

“Language is never neutral”

“How does political change occur? Does it stutter along in a series of incremental developments, accidents and setbacks, creeping so slowly that we barely notice its happening? Or does it leap forward in a sudden rush, carrying everything along with it?”

In March 2007, *Variant* commented that the publication of the Draft Culture (Scotland) Bill “marked a defining moment in the relationship between the state and its cultural workers”². The Bill itself was the direct product of a lengthy review³ and a three month consultation⁴. However, its form had arguably been cast as far back as 2000, with the Executive’s publication of ‘Creating our Future...Minding our Past: Scotland’s National Cultural Strategy’⁵; a future proposed in 2004 through an urge that “we should make the development of our creative drive the next major enterprise for our society”⁶, and concretised in 2006 when government’s “role and responsibility to help strengthen, support, and in some cases provide for, Scotland’s cultural activity” was formally defined⁷. It then underwent a reduction in scope in the wake of the 2007 Scottish parliamentary election – which saw the Scottish Nationalists emerge with the parliament’s first working majority, replacing the previous Lib/Lab ‘partnership government’. And the mooted transfiguration of Scotland’s then existing supports, The Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen, into the development body of Creative Scotland became inexorable with the eventual publication of the Creative Scotland Bill in 2008.⁸

Located amidst a wider context of neoliberal reform in which the value of culture has been reframed and instrumentalised, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Scottish government’s role for culture was thus defined. Since the publication of the Bill the policy domain has remained active, not only in assembling the means for transition, but through the introduction of additional measures, including cross-party support for the advent and protected status of Traditional Arts⁹. The fact that Creative Scotland explicitly locates itself as operating for and within a “single purpose government”¹⁰ predicated on the panacea of “sustainable economic growth”, makes infrastructural tightening and protectionism towards Scotland-the-brand seem inevitable. However, while *Variant* has long remarked that reforms of cultural provision are overdue, Creative Scotland has wider-reaching implications than simply superseding previous institutional arrangements. The removal of art-form specialisms; the abrupt, disruptive ‘transfer’ of Flexible Funding Organisations to Annual Portfolio Companies; the formulation of centralised Strategic Commissioning and Franchises, mark just a few of the notable changes in directionality at an administrative and funding level. Most tangible is the decisive shift to this language of service delivery, signifying a fundamental re-orientation of the many ways in which knowledge has previously been produced and culturally communicated in Scotland.

The dismantling and overwriting of the previous infrastructure will undoubtedly leave its mark on artists, creative practitioners and arts organisations throughout Scotland. Whether experienced directly through a loss of funding or an inability to maintain activity through diminishing planning horizons and increasingly precarious labour arrangements, including the formalisation of debt, or indirectly through the demise of a sufficiently diverse cultural scene, the impacts will be manifest. The extent to which impacts will be felt, not only for the short-term viability of practice but to the long-term boundaries of what is and what can be constructed through cultural funding, becomes all too clear when the protection of a Traditional Arts, whilst all else is left to compete in an entrepreneurial ‘creative economy’, is coupled with a new language which narrowly articulates the criteria for artistic practice. It is difficult to ignore the feeling that we are witnessing the formation of ‘legitimate’ subjects of art and culture and a re-imagining of what it means to use those very words. It is impossible to ignore the sense that this is a challenge to the diversity of cultural and therefore

political expression as a democratic right.

Despite all that can be inferred, these shifts to date have largely been enacted within a policy arena that is perhaps marked most by its silences. Certainly, much of this effect can be laid with Creative Scotland. Details of its structure have been protracted, and its staged revealing of what this means in practice have been analogously slow. And yet this silence must also be regarded in at least two other areas: academia and the arts. Within academia those who seek to unravel the policy, political and cultural dimensions of this change are difficult to locate. This at a time when the cultural and constitutional (re)imagining of Scotland is prescient. Comment, let alone sustained analysis and considered critique, seems frustratingly absent. To what extent this is ‘absenteeism’ borne from decisive retraction or is indicative of a shift in the cultural activity of academia is open to question. It would be reticent not to also point to the tentative silence which pervades the sphere in which Creative Scotland seeks to operate. While many are mindful of the developments above and maintain engagement by way of an expectant gaze, the drip feeding of policy details and the unfamiliarity of Creative Scotland’s chosen tongue has left critical activity within this sphere ostensibly subdued. Of all the silences this is by far the most understandable. Apathy, resignation, expectation, confusion and naivety combine to create a field of practice whose collective potential seems fated to wait; whose questions are being held until they can correctly be asked in the appropriate pro forma. But there is a tactical dimension to the current conditions which must be recognised. In spite of a pervasive silence, policy continues to aggregate, revealing the wait for articulation to be essentially a wait for Creative Scotland to frame and constrain the parameters of the debate. One thing Creative Scotland has articulated at length is the Scottish government’s primary belief in the economic utility of art and culture. Accordingly, the time for re-imagining is now, save we be left with no option but to understand ourselves in the language and function that others intend for us.

Variant, feeling this heightened imperative, has sought to proactively and collectively consider the potential impact of these changes for artistic practice and, more broadly, for the meaning of art and culture in contemporary Scotland. Arts organisations and creative practitioners (which are not necessarily synonymous) have previously been supported through varied levels of state support and have operated from a range of ideological and practical positions, albeit with increasing difficulty as regards their relative autonomy. However, within these different positions we believe that there is an opportunity for meaningful discussion: to consider what we really think and what we really want; to understand and strengthen our own positions and conditions of practice whilst acknowledging the differences we positively hold. As a contribution towards such a dialogue, *Variant* has invited¹¹ a series of responses to issues raised by Andrew Dixon, CEO of Creative Scotland, in the interview with him in the previous issue of *Variant*¹², which here take the form of interview exchanges¹³ and written responses¹⁴. The constraints which make difficult the possibility of even beginning to form such a collection have become all too stark. The lack of any certainty with regard to *Variant*’s own funding stability imposes its own limitations. The potential need for professional and personal anonymity has also had an understandable impact. *Variant* takes its ethical commitment to respondents with utmost seriousness. While we understand that the publicness of this task may have deterred some from contributing their voice, we wish to make clear to those participating, those who may participate in such discussion in the future and to those reading, that we will continue to deal with such matters ethically and sensitively. The question of who can speak is of course more complex. We recognise the formal and informal structures which constrain individuals’ from being able to adopt a speech position, and that positionality – in this case, the inherently gendered construction of positions – is clearly

reflected in the responses gathered¹⁵.

Acknowledging the realities through which these shifts are conceptualised and experienced, the information asymmetries that exist, and the entry points which inevitably follow, the decision to adopt a narrative structure for responses was taken¹⁶. In each verbal exchange respondents were prompted to give some context for their own engagement, with their account being left to unfold within those broad terms of reference. The openness of this approach is reflected in how the responses are presented within this text. Contradictions that exist within and between have been left to sit upon the page – the fragile logics which may appear to strengthen through momentary connections are allowed to visibly return and counter that upon which they are predicated. And that’s exactly it: the intention was never to comprehensively analyse and disseminate *Variant*’s ‘reality’ of Creative Scotland for all concerned, nor to seek clarity across responses gathered. The intention was not to shut down debate, but rather to engender the conditions for discussion and help bring to the fore some of the necessary questions that, even in our differences, we have collectively arrived at. These responses emerge as art in practice, they are the textual imagining of the possibility of something else. Far from being a dialogue in disarray, this is a silence that is being contested.

