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The Culture of Capital

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt

This article aims to reconcile the critical potential of culture with the privatisation of the cultural field and, in the process, to question the autonomous claims of art. Centred on Glasgow, it draws on the methods of investigative social research to reprise the creation of Culture and Sport Glasgow, a private company with charitable status, which assumed responsibility for all cultural and leisure provision in the city in April 2007. Written in the wake of action taken by Culture and Sport Glasgow to prevent published research into its personnel from being distributed, this account explores the role of art in challenging the neoliberal consensus in the face of attempts to block such challenges at the point of research, development and display. Based on interviews with artists practising in Glasgow, this research examines the implications for radical art of Culture and Sport Glasgow controlling the major commissioning mechanism and one of the main funding lifelines for artists in the city. In the process, it demonstrates the repressive intolerance of neoliberal attitudes towards culture.

Keywords: Culture; Sponsorship; Market; Capitalism; Dissent; Glasgow

Culture was afforded special consideration in Marcuse's 1967 treatise on repressive tolerance. Cognisant of the ways in which the 'radical impact of art, the protest of art against the established reality is swallowed up'—through neutralisation in official venues and the machinations of the art market—Marcuse was nevertheless moved to state that 'censorship of art and literature is regressive under all circumstances'.¹ After a brief consideration of how the logic of capital has invaded the cultural field, I will attempt to provide a glimpse into the radical impact that cultural forms continue to have, specifically in the field of visual art, and to discuss how this potential threat to capitalism is neutralised and suppressed.

When we talk about culture, it is important to realise that we are not speaking about an autonomous field, somehow insulated from the economic considerations

A version of this paper was presented at the *Critique* conference entitled 'Capitalism and Repressive Tolerance' which took place at London School of Economics on 27 March 2009.

¹ Herbert Marcuse, 'Repressive Tolerance' (1965) in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore and Herbert Marcuse (eds), *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 95–137.

that determine other aspects of our lives. Towards the end of his life, Pierre Bourdieu observed that ‘what is currently happening to the universes of artistic production throughout the developed world is entirely novel and truly without precedent: the hard won independence of cultural production and circulation is being threatened, in its very principle, by the intrusion of commercial logic at every stage.’² For one thing, there is a thriving private market for art, which has been boosted by arts councils, particularly in England and Scotland, commissioning ideologically-driven research aimed at exponentially increasing the number of private collectors in the UK in order to justify the provision of interest-free loans to budding collectors and exempt government from funding the arts. As the economy for art moved away from the whims of individual patrons and the church and towards the market system in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, this was initially presumed to confer more critical freedom on creative practice. But, the liberty that the private market was expected to provide has not materialised and neither has its democratising potential. Rather, what we have witnessed in recent decades is what Peter Bürger calls ‘the total subordination of work contents to profit motives, and a fading of the critical potencies of works in favour of a training in consumer attitudes.’³

Aside from the strategic deployment of supposedly arm’s-length public funding to bolster the private market, the cultural field has also been the subject of direct neoliberal state intervention through various policies aimed at concealing cuts in public spending in other sectors. Viewed in this light, former Culture Minister, Tessa Jowell’s 2004 aim to combat ‘poverty of aspiration’ was a thinly veiled attempt to avoid tackling systemic poverty by harnessing culture in social inclusion and job creation,⁴ while the ‘creative industries’ discourse, currently pervading what was previously thought of as public sector funding for the arts, conceives of culture as a major driver of the economy, with artists as its entrepreneurs, which is likely to see the introduction of loans (as opposed to grants) for artists as a way of outsourcing risk.⁵

² Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Culture is in Danger’ in Pierre Bourdieu, *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 67.

³ Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 30.

⁴ Tessa Jowell, *Government and the Value of Culture* (London: Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2004), www.dcms.gov.uk/images/publications/valueofculture.pdf. See the response deriding Jowell’s lack of acknowledgement of art’s critical potential in David Edgar, ‘Where’s the Challenge?’ *The Guardian*, 22 May 2004.

