

Comments

If Sharks Were Men

"If sharks were men," Mr. Keuner was asked by his landlady's little girl, "would they be nicer to the little fishes?"

"Certainly," he said. "If sharks were men, they would build enormous boxes in the ocean for the little fish, with all kinds of food inside, both vegetable and animal. They would take care that the boxes always had fresh water, and in general they would make all kinds of sanitary arrangements. If, for example, a little fish were to injure a fin, it would immediately be bandaged, so that it would not die and be lost to the sharks before its time. So that the little fish would not become melancholy, there would be big water festivals from time to time; because cheerful fish taste better than melancholy ones.

"There would, of course, also be schools in the big boxes. In these schools the little fish would learn how to swim into the sharks' jaws. They would need to know geography, for example, so that they could find the big sharks, who lie idly around somewhere. The principal subject would, of course, be the moral education of the little fish. They would be taught that it would be the best and most beautiful thing in the world if a little fish sacrificed itself cheerfully and that they all had to believe the sharks, especially when the latter said they were providing for a beautiful future. The little fish would be taught that this future is assured only if they learned obedience. The little fish had to beware of all base, materialist, egotistical and Marxist inclinations, and if one of their number betrayed such inclinations they had to report it to the sharks immediately.

"If sharks were men, they would, of course, also wage wars against one another, in order to conquer other fish boxes and other little fish. The wars would be waged by their own little fish. They would teach their little fish that there was an enormous difference between themselves and the little fish belonging to the other sharks. Little fish, they would announce, are well known to be mute, but they are silent in quite different languages and hence find it impossible to understand one another. Each little fish that, in a war, killed a couple of other little fish, enemy ones, silent in their own language, would have a little order made of seaweed pinned to it and be awarded the title of hero.

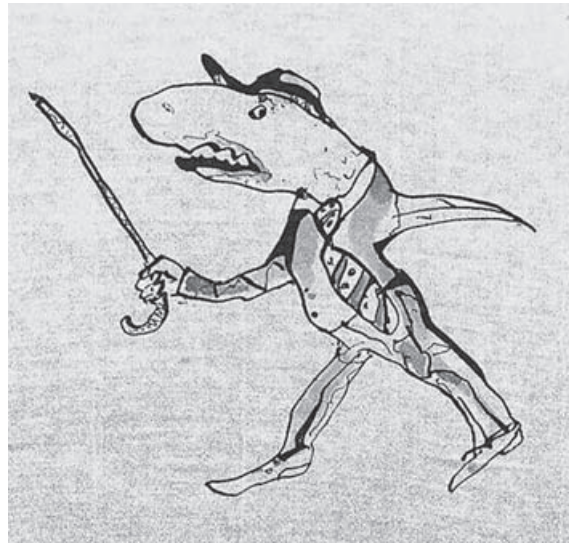
"If sharks were men, there would, of course, also be art. There would be beautiful pictures, in which the sharks' teeth would be portrayed in magnificent colors and their jaws as pure pleasure gardens, in which one could romp about splendidly. The theaters at the bottom of the sea would show heroic little fish swimming enthusiastically into the jaws of sharks, and the music would be so beautiful that to the accompaniment of its sounds, the orchestra leading the way, the little fish would stream dreamily into the sharks' jaws, lulled by the most agreeable thoughts.

"There would also be a religion, if sharks were men. It would preach that little fish only really begin to live properly in the sharks' stomachs.

"Furthermore, if sharks were men there would be an end to all little fish being equal, as is the case now. Some would be given important offices and be placed above the others. Those who were a little bigger would even be allowed to eat up the smaller ones. That would be altogether agreeable for the sharks, since they themselves would more often get bigger bites to eat. And the bigger little fish, occupying their posts, would ensure order among the little fish, become teachers, officers, engineers in box construction, etc.

"In short, if sharks were men, they would for the first time bring culture to the ocean."

Excerpt from Bertolt Brecht's 'Stories of Mr. Keuner'.



It's Corporatocracy, stupid! Culture Commission : Scotland

"Everything can be measured, and what can be measured can be managed."

McKinseys consultants

"The very act of observing alters the reality being observed."

Heisenberg

Scotland's Cultural Commission emanates from First Minister Jack McConnell's St. Andrew's Day speech of 2003 and "the express requirement that all government departments consider how cultural activity can help them meet their aims."

In April 2004, then Scottish Culture Minister Frank McAveety appointed eight right-thinking people to the Commission, to be chaired by James Boyle (who had jumped ship as Chair of

the Scottish Arts Council to take the job, despite that month agreeing a three-year extension to his contract). With £478,000 to support the Commission for twelve months, it started work that June to review the funding and organisation of the arts in Scotland.

McAveety claimed, no less: "The creativity of Scots – from the classroom to the boardroom – is the edge we need in a competitive world. Our duty as an Executive is to create the conditions that allow that creativity to flourish." Scotland's economy is to be inextricably tied up with the miasma of 'Creativity'.

Protesting that the Commission did not have "practising artists in sufficient proportion from varied artistic and cultural backgrounds", composer Craig Armstrong resigned from it days after its membership was announced. He was replaced by Scots traditional singer Sheena Wellington (who sang at the opening of the Scottish Parliament).