Variant, Editorial Group

Notes

- 1 Lahoud, A (2009) Post-Traumatic Urbanism, Available: <http://post-traumaticurbanism.com/?p=138>, [Accessed 29 November 2011].
- 2 *Variant* (2007) Privatising Culture, Available: <http://www.variant.org.uk/events/privatising29/PrivatisingCulture.htm>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 3 The Scottish Executive (2006a) Culture Review, Available: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Arts-Culture/19347/18411>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 4 The Scottish Executive (2006b) Draft Culture (Scotland) Bill: Consultation Document, Available: <http://scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/12/14095224/0>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 5 The Scottish Executive (2000) Creating Our Future... Minding Our Past, Available: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/nationalculturalstrategy/docs/cult-00.asp>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 6 The Scottish Executive (2004) Culture - it defines who we are, Available: <http://www.culturalcommission.org.uk/cultural/files/Cultural%20Policy%20Statement.pdf>, [Accessed 28 November 2011], Page 4.
- 7 The Scottish Executive (2006c) Scotland’s Culture, Available: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/89659/0021549.pdf>, [Accessed 28 November 2011], Page 4.
- 8 The Scottish Government (2008) Creative Scotland Bill, Available: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/03/13094003>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 9 The Scottish Government (2010) Scotland’s Traditional Arts, Available: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2010/12/03163022>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 10 Creative Scotland (2011) Investing in Scotland’s Creative Future: Corporate Plan 2011-2014, Available: <http://www.creativescotland.com/sites/default/files/editor/Corporate-Plan-Singles-31-3.pdf>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 11 *Variant* (2011) Call for responses to interview with Andrew Dixon, Available: <http://www.variant.org.uk/42texts/call42.html>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 12 *Variant* (2011) Investing, Advocating, Promoting... Strategically, Available: <http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue41/adixon.pdf>, [Accessed 28 November 2011].
- 13 Conducted by Lisa Bradley, *Variant*
- 14 Collated by Leigh French, *Variant*
- 15 67% of those working in the visual arts in Scotland are women, according to the Creative and Cultural Skills AACs LMI report (2010), Available: <http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/nextstep/lmib/Next%20Step%20LMI%20Bitesize%20-%20Creative%20and%20cultural%20skills%20-%20visual%20arts%20-%20Jun%202010.pdf>, [Accessed 29 November 2011].
- 16 In total 8 responses were made: 3 narrative interviews and 5 written responses.

Responses to *Variant's* interview with Andrew Dixon, CEO of Creative Scotland

Lindsay Gordon, Director of Peacock Visual Arts

Lindsay Gordon: Okay, a little bit of context. I'm 62 years old. I've been living and working in the Arts in Scotland since 1975. I used to work at the Scottish Arts Council and back then at least, well, it was patrician. The chairman was Lord Balfour of Burleigh, the director Alexander Arbuthnott Dunbar. The Arts Council was set up by the economist John Maynard Keynes after the war, exactly the same year as I was born and Nye Bevan set up the NHS. And it was this idea that these things were good for you. But it was patrician. But at least it was kind of honest, you knew where you were. The Arts Council of Great Britain, which spawned the Scottish Arts Council, had a thing called a Royal Charter. Not a business plan or a strategic whatever. And the Royal Charter said three things. You are there, one: to improve the practice, knowledge and understanding of the arts. Two: to increase accessibility to the arts. And three: to liaise and work with other bodies, local authorities etc., in pursuit of the first two. So it was very top down. But honest, transparent. And it was the idea that culture, actually, was good. During the war it was shown to be good for morale, and it was all part of the great socialist ideals: orange juice, education, culture, great stuff! [pause] It's a long time ago, Lisa. You're young, you won't remember that. I left the Arts Council in 1992 and I'd already started to see this shift away; from art being something worthwhile in itself. I think it's because where we were at the time – and I include myself in this – what we were trying to do was to get more money out from government to the people on the ground. And at that time in Scotland we were trying to build up an infrastructure so that instead of artists wanting to bugger off to London they might actually want to stay here. So we invested [laughs] – we put money into things

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like workshops, studios, places where artists could work and do things, and galleries where they could show them. But in order to get more money we thought, "we have to come up with some new arguments". The old argument that art, like orange juice, is good for you, was getting tired. So, I remember this guy called John Myerscough, the economic impact of cultural blah-de-blah, and us thinking, "oh, that's a good idea, now we can start talking in the language that politicians are interested in; the economy, they can understand that". So we actually sold that pass ourselves. And now, well I went to one of the last dying acts of Scottish Screen and they were talking about Communities Cash-back: money that government takes back from criminals – alleged criminals – and gives back to Scottish Screen. And it was entirely instrumental in that this time round they wanted to measure the impact very closely. But actually, what they wanted to show was that the involvement of young people in cultural activity, the arts, would lead to a reduction in ASBOs on Friday and Saturday night. That's not my problem and I'm not going to pretend that I can do anything about that, that's a much, much larger problem. So, there's been a complete change, from a kind of laissez-faire, high Tory, this is good; to a completely instrumental view of art and culture. And what I feel most is that in reality, the arms-length principle is gone, completely. And we are now, all of us, cultural workers. If we want to get our wages paid we're going to have to do what the Scottish Government wants us to do through its conduit of money: Creative Scotland.

Lisa Bradley: To what extent do you think there has been an even further shift, from the social impact towards an explicit economic impact?

LG: I think we've all got to be honest. Let's talk about art or what is now called the visual arts. At one end

of the spectrum it's a luxury commodity, it's part of capitalism. It's Louis Vuitton handbags and Hugo Boss suits. I work in a printmakers, Peacock, and we produce multiples. And what's the point of producing twenty of something? You've got to do something with it, you sell it. So we've always been in that mixed economy. I'll come back to printmaking, because printmaking could be, should be, a subversive art form. But it aids, and it has always chosen to aid, the capitalist art market. You only produce a limited run and then you destroy the plates. You're creating rarity out of something which actually should be available for everybody. But those kind of contradictions are absolutely inherent in the art market; in art. [...] That's a dilemma, a dichotomy which one lives with. [...] So I think sometimes we have a tendency to be not entirely honest with ourselves if we purely critique something which is of a capitalist nature, because we are also the producers of those luxury goods and some of us benefit very nicely from doing that. And maybe that's ok. But what I think is worrying now – and I don't know how much this worries individual artists but I do know that it worries some people who work in the infrastructure, in the organisations – is that more and more we see that if we want the money, we have to dance to their tune. And their tune is becoming more and more explicit. And at the moment it's a direct copy of the Scottish Nationalist's agenda: for richer, whatever, whatever, whatever. And worryingly I think, if you look at the Scottish Nationalist's agenda the arts are not mentioned at all. So, they are simply there as an instrument to help deliver, whatever. It's that whole neoliberal lie that pretends and only values you for what you can deliver, not for art. Art, good art, should be and always has been subversive. Revolutionary. Biting the hand that feeds you; chopping the head off the person. And I think that's going to get more and more difficult as a new breed of arts administrator come through, buying the language, buying the ideology, worrying about wanting to get on. And I think that's rather sad. I listened the other day, two days running in fact, to the radio when I went home. And the first day was George Soros talking about the economy, telling the truth: they're all lying. And the next night it was Umberto Eco, telling the truth as well: they're all lying. And these old men are chuckling because no one listens to them, and that's okay because the whole roller coaster is just going. So, where is the role ahead? Well, when I read Andrew Dixon, you know [pause] words fail me. Because I'm sure he actually believes what he's saying. It's pathetic.