⁵ In 2000, three years after the Blair government set up a Creative Industries Task Force, the Scottish Executive defined this as follows:

The creative industries are the activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. They comprise Architecture, Advertising, Arts and Cultural Industries, Design (including Fashion, Design and Crafts) Film, Interactive Leisure Software (computer games, consumer packaged software), Music, New Media, Publishing, Radio and Television.

See Rhona Brankin, *Creating our Future—Minding our Past: Scotland’s National Cultural Strategy* (Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2000), p. 14.

At the same time, the past four decades have witnessed the intervention of business into the arts. In the early 1970s, German artist, Hans Haacke, conducted some prescient research into the corporate and political affiliations of Guggenheim Museum and Museum of Modern Art trustees, who were shown to regard art in terms of its social usefulness and the opportunities it provided for business. So, on one of the aluminium plaques made by the artist, we have David Rockefeller quoted as saying:

From an economic standpoint, such involvement in the arts can mean direct and intangible benefits. It can provide a company with extensive publicity and advertising, a brighter reputation and an improved corporate image. It can build better customer relations, a readier acceptance of corporate products, and a superior appraisal of their quality. Promotion of the arts can improve the morale of employees and help attract qualified personnel.⁶

During the 1980s, the corporate approach to sponsoring the arts moved from the passive provision of solicited donations to the proactive deployment of funds as part of a dedicated public relations strategy. This led to a two-pronged approach which simultaneously made a connection between the brand and exhibition—exemplified by the distribution of a drinks manufacturer's product at a private view—and attempted to improve the corporate image, which has proven useful for companies whose brands (such as oil, tobacco, alcohol or armaments) may be in need of burnishing in the public eye. With corporate executives and their invited guests being offered exclusive access to museum events, sponsorship activities were also found to provide a backdrop to political lobbying.⁷

In the 1990s, Anthony Davies and Simon Ford documented the process by which 'many companies were beginning to move away from sponsorship towards an integrated partnership or alliance strategy. This marked a further shift from the "something for nothing" arm's-length philanthropic model to a "something for something" contract in which marketing departments perceived cultural (and often environmental) programming as an integral part of ethical marketing strategies.'⁸ In the burgeoning knowledge economy, the art world provided instant access to advertising-sceptical opinion-formers, while an association with contemporary art was shown to form part of the 'intangible assets' of a company or individual, paving the way for other corporate forays into the public sector. Whatever the motives, one consequence for museums of their reliance on corporate finance has been an increase in blockbuster exhibitions which provide maximum exposure for the sponsor's brand. And, as Julian Stallabrass has noted, 'corporate sponsorship of exhibitions tends to militate against critical or radical content.'⁹

⁶ Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed: 7 Works 1970–75* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

⁷ Chin-tao Wu, 'Embracing the Enterprise Culture: Art Institutions Since the 1980s', *New Left Review*, 230 (1998), pp. 28–57.

⁸ Anthony Davies and Simon Ford, 'Art Futures', *Art Monthly*, 223 (1999), p. 9.

⁹ Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 145.

So what do we mean when we talk about radical practice and what kind of threat can it pose to capitalism? In the parallel development of capitalism and aesthetics, Terry Eagleton has posited that the imposition of aesthetic theory onto a previously unregulated sensory realm may be regarded as part of an attempt to engender social cohesion via the self-policing of autonomous individuals.¹⁰ However, invoking forces like the aesthetic to render a population safe involves an element of risk, and, as the sociologist, Howard S. Becker observes, ‘the state always has an interest in the propensity of its citizens to mobilize or be mobilized for collective action. Political leaders usually believe that the symbolic representations embodied in both high art and popular art affect whether citizens can be mobilized and for what ends. [...] Some art makes people discontented, destroys their moral fiber, and makes them unfit to play the roles and do the work the state wants done.’¹¹

