reach of the state under New Labour, just as it had under the Conservative governments of Thatcher and Major, resolutely framed those questions in terms of private capital and allowed them to be shaped by the sponsors. In an ironic reversal, over a decade later, the 2012 London Olympics Opening Ceremony, a project initiated by a Labour government and inherited by a Conservative-led coalition government, while the Dome had been a Conservative initiative inherited by a Labour government, did ask those questions. The ceremony, directed by Danny Boyle, was widely agreed to have been ‘the grandest and most enjoyable act of public education’ most in Britain had witnessed in their lifetimes. In the context of the Olympic Games, fraught with controversy over the role of sponsorship, the opening ceremony took place under the auspices of the Olympic flag in the Olympic stadium, a site that was required under Olympic rules to be a sponsorship free zone.

Notes

- 1 Clause IV had been written by the Fabian Sidney Webb and called on the Labour Party: ‘To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange . . .’.
- 2 *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press) was the title of a 1998 book by Anthony Giddens, professor of sociology and then the director of the London School of Economics; he was a close friend and advisor to Blair.
- 3 A plaque to commemorate Barry’s contribution to the Festival of Britain was put on the wall of the Festival Hall in 1971.
- 4 As McGuigan and Gilmore explain, Pierre Gerbeau, who was brought in to replace the chief executive Jennie Page and to draw in more visitors, was concerned to promote visitor recognition of the sponsors and redefined them as ‘partners’ (McGuigan and Gilmore, p. 4).
- 5 Pierre Gerbeau also came with experience from the Disney parks.

- 6 The acrobatic display, the 'Millennium Show', was, according to visitor research, the most popular feature of the Millennium Experience, significantly, as this was one of the few attractions of the Dome not to feature any sponsorship (see McGuigan and Gilmore 2002, p. 13).
- 7 The following accounts of the 'zones' of the Dome do not cover every attraction available, but identify those in which sponsorship (or its absence) was central in shaping the contents and messages of each zone.
- 8 In 2001, the BBC reported the findings of *Which* (the magazine of the Consumers' Association), that it would take £20,000 worth of shopping in Tesco's to collect enough vouchers for a computer worth less than £1000 (www.bbc.co.uk, 2001).
- 9 The Lambeth Group was formally known as the Churches and Other Faiths sub-group of the Millennium Co-ordinating Group of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
- 10 The Hinduja Foundation was the main sponsor of the Faith zone; a year later, both the Hinduja brothers and members of New Labour were embroiled in a scandal in which it was alleged that their application for British citizenship had been fast-tracked through their close association with ministers. Although an independent enquiry ruled that there had been no improper behaviour, two government ministers resigned over the allegations.
- 11 The Garston Weston Foundation was a major donor to the Conservative Party. In 2010, the Charity Commission found that their contributions were in breach of charity law, as were their donations to the Centre for Policy Studies. They have also contributed to right-wing European political lobby groups, including the European Foundation, and have been implicated in offshore tax avoidance schemes.
- 12 Zaha Hadid was the British entry in the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2000, the year of the Dome, where her display was one in an exhibition of 'City Visionaries'.
- 13 Berners-Lee would not take out copyright or a patent on his discovery and so made the World Wide Web freely available.
- 14 In 1999, BAe signed a contract with the Tanzanian government, which was later judged as corrupt by the Serious Fraud Squad, in 2010.
- 15 The deregulation of the bus services had begun under Thatcher in the 1980s, and British Rail was privatized in 1993. Blair's administration did nothing to reverse this privatization.