LB: Are you angry at what's happening?

LG: How can I be angry? I mean, I should be angry, but it's just, you look around – I mean, just look. See, I'm going to sound like another old man; I am an old man. I wish I was angrier instead of just grumpy. Not even grumpy, sometimes I'm just sad. I think, well, what the fuck is this all about. And I'm sad a lot at my fellow human beings, the inhabitants of this planet, this country, this town. Because Glasgow boasts Shopping with Style, it's a shopping culture. The arts: they've become part of "lifestyle". And really what one wants is to get out there with the guys in George Square. There should be more tents out there, shouting louder. And that's where the artists should be. And that's where old guys like I should actually be, to encourage the younger artists to be more political and to be, basically, subversive. [...] And I come back to what worries me most, those, like Variant, who have never enjoyed any secure funding from the Scottish Arts Council, now Creative Scotland. And long may they not in a sense, because as long as they don't it shows that they're doing a good job. It is irritating the establishment. And that's what more artists and arts workers should be doing.

LB: Where is the space for that?

LG: Come to Peacock. No seriously, and places like Street Level in Glasgow. There are some of us that actually want to see more subversion. And sometimes, I'm disappointed. You get a call for open submissions and ideas; proposals. And frankly, the artists [pauses] what the hell are they – what's happening to artists who go to art school?

LB: You trace a couple of trajectories, one in terms of the lineage of policy formation, but there's also a real-world context which seems to mirror the policy context.

Andrew Dixon is positioned as a figurehead for Creative Scotland, when there was none in such a way before. So we must deal with what he represents as his opinions. He appears careful to say appropriately inclusive things but he displays the qualities of a politician and therein lies the spin. Once the image fades there are many issues and contradictions that become apparent, specifically the gap between the rhetoric and the examples he uses. There is little room here to analyse his proposed exemplary culture(s) but I can present the immediate issues as I see them and talk of what I would delve further into.

The language used by Creative Scotland (CS), which Dixon is the mouthpiece for, seems to have changed from that of the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) with a number of distinctions being made about the value of culture. I would like to point to a number of assumptions that have been made and how his/ its position is symptomatic of a general neo-liberal turn in the meaning of the word 'value' from social to economic worth.

A personal example I could give is my experience in the last couple of years as a committee member of an artist run space. One which had survived on SAC funding for several years but, being outside of the flexi-funded loop, completely ignored strategically since CS took over. Why is that? Quality? No, that doesn't seem a consideration. Reduction of budget? No, following his/ its new logic those whom you would think CS get most value from, a wealth of production on a minuscule budget and voluntary 'CV-building' labour, have been confusingly missed out. Or is it more to do with surface visibility and an old fashioned ideals system that is not profit making or cannot be presented as such. The message is that you were lucky to receive it in the first place and if you want to do it you should be self-sustaining because it is self-indulgent, only of relevance to yourselves. But this seemingly ignores the symbolic: you take away that level of activity and you are left with a gap, no space outwith the commercial or the instrumentalised for contemporary practice(s).

There is also the problem of the concoction of 'partnership' working as innately positive, and in general of culture as a positive force, for if everything has to be wonderful then the space for critical discourse is narrowed, the assumption being that critique is of detriment to...something. The use of the words 'creative' and 'talent' have connotations which cannot be ignored as they reduce the work of artists to hobby and innate ability, placing less emphasis on the work put into the practices of artists and groups, reducing its potential for agency, and demanding usefulness as a 'value'. The language used is important not because he might mean what he says, but rather as an important signifier because it normalises a rhetoric that submits culture to singularly economic purposes. For example, the deeply problematic, if also totally vague, idea of the 'franchise', which seems to centralise power in organisations with their own non-neutral agendas, is something that needs analysis.

Also, as an artist who had moved back North, holding a naïve view of the values of public funding and believing I could better survive within the Scottish environment, I did receive one of the last SAC grants and I would like to reflect on that process as it was and how it has changed. Since, I have not heard of one person who has actually applied as an individual artist, most sighting option paralysis - a difficulty in categorising themselves from what's discernible. I would like to look into it further to see what the facts are, who has been able to apply in the last year.

I have joked with people about the ultimate CS 'commission'. It is easy to be cynical about it. But I would not propose that we regress into or reminisce about a former system, one in which over the past decade neo-liberal pragmatics were more hidden but nevertheless in evidence, but that we don't close off the options either; don't reject that there might be a possible space outside 'entrepreneurialism' for anything other than 'Traditional Arts'.

I would like to be able to write a response which was thoroughly researched, in depth and was able to reach a wider audience, but unfortunately there are few spaces left for dissenting, questioning voices and little time.

Shona Macnaughton

I can't tell whether it's policy shaping the real-world context or whether it is the real world to which policy is responding. In terms of Creative Scotland, where did it come from; where is it going?

LG: Creative Scotland, it didn't come from nowhere. There's a history. It came from the late '70s, early '80s, the arts administrators who well-meaningly tried to convince politicians to put more money into the arts. And hence the instrumentality. Andrew Dixon talks about the prisons, for example. But it was an earlier generation of arts administrators who started that. And so it's that, coupled with the present Scottish Government. The other stuff you're asking about, I find harder. Recently Sandy Moffat, David Harding and Sam Ainsley, organised a conference called State of Play: Art and Politics in Scotland. Here Sandy reminded us of that very interesting and exciting time in Scottish politics in the mid-'70s, in the lead up to the watershed that was 1979, the 40% referendum on independence. There was a sense back then that artists and intellectuals could actually come together, that there was an opportunity to shape our destiny as a country. It was exciting. But we were young. Does it feel like that now, Lisa? You're young.

LB: It certainly doesn't, no.

LG: Why's that do you think?

LB: I suppose I struggle with the apathy that seems ever more present, while at the same time I am frustrated that there's not many spaces in which I can critically engage. That doesn't feel possible within existing spaces, and certainly not in a grander sense. And my interest in art and culture comes, then, in viewing its transformative potential. And I don't mean that simply in an instrumental sense, but it excites me that the sphere of culture and the arts can exist as the antithesis of the state and as such can be a space for contestation and difference. And I think that's why the language of cultural policy and the manifestations of that language concern me so much.

LG: No, I totally agree. Sometimes I do get depressed, not necessarily about the things you were talking about there, but about the stuff I see, the art I see, the projects I see. And every so often you come across something that's, like, powerful. Effective. Beautiful. Usually where it has empowered other people; where people can tell their own story and can interrogate the circumstances they find themselves in. We did a lovely project in Aberdeen called ASS, Aberdeen Street Skaters. One day I noticed that around the offices of the City Council, these metal skate-stopper things that looked like twelve-inch long, metal phalluses, had been built overnight. So I said to a friend of mine who was living in Aberdeen – Eva Merz, a photographer – “will you photograph this shit?” Because it was just so absolutely, aggressive: “you are not going to have fun here”. Even worse than that, it was unnecessary. So we photographed the disenfranchised, the people who wanted to go skating. And of course the funny thing is that most of those kids, well, they weren't working class kids. They were the nice, polite young boys who went to a good school. So they organised a group called Aberdeen Street Skaters, and they realised that they had to have a manifesto. And the ASS manifesto says: “The Association's principal aim is to improve communication, inclusiveness and openness in all aspects of public interaction and to emphasise the fact that people come before buildings and economics. It is the citizens who create and develop culture in the community. This culture should be supported, not obstructed by the authorities – always remember – never forget!”. [...] So that's kind of empowering, you don't have to accept all this shit.