More recently, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have implicated culture in the process by which the spirit of capitalism is justified and maintained. They emphasise the primacy of both social and artistic critique, the latter of which ‘presents a world in which the requirement of justice is incessantly contravened [and] unmasks the hypocrisy of moral pretensions that conceal the reality of relations of force, exploitation and domination.’¹² Given that ‘safeguarding the accumulation process [...] is ultimately threatened by any narrowing of its justification’,¹³ Boltanski and Chiapello argue, the cultural field becomes a key nexus at which such legitimation may be upheld or withheld. Indeed, visual stimuli—so vital to the survival of many species—have been co-opted by capitalism, with images and signs being hijacked by television and advertising to form an integral part of the ‘consciousness industry’.¹⁴ However, artist Hans Haacke attests that ‘works of art, like other products of the consciousness industry, are potentially capable of shaping their consumer’s view of the world and of themselves and may lead them to act upon that understanding’,¹⁵ while Eagleton maintains that ‘a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which political hegemony is maintained is a necessary prerequisite of effective political action, and this is one insight which I believe an enquiry into the aesthetic can yield’.¹⁶

There are two main sites at which this artistic threat to capitalism can be disarmed—firstly, at the point of research, development and production, hampering it from coming into being in the first place and, secondly, at the point of display—by preventing artistic critique from having any official outlet or by neutralising its critique. This second phenomenon is the most obvious form of cultural censorship and, looking across the Atlantic for precedents, we find that, in 1971, Haacke had a

¹⁰ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

¹¹ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 166.

¹² Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴ See H.M. Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

¹⁵ Hans Haacke, ‘All the “Art” That’s Fit to Show’ in Walter Grasskamp, Molly Nesbit and Jon Bird (eds), *Hans Haacke* (London: Phaidon, 2004 [1974]), p. 106.

¹⁶ Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

major exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum cancelled in a shower of controversy. His proposed work, called *Manhattan Real Estate Holdings*, delved into the murky world of Lower East Side sweatshops and documented the shadowy subsidiaries owned by Manhattan's largest landowners at the time. Since then, the presence of corporate personnel on the boards of museums, and their contributions to museum coffers, has led over-zealous museum functionaries to censor exhibitions for fear of reprisals. Fast-forwarding 35 years, this led Chris Gilbert to resign from his post as Curator at the Berkeley Art Museum in 2006 under pressure from the museum's marketing department 'to replace the phrase "in solidarity" with revolutionary Venezuela with a phrase like "concerning" revolutionary Venezuela—or another phrase describing a relation that would not be explicitly one of solidarity' in the information panels relating to a series of exhibitions.¹⁷

Alongside these forms of direct censorship, the institution of art also serves to neutralise critique. This practice dates back to the aftermath of the French Revolution when a wing of the Louvre Palace was turned into a national museum to disarm the significance of the royalist paintings, sculptures and fleur-de-lis that continued to litter France.¹⁸ In recent years, self-reflexive institutions have embraced a form of 'constructive institutional critique',¹⁹ in a bid to compensate for their inadequacies, and acceptable forms of critical contemporary practice have been championed from within the bourgeois institution of art. An obvious example is Mark Wallinger's reconstruction of Brian Haw's Parliament Square protest within Tate Britain in 2007, which served to bring a veneer of dissent into the most powerful art institution in the country, ingratiating itself with a certain sector of its public while focussing attention more on the placement of Tate Britain within the Government's exclusion zone than critiquing the atrocities being committed in Iraq that Haw's protest aimed to highlight.

In much the same way, Peter Kennard last year sold some of his older (and hence less politically urgent) work to the Tate and discovered, to his distress, that it had been included in part of the collection re-hang sponsored by BP. This is particularly problematic for an artist who has been explicit in his critique of the imperialist ambitions underlying the quest for oil and who has taken part in the Art Not Oil project with its anti-BP message.²⁰ This demonstrates what can happen when critically engaged artwork enters the museum—its political potency tends to be disarmed, leaving the host institution relatively unchanged—which well illustrates Marcuse's assertion that 'what is proclaimed and practiced as tolerance today, is in many of its most effective manifestations serving the cause of oppression'.²¹

¹⁷ See Chris Gilbert, 'Statement on Resigning' at www.ressler.at

¹⁸ Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 180–182.

