

“We’re on the Highway to Hell”

The least charismatic person in Scotland, Jimmy Boyle is now the chairman of the Scottish Arts Council. He is not to be mistaken for Jimmy Boyle, the author of “A Sense of Freedom”. That Jimmy Boyle is a reformed character with a genuine interest in art, and this Jimmy Boyle still seems to enjoy stabbing people in the back.

Just as Jimmy ‘joined’ the SAC he was also appointed to the Civil Service Commissioners (CSC), who decide on top level appointments to the Home Civil Service and the Diplomatic Service. One good turn deserves another in the land of the terminally bland. Jimmy’s SAC appointment was overseen by the Office of the Commissioner of Public Appointments, run by Dame Rennie Fritchie, who also sits on the CSC, because it is much the same thing.

Although appointments are made by Ministers the task of these bodies is to pretend that appointments are based on merit—who knows? One day they may succeed and the class system will come tumbling down. Until then these committees will be full of the kind of inept people who cling to politicians’ coat tails for their legitimacy.

Along with Jimmy the CSC also brought in Dr Maggie Semple, OBE, former Director of Learning of the New Millennium Experience Company. Her knowledge of financial rectitude and public accountability running the Millennium Dome is a match for Jimmy’s talentless approach to SAC.

If Jimmy is responsible for the appeals process when people in public office are mysteriously dismissed: this must give him a wee bit of inside knowledge eh? Strangely in these days of bureaucratic transparency, no one knows what happened recently at a secret SAC meeting when Tessa Jackson, the SAC director was dismissed. No one can say why she and the SAC are wasting money on lawyers when a perfectly impartial appeals procedure exists. You don’t get to be a part of it yourself, but it does exist.

The complete ignorance of the local press about what is going on is also unexplainable, given that Jimmy has put a couple of old journalist mates who happen to run the PR company “Hatch” on the pay-roll (‘Rent Money’ as we can it up here in Scotland). Surely they are keeping the local press straight on matters. It all must be fair because we haven’t heard Tessa Jackson complaining about it?

Jimmy is also on the board of *Wark Clements* (Kirsty Wark’s production company) which tends to focus on (rather than monopolise) arts programme making in Scotland. Now that Jimmy completely controls things, successful models like this will probably gain more SAC funding than they would have when Jimmy used to be the Editorial Controller of BBC Scotland.

No wonder there are so few jobs in the arts up here. There are no artists involved in decision-making committees any more either. Bureaucrats do it all. They even determine what the art should be to make everything even simpler.

So the signals are that in future you would be advised to bring your own art should you decide to visit such a creatively closed country with any expectations. No one (in power) wants to ‘speak out’, so watch what you say.

Jimmy has realised that because 90% of SAC funds are pre-allocated: you don’t actually need anyone in the SAC with ideas, certainly not ideas about art and certainly not with any connection to Scotland. If there is no direction why bother with a Director?

Can’t see Tessa Jackson joining in somehow, but if anyone is unhappy about the SAC they can contact the large multi-national PR consultants, Deloitte Touche because the SAC are paying them a lot of money to let them use *their* web site as part of the biggest consultation process since the last one. Obviously no one would take it seriously if it appeared on the SAC’s web site on the cheap.

Conversely because of the critical writing we



publish in Variant, the SAC have refused to fund us for reasons Nicholas Spice (the independent internal assessor hired by the SAC) called “definitely political.”

So we would advise anyone presently in receipt of funding to say that everything is fine.

That will be the message anyway when Jimmy prints out ten tons of much more legitimate literature to make it seem so. So stand back and watch that bureaucrat go!

Artists will be better off in the future: Jimmy has a Magic Plan, to turn the SAC into a “Development Agency” and then a “Hall of Fame”. Why it almost rhymes.

You don’t hear dead artists crying out for help. But it should be stressed that although appointed by them and supervising their appointments, paying journalists, meeting with them and all the rest, that Jimmy is in no way connected to the government. Half of whom have gone in Scotland anyway.

No: the SAC operate a strict “arm’s length policy”. You’ve got to when something smells that bad. When Jimmy’s Development Agency is up and running artists will not have to waste their time filling in stupid forms, chasing after a piece of that 10%. No that won’t be around any more. Not that these forms are completely useless: sometimes “you’ve got to scrape the shit right off your shoes.”

Occasional Documents: Towards Situation

Howard Slater

What follows is the introduction to Howard Slater’s “Occasional Documents: Towards Situation”. The complete article is posted on the Variant on-line forum — details below.

In a culture still driven by commodity exchange and representation (driven by the submergence of social relationships in the object) the means of expression, as the vital component of creative activity, is often overlooked. Yet, if there is to be a popular participation in culture, a sustained participation that, as a revolutionising presupposition, can actively work towards 'a dual power in culture', or a 'crisis of proliferation', then this can only be feasible if more and more people come to be 'expressed'. 'Expression' here means an undisciplined creativity that, above all else, above the consumption of relationships, seeks to deal in the production of subjectivity—an autonomous creativity that circulates desires as the expression of singularities and differences, and not a commodifiable creativity whose expressions are overcoded as individualistic, subject to 'qualitative aesthetic judgements' and easily professionalised.

In order for there to be a renewed outgrowth of expression, an outgrowth already made possible by technological advancements, there has to be a shift in social perception wherefrom our relation to the means of expression is not seen as a 'stage' we have reached and surpassed, but an ongoing rhythm that informs our creativity and makes of being a becoming. Expression, then, has to become conscious of itself as a social practice which, being formed by social relations, can effect those social relations, create new social relations.

Already it can be said that over the past decade the means of production in the cultural sphere have been in staurating a change in social relations which are as yet inchoate. The 'leap forward' of these productive forces is leaving a 'lag' into which the increasingly outmoded social relations of creative production are attempting to infill with more of the same. Artistic activity, be it that of fine artist or musician or writer, is coming to be represented as an economical link to an outmoded manufacturing industry (creation of objects, valorisation of information), as a means of orientation for society in terms of future models of wage labour (micro-entrepreneurial, affective labour), as a means of maintaining the circulation of capital (the uninterrupted metamorphoses of value and the creation of new markets c.f. Benjamin's "exhibition value") and as a means of ensuring that social relationships are made valorisable and thus integratable (historification of cultural practices). It is from such contradictions, the antagonisms they offer, that new social relations could spring; ones that seek to reappropriate their own 'living labour' through a winning of the means of expression...

Extract from Break/Flow

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<http://www.topica.com/lists/variantforum>

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