

# Don't care in the community

A metaphor: At a ceremony concocted by the Scottish Media Group (a local monopoly) and a Swiss Bank, Scotland's first "politician of the year" was announced together with further endless awards for all the new politicians. The same day a conference was held by a new organisation set up in March, the Scottish Civic Forum "in the wake of it being awarded £300,000 by the Scottish Executive." The Forum will "encourage participation in the work of the Scottish Executive." Its funding has been secured for three years. Its convener (a known hustler) said "this is a step forward for making a difference to Scottish Government." Although they do not know what they will do they've got the money to do it. Organisations which question the Scottish Executive—and indeed their relationship with Swiss banks and the media—receive no awards.

State support, in its broadest sense, continues to be systematically politically allocated. This is disguised in political language which mimicks that of self-empowerment groups. The emphasis on individual 'self-help' puts the accent on the guilt of individual failure and serves to relinquish the State of any culpability. As one of our writers notes: mental handicap is now termed "learning disabilities", largely because of the expediency of care in the community. Within bureaucratic culture the shutters come down on any reality—any potential heresay—which deviates from the culture imposed from above.

Public sector funding is administered by people who have conditioned themselves to think that culture is a game: they watch themselves lose their soul as petty bureaucrats obstruct and fabricate conditions. In the arts inventing priorities has become inventing basic exclusions. This year's qualifications are next year's disqualifications. There is no leadership from these organisations, there is no direction.

## Tough on Art — Tough on the Causes of Art

The political fixation with the designated look, or designed reception of policy is discredited. The UK government is set to sustain its concern with 'correctional facilities' through its various obliging 'arms length' arts bureaucracies. Here this self-help goes as far as doing-in what actually exists on the ground and replacing it with a speculative clientele bidding. The effect on artists and their practices as directed through the mechanisms of the public funding system, and more importantly the communities and groups that are set to be targeted, has become an attack on freedom of expression. There are too many voices around and some of them are saying the wrong things for those who seek to imprison the mind.

The zombification will come in handy. We are being prepared—well bound and gagged—for the type of art which will inhabit the galleries of the future. Most big cities are having their big art spaces done up with Lottery money and if they are compliant enough... as one reader writes:

"The Dome should be seen a forebear of what we have to look forward to: nothing less than the monumental re-embodiment of the State, a theme park to Civic pomposity. It is time for artists, individually and through their organisations to get together and attack the cowardice

of the Arts Councils. Or you can apply for some money. That's really what they are trying to make people think, that there is no sense that you can influence policy, simply subserviently trail their money."

The government have their attempts to control culture: their efforts are pathetic and deplorable. The meaning of life is not contained within a government edict or a grant. Why should we tolerate facile categorical imperatives imposed on freedom of expression, they are humiliating and degrading—the end product of years of materialistic priorities with entirely predictable inhuman outcomes. You can get a glimpse of another time (before all those years of wallowing in the mire of sheer ideological manipulation of the arts) by looking at what Roy Jenkins wrote in the early '60s:

"First there is the need for the State to do less to restrict personal freedom. Secondly there is the need for the State to do more to encourage the arts, to create towns which are worth living in, and to preserve a countryside which is worth looking at. Thirdly there is the need independently of the State to create a climate of opinion which is favourable to gaiety, tolerance, and beauty, and unfavourable to puritanical restriction, to petty-minded disapproval, to hypocrisy and to a dreary, ugly pattern of life. A determined drive in these three directions would do as much to promote human happiness than all the 'political' legislation which any government is likely to introduce... In the long run these things will be more important than even the most perfect of economic policies." *The Labour Case* (London, Penguin 1959)

Written some forty years ago (expressing basic liberal attitudes) this stands as an indictment on the present state of affairs. What progress has been made when people had greater freedom in the past? The Welfare State was set up when Britain was at its poorest, and owed millions, after a war which almost destroyed the country. What existed then was the political will. Today affluence is everywhere yet we are told we have less money. The result of all this is a worse quality of life; the demise of the public sphere altogether. Politics becomes deals done in a back room.

It is one thing to blame the ongoing crimes of bureaucracy on one or two stupid individuals who make up the rules as they go along; it is another to go along with it.

That which is termed responsible: official 'Culture', and exposure to it has been routinely represented as having a positive, corrective influence. Unfortunately today there is still scant questioning, let alone discussion, of what and who compete to constitute 'acceptable' culture, and what exactly are its ideological values.

There is going to be a history of this period and someone is going to write it. Who writes history has always been the privilege of the victor but there can never be only one voice. For if there is only one voice what need have we of truth.

## An example of how the arts are covered in Scotland

Pathetic non-stories, inflammatory gibberish and a lascivious pouring over of weird fantasies are the hall-mark of most tabloid press attempts to cover the arts.

The Scottish Media Group decided in its *Glasgow Evening Times* to allege on its front cover that Lynn Ramsay's film *Ratcatcher* was an "under-age sex movie". *Ratcatcher* (a work drawing on many Scottish, UK and European film traditions) opened the Edinburgh Film Festival. Instead of offering appreciation and encouragement to view the work Scottish Media Group contrived a mindlessly salacious headline implicating Lord Provost (Scotland's equivalent of a Mayor), Pat Lally, his image appears on a TV set in the film.

Thus the headline "Pat in under age sex movie" was part of an "exclusive" story dubiously written by Andy Dougan. Above the headline is a picture of a "Bonnie Babies" winner and below it is an advert for the "Ultimate Kids Play Area". News vendors were giving away a free bar of chocolate with the paper. Underneath the story on page four is one headlined "Boy's club sex fiend drops appeal". It is a fairly standard example of how sick and pathetic coverage of the arts has been in Scotland for as long as anyone can remember. It is also an example of the Scottish Media Group's cultivation of an obsession with child pornography.

The sub headings within the story are "Lally's movie shocker" and "indecent". The story was a bizarre contrivance made up to coincide with the film's premiere which opened the Edinburgh Film Festival a few days later. It is hard to imagine why Dougan provides such statements as: "The most explicit is one in which she frolics in a bath with a 12-year old ..." One paragraph (in bold italics) is little more than a parade of words such as full-frontal, young girl, topless. The only point of the article apart from Dougan's own distorted self-indulgence is to try to create/ test the waters for some kind of 'public outcry'.

There is a spurious quote from a spokesman (sic) for the British Board of Film Classification who says: "We cannot comment on a film before we have seen it. But we would always look very closely at any film which involves children in *such* scenes." [emphasis added] You can almost picture Dougan thinking "that'll do."

A is for Art

B is for Bureaucracy

C is for Cuts

The first in a series of essays designed to reach a younger audience purely to comply with funding criteria.