¹⁹ M. Lind, 'Learning from Art and Artists' in Gavin Wade (ed) *Curating in the 21st Century* (Walshall and Wolverhampton: New Art Gallery and Wolverhampton University, 2000), pp. 87–102.

²⁰ See www.artnotoil.org.uk

²¹ Marcuse, op. cit., p. 95.

Having considered ways in which the radical aims of artistic practice can be halted or disarmed at the point of display, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss an even more worrying trend in which the censorship of cultural critique has implications for the research, development and production of future radical practice. On 1 April 2007, the Cultural and Leisure Services department of Glasgow City Council became Culture and Sport Glasgow (CSG), a private company with charitable status and a separate trading arm. This strongly contested departure from the Labour council was spearheaded by Bridget McConnell, the wife of then First Minister of Scotland (whose Labour party would be deposed from control of the Scottish Government exactly one month later). And, although it appeared to pass through all the correct layers of council bureaucracy, being finally approved on 2 February, the company had already been registered at Companies House the previous December, at the same time as it applied for charitable status, which suggests minimal doubt that this controversial move would be pushed through.

The hasty creation of a company to manage culture and leisure in Glasgow—including the city's libraries, museums and galleries (thereby affecting, directly or indirectly, most of the major cultural venues in the city and a large proportion of public sector and cultural workers)—prompted research into the overlapping networks of its key personnel. This quickly revealed the boards of both companies to be dominated by business interests, including all the major Scottish banks and some of the more nefarious think tanks—Demos, the Social Market Foundation and the Futures Forum. As we have seen, the presence of businesspeople on the board of a cultural organisation is no longer shocking to those familiar with the neoliberalisation of culture; what is more unusual about CSG is the presence on its board of six elected councillors.

While giving the company a veneer of public accountability, their interests prove the most telling when considering its likely future trajectory. Alongside the former Council Business Manager and the City Treasurer (managing the council's £1.3 billion debt which costs the city £90 million in interest every year) sit the Leader of the Council and the former Lord Provost (the Scottish equivalent of Lord Mayor). Their combined influence points directly to the city's misguided tourism and regeneration strategy, exemplified by Glasgow playing host to the Commonwealth Games in 2014, which spectacularly ignores the stifling poverty that grips the city. Like the creative industries agenda on which it is predicated at a local and national level, CSG considers culture solely in terms of its use value, with the business people and bureaucrats at its helm having little sympathy towards creative practice beyond the cultural capital it confers upon them.

When this research was published in the summer 2008 issue of *Variant*,²² a small independent cultural magazine, it provoked a vociferous reaction from CSG Media Manager, James Doherty. He immediately threatened the magazine with legal action on the basis of the article's alleged 'inaccuracies and potentially defamatory statements'. A subsequent list showed these objections to be largely trivial and easily

²² Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, 'The New Bohemia', *Variant*, 32 (2008), pp. 5–8.

rebutted by evidence available in the public domain. Interestingly, none of Doherty's objections related to the main thrust of the argument, about the presumed direction of the city's culture or the intrusion of private interests, but they did lean heavily on his rejection of the use of previous journalistic research as source material. Around the same time, this issue of *Variant* was removed from all CSG venues and James Doherty was discovered to be President of the National Union of Journalists.

The furore surrounding the article had the unexpected side-effect that a member of staff from the city's landmark Mitchell Library made contact with related concerns about press freedom. It transpired that the main newspapers in Glasgow—the *Herald*, *Sunday Herald* and *Evening Times*, which formed part of SMG Publishing, subsequently bought by the US media conglomerate, Newsquest—had delegated responsibility for its archiving and research to the Mitchell Library.²³ In other words, Culture and Sport Glasgow is now responsible for undertaking the research that informs the main journalistic outlets in the city. This sits alongside more generalised regressive policies insinuating themselves into the library network to be found in the explicit banning of political content. Towards the end of May 2007, Glasgow-based group, Save Our Homes, sought to organise a protest at the first full council meeting to take place after the aforementioned elections. Accordingly, the group drew up a poster outlining its challenge to Glasgow Housing Association's attempt to charge individual homeowners £6,000 for communal repairs, giving them only a year to pay. When a member of the group attempted to put one of posters up in Pollokshaws library, she was informed by a member of staff that this would not be possible on account of Glasgow Housing Association's affiliation with Glasgow City Council (GCC). This stance was later confirmed by a GCC spokesman as part of a deliberate policy to exclude all political content from libraries.