LB: Seeing decisions like that delivered through policy all over the UK, signalling that there is a right and proper use of something, are we starting to see those messages being delivered through cultural policy?

LG: I have two grandchildren, I'm very lucky. My granddaughter's fifteen and my grandson is thirteen. And they have two rules. I said to them one day, and unfortunately my daughter, their mother, overheard, but I said “right guys, we're talking about rules. There are only two rules, actually there are only three. First rule is, disrespect authority” and I think it was at that point their mother started to walk in. “Second rule, always ask why. So what's the third rule? Well there isn't really a third rule, but it's a good bit of advice: always stay wild”. Well, if you constantly disrespect authority and always ask why, then the world would be a better place.

Two Committee Members from Transmission Gallery

Transmission Gallery is an organisation supported by a large membership of artists in Glasgow and the UK. The opinions expressed in this interview are based on the experience of these individuals as serving committee members.

Committee Member one: My engagement with, or understanding of the changes that are taking place in cultural policy generally began with the realisation that there are definite changes affecting the particular funding situation of this organisation: specifically, the end of Flexible Funding and the introduction of Strategic Commissioning. [...] Strategic Commissioning doesn't provide the stable, long-term support that allows us to be flexible in our programming and to develop projects over time. Also, the term 'strategic' seems to highlight the issue that decisions relating to what culture is and what purpose it fulfils are being centralised. In the interview with Variant, Andrew Dixon talks a lot about what 'we' need; he refers to 'we' quite a bit and to the 'gaps in the map', and 'gaps in career path'. But there's not really much about who that 'we' is, and what will be achieved when the gaps are filled in; what that's working towards. Another thing that has a huge impact on this organisation is the funding situation for individuals and the working conditions for individual artists and practitioners, because they're the people we're working with most directly and most of the time. [...] The situation for funding individuals seems to have become a lot more [pauses] difficult. The funding that does exist seems to be completely [pauses] well, it seems that nobody's really figured out if there are any development grants for individuals yet. When you look at the Creative Scotland website, the language is so difficult to find your way around. And the removal of art-form specialisms creates confusion.

I'm worried that the language used by a funding body, in this case the language of management and business, and the imperatives they place on those applying for funding ... can begin to shape the way we speak about our own work and understand 'value'.

Lisa Bradley: Would you add to what [committee member one] has said, or do you have a different response?

Committee Member two: When I was reading the article and Creative Scotland's Corporate Plan, there is some specific language that is really concerning. [...] I want to resonate on [committee member one's] point about that question of what culture is and who it is for. I guess I fear that in the changes, the autonomy of organisations might be affected. For me, reading the interview and corporate plan, all the language about collaboration and partnership, Creative Scotland seem to say that they're taking more responsibility. But they're also delegating out the responsibility and management in a tier system. For me, what that screams is more administration and less autonomy. [...] Not to mention the fact that some organisations may now be competing for funding with Creative Scotland. There is a lot that's difficult about the upcoming changes, but for me one of the most concerning things is the language and how that language makes it difficult to access a knowledge about how it's running, especially as an individual artist.

LB: Can you give me an example of this new language?

CM2: A lot of it now, well, most of it, doesn't apply to individual artists. It'd be interesting to make a map of who the opportunities are relevant for. You see increasing amounts of opportunities to increase your marketing skills; advice about how to run a business; how to interact and collaborate with the tourism industry.

LB: Do you view this change in language as a benign shift or as something more purposeful?

CM1: Purposeful in what sense?

LB: I suppose I'm asking whether you see it as a response to the current conditions; viewing cultural policy as

sitting within a broader policy context?

CM1: Yes absolutely, I see it as a funding body or an 'investment agency' adopting the language of neoliberal governance; marketing language. I think a lot of organisations are very adept at picking up on the language used by other people and adopting that language. And I think that's the process happening here. I'm worried that the language used by a funding body, in this case the language of management and business, and the imperatives they place on those applying for funding – to produce statistics to justify their work for example – can begin to shape the way we speak about our own work and understand 'value'.

LB: And when you acknowledge the position of cultural policy within a 'single purpose government' aiming for 'sustainable economic growth', to what extent do you think the language moves beyond responsive to purposeful?

CM1: Well, I suppose you can argue that naturalising business language within the arts and teaching arts organisations to think of themselves as 'companies', paves the way for marketisation.

CM2: And also, the business language, it's not just talking about figures and number crunching. It's talking about participation, accessibility, talent, innovation, creativity, collaboration. These kind of words appeal to people and have meaning. But when they're put through this

We're in a climate where 'entitlement' to public funding in the arts is becoming a thing of the past – and I think this might be harder to acknowledge in Scotland than in England.

It seems like we've had a decade in public funding of the arts tied to government social inclusion agenda, and now it's an economic agenda.

While commercial values are not always at odds with the production of quality artistic work – selling has a place in the visual arts in Scotland – success in Scotland has been dependent on which one has been the driver. The ability to support the individual, nurture new talent, take risks and respect the time needed for meaningful creative development has been a strength of arts funding in Scotland.

While a 'culture of dependency' on the grants system is not desirable – one where many of the same artists continually receive money, and similarly for institutions shifting to being producers – we do need a funding system that knows *when* and *how* to support talent and take risks. Artists and the arts by their nature will never thrive if treated as Fast Moving Consumer Goods.

Creative Scotland might have a strong developmental role but it's not that evident. Whereas the Scottish Arts Council was never just a 'cash machine'; it was an arts agency that was hugely developmental and it 'invested' – DCA (Dundee Contemporary Arts) is a prime example.

Language is important in the arts. The language of commerce adopted by Creative Scotland sits oddly with how we engage with arts and culture in Scotland. An emphasis on prescriptive investment schemes risks screening out many good artists from applying. Emails headed 'Creative Scotland Investment Update' read at first glance like one of those email bank scams. Language perhaps for a government rather than a people?

It is not misplaced nostalgia to recall the structure of committees and panels at the Scottish Arts Council and the debates between members that underpinned a rigorous decision making process – it took time, we came in for criticism at times, but the process was rigorous.

Who makes the decisions at Creative Scotland?

How are those decisions quality assured?

What expertise underpins the decision makers, and are they internal staff or external?

What is the profile and rotation of the decision makers?

Where do we find this information?

When we submit our ideas to the Creative Scotland 'Ideas Bank' who is judging our intellectual property (a potential financial asset we are told)?

Where is the decision making process published on the Creative Scotland website?

Arts Council England publishes all National Portfolio funding allocations. Why are all Creative Scotland's sizable public funding allocations, including those given to revenue funded organisations, not also online?

Why isn't there more transparency?

Wendy Law

Independent Arts Manager
www.wendylawart.com
Edinburgh, October 2011

business filter, they mean something quite different.

CM1: Using friendly, comfortable sounding words to describe things. That may mask certain realities. [...] I think by presuming that everyone's pursuing 'sustainable economic growth', and that art and culture is instrumental in that, I think that causes problems.