At the time of writing, reports of another attempt at censorship within the city have been coming through. Following a three-month residency at CSG's flagship venue, the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA), Dani Marti was due to participate in an exhibition called 'sh[OUT]: Contemporary Art and Human Rights', which forms part of its social justice programme; addressing 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex and transgender life [...] the exhibition [intends to] celebrate and raise awareness of LGBT people, their rights and history.'²⁴ However, three of the four works Marti was in the process of finalising for the exhibition were withdrawn on the instruction of CSG/GCC. This included a sound installation, which used audio footage from a gay nightclub, and two films. The enforced removal of three-quarters of Marti's work forced the artist to withdraw from the exhibition with the offer that the films would be screened during a ticketed symposium at a less central venue in November. Marti writes:

The decision to cancel the exhibition of most of my work negates the point of the 3 month residency with GoMA and Gay Men's Health. The point of which was to

²³ Catherine Watson, 'Bad News for Media Libraries?' *Gazette*, 8–21 August 2008.

²⁴ <http://www.glasgowmuseums.com/venue/showExhibition.cfm?venueid=3&itemid=235>

address key issues such as gay men's health and wellbeing, social and lifestyle factors, the stigma of homosexuality, and stigma associated with HIV status and disclosure. The project was aimed at reducing marginalization, social exclusion, homophobia, and HIV related stigma. Culture & Sport Glasgow's recent decision, unfortunately, colludes with these oppressive social forces and quashes the voice of the artist, and does a tremendous disservice to the affected communities. GoMA's compliance with Culture & Sport Glasgow's decision, which came about due to pressure from Glasgow City Councillors, is both offensive and disrespectful to those individuals, and the respective communities, which have contributed to the art work and borne witness to exactly this kind of silencing. The participants' voices, their social inclusion, and their civil rights are now at stake.²⁵

A request to Glasgow City Council under the Freedom of Information Act for information pertaining to this cancellation provoked the response:

On inspecting our records, it would appear that Glasgow City Council does not hold the information which you have requested. Neither does anyone else hold it on our behalf. Accordingly we are unable to comply with your request. The information which you have requested is held by Cultural and Sport Glasgow, which are now a separate entity to the Council.²⁶

Let us turn now to a consideration of how these developments might affect the genesis and proliferation of radical artistic practice in the city. I mentioned earlier how the interests of CSG personnel point to an aggressive tourism and regeneration strategy. In terms of the visual arts, the two main projects to consolidate this trend are Trongate 103 has been the redevelopment and Glasgow International. Trongate 103, which is due to open later this year, will see the redevelopment of a block that has long housed eight non-profit arts organisations, to form a unified arts complex. Tapping into a familiar, and often disastrous, strategy of culture-led regeneration, this dovetails neatly with the Five Year Action Plan devised for the regeneration of the Merchant City area at the east of the city centre and each of the cultural tenants of Trongate 103 has been offered a five-year lease, taking them up to the Commonwealth Games.

Glasgow International (Gi) is a biennial, fortnight-long visual arts festival which accounts for the majority of the city's resources for commissioning new artistic projects. Without wishing to privilege the agency of artists over anyone else in the city, I would like to examine the early impact of the privatisation of culture in Glasgow by considering the case of Simon Yuill, whose film, *Given to the People*, was included in the 2008 Glasgow International. Using original footage and interviews with many of the people involved, the film documents the creation of Pollok Free State, which began as a series of treetop protests against the building of the M77 motorway through Pollok Park in the south of Glasgow. Describing the project, Yuill writes:

²⁵ Taken from a written statement issued by the artist on 13 August 2009.

²⁶ Response to Freedom of Information request made by *Variant* magazine.

Whilst the Free State was unable to stop the motorway it nevertheless succeeded in giving the people of Glasgow something far more powerful: demonstrating the ability of ordinary individuals to come together in common cause, take responsibility for their surroundings, and realise their own initiatives for transforming them.²⁷

Yuill's film was one of the major works commissioned by festival curator, Francis McKee, to respond to his pertinent theme of 'public and private'. Conceived as a part of a larger project, documenting three instances of conflict around public and private space in the city, the quality and quantity of archival material surrounding Pollok Free State soon necessitated separate consideration, but the emphasis on conflict remained undiminished. Commissioned in February 2007, Yuill was developing his work while Culture and Sport Glasgow came into being. He was duly notified that CSG would be assuming responsibility for marketing Glasgow International and began to receive reports about the tourist-led focus of their strategy. In summer 2007, he was contacted by what claimed to be an independent magazine researching a feature on Glasgow International. Having sent some images and a description of *Given to the People*, he was surprised to discover, upon publication, that this issue of *Next Level* magazine had been funded by Glasgow City Council (partly through the Commonwealth Games budget), and that the council had commissioned its own choice of writers for the editorial and other articles. Scant reference was made to the public/private theme of the festival and Yuill's images were reproduced without contextual description.

Concerned by these developments and the exclusion of local audiences they entailed, Yuill scaled back his communications with festival management to concentrate on making his film, and sought reassurance from the organisers that the URL for the [giventothepeople.org](http://www.giventothepeople.org) website he had established to contextualise the film—which contained links to various 'save our park' campaigns then active in Glasgow—would be included in all festival publicity. As feared, the advertising campaign was geared around promoting the 'G' brand rather than any of the actual projects that were happening in it. In particular, the public/private theme was downplayed to the point of invisibility, which in turn led to the diminution of projects responding to the theme, including Yuill's, and the URL for his project was notable by its absence in the first run of festival brochures.

Yet, of all the events at Glasgow International, *Given to the People* received the highest positive public feedback and some dedicated press coverage which commented on the contemporary resonance of the struggle deliberately extrapolated by Yuill. This coverage notably came from journalists working beyond the niche art and lifestyle publications courted by CSG. The film was screened at the GalGael in Govan—a community-run traditional boat-building yard, set up as a direct consequence of Pollok Free State, by its initiator, Colin Macleod. Deliberately or otherwise, the Glasgow International marketing team misunderstood the ethos of Yuill's piece and the significance of the site he had chosen to screen it. They made several inappropriate

²⁷ <http://www.giventothepeople.org>

suggestions for hospitality and branding that would have interfered with the daily running of the workshop while making negligible attempts to inform the people of Govan about the film.

While the work was being screened, Pollok Park was again under threat—this time from a company called Go Ape, which proposed to construct a commercial adventure playground in the treetops. A month later, building work was to begin on another motorway—the M74 extension, which is intimately linked to the Commonwealth Games bid and scheduled to pass through some of the poorest parts of the city at a cost to the public purse in excess of £650 million—and resistance was again being mounted by members of the Free State. A seminar about the relevance of the Free State to contemporary issues in Glasgow, which included members of the JAM74 campaign, was organised as part of *Given to the People* and similarly failed to appear in any Gi publicity material.

In the wake of the festival, artists were invited to meet the curator of next year's Glasgow International who also happens to be director of the 'public' arm of Glasgow's predominant commercial gallery. Yet, despite being one of the major commissioned artists and arguably the most successful in terms of public and press response, Simon Yuill was not invited to attend this debriefing.