CM2: I would agree. Even more strongly. I think that presumption that we're all pursuing economic growth, if you're operating a mode of support for arts and culture through that assumption, it becomes problematic. And I don't think it's just necessarily Creative Scotland or the Government, but it applies to the whole situation of how our society is structured at the moment.

LB: Could you tell about some of these more concrete shifts you've witnessed?

CM1: I think the main practical shift is that there is no longer a specialist visual arts officer with whom we have regular contact and a working relationship. That person was really vital to us, given the fact that this organisation is run by practicing artists who don't necessarily have much administrative experience or a background dealing with funding bodies. It's not so concrete, but the uncertainty created by the looming end of Flexible Funding is another shift – maybe not only for Transmission itself, but also for other visual arts FXOs [Flexibly Funded Organisations] that we're in contact with. There's a definite thing hanging over everyone that at the end of the next financial year there's going to be this complete change. That's creating a [pauses] quite a fearful feeling. You get a sense by observing how other

organisations are acting that people are attempting to position themselves in line with what they think the new structures will demand.

LB: Are you meaning in terms of the work that they're curating; the programmes they're planning; the discussions that they're having?

CM1: Discussions, but also work that they're curating. It's maybe not good form for me to talk about another organisation explicitly, but take, for example, Creative Scotland wanting to remove art-form distinctions and promote cross-disciplinary working. The programmes of certain arts venues seem to be made up increasingly of work produced by theatre practitioners or dance companies and visual artists in collaboration. I don't think that interdisciplinary working is a problem in itself and I have no hard evidence to say that that's entirely a response to the funding situation, but it seems like that to me. It seems like a step towards Commissioning.

LB: In terms of the end of Flexible Funding and the beginnings of Strategic Commissioning, what are your understandings of that change and what do you think it will mean for Transmission and other organisations?

CM1: [F]rom what I think I understand of it, I can't see how this organisation, or really any visual arts organisation with a permanent premises, can fit within that structure. It seems from the interview, and also from hearing Andrew Dixon talk about it at Creative Scotland's FXO conference last year, to be very much focused on the geographical spread of things. It's maybe a slightly more workable arrangement for

theatre organisations. And I believe the majority of organisations that are currently Flexibly Funded are theatre companies, so there's some logic to that I suppose.

the term 'strategic' seems to highlight the issue that decisions relating to what culture is and what purpose it fulfils are being centralised.

CM2: I also don't know much about Strategic Commissioning, but what it does sound like to me is [...] if the funders see two different organisations doing something that seems on the surface very similar they'll see that as a replication, and therefore not necessary.

CM1: It seems to be about putting in place a designated career path in every city and throughout the country, where there's maybe an artist-run gallery where recent art school graduates can show their work, and then a small institution, and then a larger one [CM2: Yes]. They don't want ten artist-run organisations and no Fruitmarket Gallery. And maybe I'm oversimplifying it, but they seem to want to put in place an officially sanctioned career ladder and they want to make sure that there's one rung on every step of that ladder. There's loads of problems with that strategy, but the most fundamental is that it's totally top-down and doesn't allow people to do what they want to do, and to put what they want to put in place, in place. It only validates one logic, one career-trajectory.

CM2: And that logic brings you into the market.

CM1: Yes.

CM2: Dixon also talks about the importance of 'adding value'. When people show younger artists' work he talks about the value in that as something they can put on their CV. And that's really, really dangerous language for me. And that's not just the language, it's a point of view: It's the type of thinking that only sees value in doing something, or being involved in the arts community if it's going to get you somewhere else after that.

LB: Can I ask you to expand upon that danger; how will it materialise if what you've described comes to fruition?

CM1: It excludes organisations and individuals who are working in ways that don't fit into that prescribed career path. So that decreases the diversity of what's happening culturally in Scotland.

CM2: Rather than that being about freedom of expression, it's more about freedom of communication and the spaces where you are able to actually communicate publicly within a community and society. And I think that it will affect Glasgow. Maybe not a huge majority, but I would say that a majority of artists working in Glasgow are working in that way.

CM1: Yes, it undermines the idea of self-organised or self-institutionalised space as something that is of value in and of itself – as opposed to being of deferred monetary value. It undermines the value of alternative ways of working and of ways of working that might actually be [pauses], overtly resistant to the kind of career trajectory Creative Scotland are prescribing. At best it misunderstands and at worst it actively suppresses the idea that self-organisation might actually be a choice taken by people who want to work within an alternative infrastructure rather than use it as a stepping stone to, I don't know, to the Venice Biennale or something [laughs].

CM2: There's also quite a few groups I know who want to avoid needing to apply for funding at all costs. But actually, they quite rely on places like Transmission existing and are aware of that relationship. [...] There are a lot of smaller artist-run organisations and similar places that allow activity to happen outside of institutions but which also contribute quite a lot to the culture of the city. Though it's almost impossible to justify those kinds of practices using Creative Scotland's current policy.

LB: [W]hat are your thoughts on the long term impact of these policy shifts?

CM1: I think there's a real risk that artists and other cultural practitioners will simply stop choosing to base themselves in Scotland. The visual arts infrastructure which exists in Glasgow is probably the only aspect of

"..You get the drift?", Creative Scotland CEO Andrew Dixon asks at one point during the interview... And indeed a drift it is – Scotland's cultural landscape seems to be drifting slowly towards an inevitable drop over the edge, whence we will resurface and find ourselves in completely new territory.

It was interesting, and telling, to read in this the first published interview with Creative Scotland's CEO of his vision – of how Creative Scotland is indeed "a funding agency, or investment agency as we call it, but we are much more of a promotional body or an advocate for the cultural sector..." Creative Scotland will not just assist and support artists to create, it will also present "the total picture back to Scotland and back to visitors... because [the story has] not been told in the past as positively as it should be so we're underplaying our strengths."

Not many artists would argue with having their work promoted more widely, but might this additional task inevitably draw money away from artists' own grass roots production towards the more bankable and marketable, an official state sanctioned version of Scotland – one that is relentlessly positive and uncritical?

Dixon, perhaps alert to this contention, assures: "we still will invest in straight cultural, individual artist's projects on artist's terms. It's absolutely pivotal to what we do. In fact we will put more money into that." But does the rhetoric match reality? The most recent available figures (from SAC/CS '09/10) show around 0.1% of all available funding actually got directly to visual artists.¹ Things can only get better, or can they?

Dixon states "we're obviously planning a growth budget..." Yet on 22nd September a 2% cut in CS's budget for 2012-2013 was announced (3.49% in real terms) from £53m to £50.4m.² Sir Sandy Crombie (Chairman of Creative Scotland and independent director of the Royal Bank of Scotland) responded to this announcement on his watch: "This is a welcome expression of confidence in the contribution that the arts, screen and creative industries will make to securing Scotland's future success."³

If the income is going down, and the expenditure is going up (due to additional activity around promoting culture, additional remit for creatives industries, etc.) it doesn't take a banker to realise that a reallocation of resources is coming.⁴

The major change is to how Creative Scotland operates – investing in themselves the position and power to reshape the landscape of the Scottish cultural sector through the intervention of 'Strategic Commissioning'. This is a regressive move to a more direct form of managing the cultural sector. This can only weaken the sector in both the short term and the long term. There is a fundamental difference between supporting artists, and "inviting them... into a series of conversations which says 'What more could you do in delivering our objectives in Scotland?'"⁵

What will become of the fate of the Flexibly Funded Organisations (FXOs), who currently get funded on a two year cycle? As Dixon notes, "this is by its very nature very competitive" with 139 organisations bidding for circa £8million, with 60 being successful. "We're going to get rid of it in two years time", in March 2013, following review

of each sector. The Corporate Plan notes the purpose is "to review the cultural ecology of key sectors to inform future commissioning of production and touring franchises."⁶ One web article, obviously based on a press release, suggests that "the current FXO program, which runs through 2012/13, will be replaced by a new £7 million strategic commissioning programme."⁷ And Dixon suggests that "we would define four or five franchises that we'd then advertise and invite proposals to come forward."

Dixon's ecological metaphor seems misplaced given the process of managed change he is advocating.⁸ CS is to consolidate support of larger institutions – the national infrastructure represented by the Foundation Organisations (currently recipients of circa £18million funding). Dixon is explicit: "Once you've got the foundations, you want to ask: what else can you build on top of them? Could you make them even stronger? ... Actually, if you gave them a bit more resources, what else could they do?"

This rationalisation process is not so different from that found across the voluntary sector working to a funding model based on service delivery – a legacy of instrumentalism we share. The larger organisations with the capacity to bid and win tenders will supplant or absorb the smaller, more diverse organisations in an unequal struggle for resources. This represents a drift towards the increasing casualisation and instability of work – short term contracts, and a shoring up of the bigger 'promotional' cultural organisations at the expense of smaller 'production'/'support' organisations, thereby habouring the potential "to lead to an unwelcome stagnant and mono-cultural arts environment."⁹

Johnny Gailey

Notes

- 1 'A fair share – direct funding for individual artists from UK arts councils' by Dany Louise, (a-n, The Artists Information Company, 2011) available from: <http://www.a-n.co.uk/publications/article/1558894/1558858>
- 2 See Scottish Government budget, at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/10/04153155/17>
- 3 Creative Scotland press release, at: <http://www.creativescotland.com/news/creative-scotland-responds-to-the-scottish-government-budget-171110>
- 4 Lottery income is being projected upwards to supplement shortfalls (Andrew Dixon, 9th November 2011), but, importantly, Lottery money is 'additional' to statutory spending by government, not a substitute for it, determining any additional allocation should it materialise.
- 5 My italics.
- 6 My italics. See p.24 of Corporate Plan at <http://www.creativescotland.com/about/our-plans#Plan>
- 7 See: http://www.artscampaign.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=431%3Acreative-scotland-releases-10-year-corporate-plan&Itemid=97
- 8 For a critique of 'ecology', Adam Curtis has explored what he calls: 'The Use and Abuse of Vegetal Concepts' - as part of the series 'All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace'.
- 9 'Ladders for development: Impact of Arts Council England funding cuts on practice-led organisations', by Dany Louise (First published: a-n.co.uk May 2011): <http://www.a-n.co.uk/research/article/1300054/1224267>

all this that I can speak about from experience, and I think that its very fragile [...] I would say that the majority, certainly a large proportion, of artists who currently live in Glasgow don't really live here for any reason other than that there's an infrastructure; there are opportunities; there are other artists. This all depends indirectly on a small amount of state support for grassroots activity. There seems to be a shift away from this towards spectacular, highly visible events [...] The whole project seems quite short-sighted. Putting the responsibility to support a diversity of cultural expression to one side, many of the changes that are taking place seem to undermine even the career path that Creative Scotland ostensibly wish to perpetuate and promote. [CM2: Yes] [...] I could imagine there being a funding situation where Transmission will have to join forces with other organisations increasingly to tender for larger budgets to deliver very specific programmes of work [...] I don't know what that means or how that will affect things exactly, but it definitely feels like a watering down to me.

CM2: Also, why would anyone do that at Transmission for free? We're not paid to be here, so that's a big thing as well. There's a huge precarity of all arts workers even if they have a job [...] spaces like this rely on a certain amount of autonomy to be able to function because they're not in it for the job in that sense. It's a huge amount of labour and you do it because you're able to engage on your own terms and on the terms of your community.

CM1: Yes, I absolutely agree with that point. It's really a thing to emphasise.

CM2: And again, there's no mention of that in the interview, not that you'd expect them to mention it, but if they're trying to talk about the 'cultural ecology' or the state of things outside of their sector, it has to be acknowledged. The art world, including the larger foundation funded organisations, rely on that on that

...how is there supposed to be a dialogue when people are afraid to speak about something because if they speak against it, their funding is potentially compromised?

kind of labour to function. And the art community in Glasgow relies on exactly that; a community of people who are here. If that starts to disintegrate then it's going have a huge impact.

LB: Do you think that those discussions are absent from the existing dialogue or is the extent to which the 'cultural ecology', as they would describe it, necessarily functions via precarious labour arrangements something that is silenced?

CM2: Again, it's difficult in this period of transition for people from organisations – and that's reflected in the discussions we've had around anonymity – how is there supposed to be a dialogue when people are afraid to speak about something because if they speak against it, their funding is potentially compromised? And equally, because the access to information is very limited and confusing, it's difficult to speak from a position with certainty, and to engage in a dialogue. So you're more willing to just say "let's see what happens". And then you miss the opportunity – if there is a chance at all, for people to organise against something that they perceive as wrong – because you don't even perceive that it's happening. It's a very blurred distinction in this case of whether dialogue is absent or if it is silenced.

LB: Is there anything else that either of you would like to add or that you'd specifically want me to take away from today's interview?

CM2: I remembered another title of one of the Creative Scotland communications: "Do You Need Fifteen Thousand Pounds?" [laughs] Really reminds me of [...] adverts in the back of really bad magazines.

Jan-Bert, Director of Artlink

Jan-Bert: I've been involved in looking at the transition from the Scottish Arts Council to Creative Scotland through the Cultural Alliance and I thought it'd be useful to reflect on what's happened and where we're at. It's also useful sometimes to understand why things happen and what impact it has. [...] Also, the politics of that change and what's influenced that; in a way the politics of being a funding agency and of being funded. So it's sometimes quite difficult to cut through all of that and clearly understand what that means for culture, because that's also a huge question. A massive question. And I don't know whether all of these subtle changes that we're experiencing are significant or not; whether in the greater scheme of things they have a massive influence. They have an influence in tone, potentially in intent. But I suppose my question to myself is: "how far does tone ultimately change anything?" I don't have an answer to that.

Lisa Bradley: Do you have a gut response?

JB: The gut response is that tone is setting the agenda. And there is a concern that if only tone sets the agenda, and if that tone is not well informed or informed fully, then tone, as in most walks of life, can become more important than it actually should be. [...] On the one hand I think that Creative Scotland has been set an impossible task: to have influence over our creative industries with no resources for that. So that will be one of tone in terms of being seen to be doing something about the creative industries which it has no clear influence over, and possibly nor should it have. And what its function is there to do – and the language has changed – but ultimately it's there to deliver public subsidies. And whether it's there to invest? Well yes, you can call it investment but it's still public subsidy. I think the nature of what that means and what that develops into is something that I watch with interest and trepidation. And I suppose partly I watch it with trepidation because in terms of my day job, I work in a field that is closely connected to social care and closely connected to contracting and commissioning work. And to be quite frank I've not seen any contracting or commissioning that I feel has provided a better service. Now you transport that into cultural activity and it changes the relationship between the commissioner and the commissioned, and partly also changes the nature of that relationship. [...] For me there's a concern that, again, it's all a wee bit back to front at the moment. Back to front in that a corporate plan wasn't produced after the major reviews of organisations with foundation funding had taken place. Now I know that might have been done on purpose, as the review of the organisation could have informed the corporate plan, but because they came out in such quick succession I don't think there's a relationship between the one and the two. [...] I think the strategic reviews that are about to be undertaken, and that have been on the agenda for a long period of time, are more significant.