Reflecting on his experience of the festival, Yuill has recourse to Boltanski and Chiapello's evocations of 'tests' through which our willingness to acquiesce is determined by the dominant powers in their assessment of who should be included in future projects. In the case of *Given to the People*, there were several such tests, ranging from the omission of the website details to the outlandish proposals for co-opting the GalGael workshop; by being openly critical of the marketing strategy, the artist was arguably excluded from any retrospective analysis of the project by the incoming curator. Yuill invokes a timely distinction between freedom of expression and freedom of communication:

The so-called 'autonomy' of the arts is based solely upon freedom of expression, and artists are free to express whatever they like, provided that they allow their work to be utilised by others as vehicles for communicating agendas that they have no control over. In this way many forms of supposedly 'radical' art are utilised as conduits for contradictory politics, and often serve to legitimise these politics by giving them a veneer of 'freedom', 'liberality' or 'radicalness' that detracts from their actual basis.²⁸

Another worrying consequence of the privatisation of cultural provision in Glasgow is that the Glasgow Visual Artists Grants Scheme, which biannually offers individual grants of up to £1,000 for the research and development of new artwork, was devolved from the Scottish Arts Council to Glasgow City Council. When control of cultural provision was handed over to Culture and Sport Glasgow, it was specified that all grant-giving powers would be retained by the council, but this claim does not

²⁸ Email correspondence with the author.

stand up to scrutiny. First of all, the address given for applications is that of CSG headquarters at 20 Trongate and, secondly, Freedom of Information requests to both Glasgow City Council and Culture and Sport Glasgow, requesting details of grant recipients over the past decade, generated a detailed response from Culture and Sport Glasgow, providing the information needed, and a letter from the council stating:

On inspecting our records, it would appear that Glasgow City Council does not hold the information which you have requested. Neither does anyone else hold it on our behalf. Accordingly we are unable to comply with your request. The information which you have requested is held by Cultural and Sport Glasgow, which are now a separate entity to the Council.²⁹

This confusion around the newly privatised status of culture in the city and the limits of its responsibilities and influence and the banning of last summer's issue of *Variant* from CSG venues combined to give a clear signal that dissent will not be tolerated. The artists I have spoken to well understand the consensus that exists to stifle radical practice, which has led to a whole swathe of unsuccessful funding applications at local and national level, and to a kind of self-censorship which prevents some artists from applying for public sector funds to develop their work in the first place. I would like to finish by briefly considering the work of another Glasgow-based artist, so that we might remind ourselves of ways in which legitimisation of capitalism might be withheld.

Euan Sutherland has consistently deployed the Situationist practice of 'deceptive *détournement*', which involves manipulation 'of an intrinsically significant element, which derives a different scope from the new context'.³⁰ For example, *Cultural Façade*, dating from Glasgow's year as Capital of Culture in 1990, used Glasgow City Council's signature green and yellow to paint an industrial skip as a way of commenting on city council corruption—a theme Sutherland has continued to pursue, not least through his association with the Workers' City group. With the *détourned* slogan 'City of Capitalism' painted onto the side of the skip, *Cultural Façade* now stands as an early attempt to discuss the foreclosure of cultural forms beyond those officially sanctioned. In the wake of the *Variant* debacle, Sutherland was commissioned to make the cover for the next issue of the magazine and took the opportunity to comment on the damaging effects of cultural censorship.

The field of art, then, may no longer claim autonomy from the mechanisms of capital. It has been instrumentalised to various neoliberal state agendas at the expense of any genuine consideration of inequality. It has been invaded by the logic of commerce, through concerted attempts to harness art to the market economy and through the intrusion of constraining corporate sponsorship into museums and galleries. In the case of Glasgow, a city gripped by staggering poverty and blighted by

²⁹ Response to Freedom of Information request made by the author.

³⁰ Guy Debord, and G.J. Wolman, 'Methods of *Détournement*' in Ken Knabb (ed), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981 [1956]), p. 12.

the highest infant mortality rate in the UK, we have seen how far the elision of public and private interests has progressed.

Yet, art retains the power to expose the inequity and hypocrisy underlying the cultural façade, and this potential has been duly recognised by the arbiters of culture. Certain forms of critically engaged art have been repressively tolerated while others have been actively stifled. Perhaps even more pervasively, artists are increasingly obliged to play by the rules and a self-policing consensus has formed around the art world, much like that which dominates the mainstream media. In this world of scant funding, troublemakers need not apply and, if work by radical artists happens to find its way into outlets for official culture, it risks being neutralised and decontextualised. These are the challenges faced by radical artists at a time when their critical voice has never been more vital.