LB: And in terms of the move from Flexible Funding to Commissioning, do you consider it to be just another example of a new name or is there another, deeper shift happening there?

JB: Who knows? I think that's one of the problems. Yeah, we could read into that a very significant shift and then go to what I've said about Commissioning and different ways of contracting. [...] Commissioning, contracting can be problematic. And from my experience, which is fairly significant, I don't think that contracting – or commissioning – is necessarily appropriate in all realms. But I don't necessarily think that Andrew would disagree with me; in his interview he didn't necessarily disagree with that, I don't think. [...] I think the other concern is that it concentrates responsibility in a very narrow construct at the moment, because Creative Scotland is not like the Scottish Arts Council or Scottish Screen, it doesn't necessarily have the same committee structures behind it at the moment.

LB: Do you feel there is sufficient transparency with the current structure of Creative Scotland to allow practitioners, and also the general public, to pose those questions of responsibility?

JB: Possibly not. But again, it's difficult to tell. The problem is that if you want to be fair and considered, is there enough transparency? Well yes, because funding guidelines are published; ultimately those who are funded will be published; the decision-making process is clear. I'm not sure if, at the moment, there is an opportunity to examine that decision-making process and I feel that is a concern. And I'm again not certain at the moment on how that decision-making process was

informed. And within my own field I sometimes have concerns about that. If one or two people are charged to make decisions about a very broad field of activity and interests, then it is well nigh impossible for those one or two people to have that spectrum of information and understanding to clearly inform their decisions. So, there is a danger that this exposes them to having to make decisions that they can't inform, not because they're not accountable but because it's impossible for them to have that broad spectrum of knowledge. [...] [M]y concern is that if you think about a portfolio manager and an officer, you're still talking about two people having to make decisions about a broad spectrum from within that performance silo, or that visual arts silo, or in that dance silo.

...what's consultation nowadays? It's a set of closed questions to which you can only provide a certain answer.

LB: To what extent do you think that art-from knowledge will inform decision-making, considering the language of investment and Creative Scotland's position within a 'single purpose government'?

JB: I don't know, I think the semantics around it interest me less. I get less excited about what they're calling 'investment'. I think the intent and the relationship between the government and the agency, and then how the agency is charged to fulfil its objective, interest me more. And my understanding and view at the moment is that Creative Scotland has been working pretty hard to

The interview with Andrew Dixon reinforces a concern that there has been a fundamental shift in the role of what was our national arts funding body. It is this – that the 'arms length principle', which was developed in the post war period to guard against central government interference in art and culture, has shifted and that we are now faced with a situation in which that principle has to be invoked between Creative Scotland and art and culture. If this is not a fundamental and dangerous change then we do not know what is. Creative Scotland is now doing the bidding of the Scottish government and, as such, uses the language of management, business and neo-liberalism to do so. At the very least Andrew Dixon concedes that the language used does pose problems for artists and apologises for this. Getting one's head round flexible funding, strategic commissioning, recruiting agencies, targets, artistic programmes and services, core remits, mobile organisations, infrastructure base (one could, it seems, endlessly continue with more of these terms) is far removed from the artist in the studio trying to make her/ his way in the world.

However, it is a forlorn hope that we can rid ourselves of this mangled language. Bearing this in mind we would want to make a very specific point and ask for a clarification. There is still a lack of communication and therefore understanding at 'the coal face' as to what and how the changes Creative Scotland intend to bring about will be implemented. We refer particularly to the stopping of Flexible Funding in favour of Strategic Commissioning. What does Strategic Commissioning actually mean, how will it be defined and what will the process be for 'agencies' to deliver programmes? It seems that Creative Scotland sees Foundation Organisations as 'institutions' with physical requirements and needs while current Flexible Funded Organisations are viewed solely as 'agencies' which suggests light touch, flexible, mobile organisations who can deliver with little overheads.

The reality is that most Flexible Funded Organisations are very 'bricks and mortar' based – with a need for physical premises to deliver artistic programmes and services. If they are to tender for Strategic Commissioning 'franchises' to deliver Creative Scotland targets, how will they be able to pitch for funding to maintain the infrastructure base necessary to be in a position to provide support for artists and audiences? There is a real danger of undermining the roots of these organisations as they 'chase' project funding that may lead them away from core remits and the services that they currently provide for local, national or international communities and audiences. Creative Scotland needs to offer a clear definition and path for the establishment of Strategic Commissioning.

AHM

Sam Ainsley David Harding Alexander Moffat

sustain enough investment in arts, culture and creative industries as it possibly can. I think it's done a pretty good job of that. For that you have to clearly articulate how you meet government's objectives and also how you meet objectives enshrined by law about what you are there to do. [...] [A]t the same time, it gives us all something that we can attach our activities to. And if we're all clever with words – because that's ultimately what we're talking about – then you can call anything, whatever. And actually, in the greater scheme of things it doesn't make a huge amount of difference. To a certain extent I think Creative Scotland's got a job to do: to make sure that the government is satisfied; and carrying out what it's charged with, when. I also think that in terms of the new economics which we all face, it's inevitable that, looking at how creativity informs possibilities, creativity becomes incredibly important.

LB: Do you have any thoughts or experience of how the role of consultation differs in Creative Scotland from the Scottish Arts Council?

JB: [...] [T]here were a lot of organisations that were upset about the lack of involvement in the move towards Creative Scotland. And as that move came off the rails there was a real push towards greater consultation, greater involvement. That seems to have waned; perhaps naturally because people need to find their feet. [...] But consultation, what's consultation nowadays? It's a set of closed questions to which you can only provide a certain answer. Call me cynical but I suppose it's like: what is research? And I think that is clear. Empirical research within culture: I don't necessarily think it exists.

LB: Not focusing on the content of the language, but the shift in language [...] do you feel the change has emerged from a need to communicate to the broader policy context or is it indicative of more conscious effort to change the nature of cultural provision?

JB: I think it's a good question actually, to which I have no clear answer because I think it's too early to tell. I think it's very easy for the cultural sector to start chasing windmills and to start fighting because we feel that the language isn't appropriate to our experience or we feel the language doesn't sit well with us. I think there are dangers in shifting language because you might lose as many opportunities as you might gain. You might lose opportunities because it frightens people or it concerns them. And perhaps that's being utilised on purpose, who knows? That unsettling change period is difficult for those who are used to have having a particular type of relationship with an old funding body and who are now having to establish a new relationship. I also think you have to be very careful in how you use language and what its intention is. In terms of saying they're Commissioning – a type of language – there is concern that using the language whilst being quite clear that you don't know what that means in detail yourselves, is unsettling. Because that basically means it could be

anything. And then my question would be, “why use that language if you're not clear yourself what you actually mean by it?” Because that means that there's an uncertainty which is then spread throughout the cultural infrastructure. And in a way, why do that? But to a certain extent, when you have been around for a while, you kind of go “right, new language”. But it's also about, on the other side, knowing what you're doing and why you're doing it, and how well, or how comfortable you feel, about doing the right thing – the thing that meets your principles, expectations, needs – and then actually relating that to whatever system is out there. It's the same as it was before. And I suppose, partly, I'm incredibly cynical because I've been writing funding applications for the last twenty years, and you change your language according to what your funder wants to hear. [...] I think the problem comes when particular

Why use that language if you're not clear yourself what you actually mean by it? Because that means that there's an uncertainty which is then spread throughout the cultural infrastructure.

barriers are put in place, and partly the commissioning, contracting implication. When you look at that in local authorities it becomes procurement.

LB: Those issues around the non-articulation in Creative Scotland's language; are those questions that you're posing to yourself, or are you discussing them with colleagues?

JB: It's something that we're discussing with colleagues within the Cultural Alliance framework.

LB: Have you sought clarification beyond your discussions within the Cultural Alliance?

JB: Yeah, well, we're starting to. Again, we have to set out these concerns as a way of, I suppose, testing, measuring what the truth is in terms of what the language actually sets up. Again, you have to give people the opportunity to articulate that first. So there's a meeting at the beginning of November to hear more about what's already been around for a few months yet. And I think that's unfortunate, that these terms are around for a while and then they get articulated. And I think that's putting it mildly. [...] What's important within the Cultural Alliance context is the view that that needs to be done constructively and positively. And I think that's right to constructively continue to engage, until such

time when you think: “that's not right and we need to change it”. But I don't think we're at that point by any means at all. And I also think that because the Cultural Alliance is a loose network, that would be more difficult to achieve anyway. It's much better to use it as a network of communication and to make sure that everyone's on the same page. Beyond that it has no real teeth or specific function.

LB: Than rather than me asking you to comment on this unknown trajectory, what do you feel are the important questions to be posed to Creative Scotland in order to reach those concerns over responsibility, clarity and transparency?

JB: Well, you've already answered your question to an extent, it's how is your policy informed, how your decisions are informed. What informs your policy and how far does that look, or not, towards the government? And national outcomes are now everywhere. And how far do you view what is important within the cultural spectrum? There's a mass of questions around that. And also, how can an organisation that's two thirds the size of the two organisations that proceeded it actually be responsible for a much broader spectrum of culture? And how far is that clearly defined and informed? [...] And I think again, if they're informed: brilliant. The problem is, if we don't understand what they mean. And to a certain extent what they're saying to us, we're still figuring it out. That indicates to me there's a need for a dialogue, because if you're figuring it out, you need to talk to people to help you figure it out, and those people are obviously the cultural sector as well as other types of investors, other types of contributors. It's always political.

LB: Perhaps this is an impossible question, but do you know within yourself at what point it will no longer be time to wait and see?

JB: Well I really do think the strategic reviews will be the proof in some of the pudding. I think that that is where Creative Scotland, for the first time, will seriously look at particular art-forms and will seriously articulate its view and response as to what it feels needs to happen. And I assume at that point it will have done two things: one, it will have informed that view fully; and two, it will then take it out to the constituency to get its response. And I think if that's done openly and honestly, and without consultation fatigue or consultation trickery, then that's fine. But I wouldn't expect anything less of it at the moment, I wouldn't expect anything less of Creative Scotland. I wouldn't expect anything less of Andrew. I don't see, at the moment, that Creative Scotland would be setting out to do anything else but.

Where Our Margins Are Being Marginalised

“Culture [...] ‘is what gives us a sense of identity both as individuals and as a nation’. Culture is not simply about ‘image and history’ but about presenting ‘a hard commercial edge’ – Culture, [Chris Smith] affirms ‘lies at the very heart of [the] mission’ of the new government.”¹

“[Creative Scotland] are very committed to not just being a funding body. We are a funding body, or investment agency as we call it, but we are much more of a promotional body and much more of an advocate for the cultural sector [...] The third difference [between Creative Scotland (CS) and that which it removed, The Scottish Arts Council (SAC)] is really the kind of creative industries and the economic side. You know, we still will invest in straight cultural, individual artist's projects on artists' terms. [...] But we've got a remit [...] to support the creative industries and to co-ordinate that and to encourage the likes of Learning and Skills Agencies, Enterprise Agencies, to put their money behind creative industries, whether that'd be the games industry, design, fashion, potentially festivals and to piece together the economic story about the cultural sector.”²

Variant's interview with Andrew Dixon gives witness to the perfect fog of optimistic cant around concrete questions of how Creative Scotland's supersession of axed public funding institutions will impact on practitioners. As an artist who relied on the SAC to fund films that otherwise would not have been materially possible, the situation does not leave me with a great deal of hope for the future.

The threat to public funding for contemporary art comes from the eradication of practice-based art form disciplines via an homogenised regional development discourse. It marks a return to a utilitarian criterion of cultural worth, consigning

modernist and avant garde experiments to a slightly embarrassing adolescence that our recumbent, sensible and mature bodies must place safely behind us.

Perhaps art will keep on making money for the few, but the critical functions of art and its avant gardeist potential for effecting new forms of life – of questioning, in particular, how we constitute the self, the other, society – are in danger of unravelling into the most banal exercises in superficial individuation.

The struggle for a system of arts funding that genuinely supports a “diversity of cultural expression (which includes diversity of political expression) as a democratic right”³ is intrinsic to arresting a totalising neo-liberal agenda that has insidiously governed ‘common sense’ since its Thatcherite inception in the UK.

In New York, such neo-liberal ‘free-market’ ideology fast became the new ‘normal’ – art is dominated by the reductive Darwinism of a crony-capitalist market place. At best, a minority of commercially successful artists and enlightened philanthropists manage to sustain a handful of difficult and thoughtful practices. Value is created by a network of anointed taste makers, curators and critics whose own livelihood is often contingent on a system of corporate sponsorship or on moonlighting for private collectors. The money made by a minority of cultural producers infiltrates artistic communities, sometimes divisively.

Scotland is not New York – historically, geographically, socio-economically; they are not interchangeable. But, as public funding is reassigned in Scotland, the important distinctions within modernism between what we could identify today as artist-run spaces and self-organised publications on the one hand, and the museum and the

commercial gallery on the other, are slowly evaporating.

Are artists finally wising up to the pervasive mystification of their role within late capitalist society? To our apparent function of ‘added value’ by merely moving into a neighbourhood, sparking a process of gentrification? Can we reject these fictional bohemian identities ascribed to us by the media, curators and dealers? Can we now refuse to be forced into still further competition with one another, to allow every aspect of our life to be placed under scrutiny and exploited in the form of cultural capital in the service of a chimerical creative economy? Can Creative Scotland act as a mediating force in this refusal, allowing us to retain autonomy and nurturing our diversity of opinion and expression?

If not, and we ignore our radical independent past and swallow the market model of culture wholesale, then I fear we are doomed to a collective impotence. If we allow it, in Creative Scotland I envisage a future where corporate populism has become the final arbiter of value.

As practitioners we are left bewildered.

Luke Fowler

Notes

- 1 Speech by Chris Smith, Secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport, New Labour (1997) cited in T. Bewes and J. Gilbert, *Cultural Capitalism*, Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 7-8
- 2 Andrew Dixon, Chief Executive of Creative Scotland, interviewed by Daniel Jewesbury, *Variant*, issue 41, Spring 2011
- 3 ‘From Funding To Franchise (Workshop) - What does the end of Flexible Funding mean for artist-run spaces in Scotland?’ 25th June 2011, Transmission Gallery <http://www.variant.org.uk/events/FtF/FtF.html>