Come October McAveety was sacked as Scottish Culture Minister by First Minister Jack McConnell in a cabinet reshuffle – in a great example of that sublime juxtaposition, the 'mature political state' in which we are to entrust our cultural freedoms, McAveety had misled parliament when he arrived late for question time, claiming to have been at a SAC function; he had, in fact, been in the parliament canteen eating a pie. He was replaced by current Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport Patricia Ferguson.

In November, claims of in-fighting and sabotage arose over the influence of the First Minister's partner, head of Glasgow City Council's Culture and Leisure Services, Bridget McConnell, with a rival Review set up by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities amidst concerns of protecting



in this ever expanding circus. (UK public spending on private consultation topped £1.75 billion in 2004.) Given its origin, it's unabashed about the instrumentalisation of the arts in "deliver[ing] the policy objectives of other areas of government". Throughout "the norm is a belief that freedom prevails, which is true for those who have internalized the required values and perspectives."¹

Under the thumb of the non-devolved, non-negotiable National Cultural Strategy, it sets out to singularly 'manage' "the arts, including drama, dance, literature, music, the visual arts, crafts, film, and all branches of these; the creative industries, including screen and broadcasting; museums and heritage; galleries; libraries; archives; architecture." ('Creative Individuals' should also be interested in the carrot of international research into welfare adjustments and tax breaks, only to be told: "This is operated at UK level and is not, of course, a devolved matter.")

Presenting this total regulation as a 'holistic approach', amongst the Commission's organisational options, the media consensus is that Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen will be abolished and their work absorbed by two limited companies with charitable status: Culture Scotland and The Culture Fund. These would oversee cultural policy and funding respectively. This is legitimised as appeasing artists' concerns by retaining the fabled 'arms length principle' – as if this partial appeal is their only concern.

But let's look at whose arm and in whose interest?

Culture Scotland would be "owned, governed and managed by members ... drawn from key stakeholders: Cultural Partnerships [led by Local Authority], the Sectoral Councils [representative bodies for "six areas of cultural activity"], business, education and the voluntary sectors," and also include "ex officio observers representing Scottish Ministers, a European culture agency, Visit Scotland [tourism], DCMS [central government] and perhaps others."

The Culture Fund board would be "drawn primarily from the cultural, financial and business sectors." "Government has a golden share and the Scottish Executive is represented on the board by the Minister with responsibility for Culture."

Depending on which side your positivistic bread's buttered, it should be remembered there are a number of options laid out by the Commission, ones that include greater or lesser roles for Local Authorities.²

Despite this distracting procession of 'choice' – where we are presented with competing nuances of the status of various pre-designated 'stakeholders' – the ground-plan remains that of government-business partnerships. "By talking about governance rather than policy differences we are led to believe that there is no choice in what we do, only choices in how we do it. By talking about the whole political process in terms of the interpersonal relationships of the key players we are gently led to believe that this is the important thing. The problem has got so bad that quite a lot of the professionals can't even see the politics anymore."³

The 'third way' basis of the structure, with which we are not to engage but which we

must endorse, is that of government-business partnerships and is historically described as Corporatism. Located in Italian Fascism, Corporatism's genealogy has not gone unmissed by some media pundits. While such historical criticisms will be maligned, as the Cultural Policy Collective state:

"Under Mussolini the state successfully negated competing political programmes and ideological interests in order to extend its control over the whole of society. In less dictatorial guise, corporatism has played a significant role in post-war British politics, perhaps especially in the social pact established between capital and labour whereby trade union leaderships have consistently accommodated themselves to commercial interests in return for minor concessions (modest redistribution, pensions and other benefits, low unemployment etc). However, since the 1970s, this social compact has been overturned by the neoliberal offensive, although trade union bureaucracies in Britain and abroad continue to adhere to notions of partnership despite systematic attacks from business and the state on workers' rights and conditions of employment. The fact that the language of 'partnership' is so prevalent in the public sector is an indication of the extent to which collective social provision has now been undermined by the incursion of market forces."⁴

David Miller of Spin Watch has documented this incestuous relationship between the pro-business outlook of the Scottish Executive, corporate lobbyists and private business, and the cosy interchange of seconded personnel between them.⁵

It's reported that Ferguson has already indicated interest in the options put forward by the Commission on infrastructure change. The political parties have called for sound-bite "efficiency savings" and a reduction in bureaucracy, but there is scepticism that this system will deliver – if that's its true function beyond the propaganda of wresting power. The most far-reaching of any changes are expected to form the basis of a Culture Bill in 2007.

Notes

1. 'Manufacturing Consent', Chomsky. p. 304
2. CoSLA's briefing for Councillors, assessing implications of Commission's report for local government, see: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Arts-Culture.
3. 'No Idea : Control, Liberation and the Social Imagination', Robin McAlpine
4. 'Beyond Social Inclusion : Towards Cultural Democracy', Cultural Policy Collective www.variant.org.uk/20texts/CultDemo.txt
5. www.corporatewatch.org.uk

Link

Scottish Executive : Cultural Commission
<http://www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk/News/Releases/2004/06/5635>

their role as 'cultural sector service providers'.

At the same time, the Arts Council of Wales was brought directly into the political machinery of the Welsh Assembly, causing anxiety amongst artists over freedom of expression.

In June 2005, just days before the Commission was to publish its findings, yet another row broke out, with Boyle accusing the Culture Minister of acting "without integrity" and of insulting his colleagues by stealing and going public with one of the Commission's 'best ideas' – a 'National Council for the Creative Individual' for a favoured few artists, not unlike Ireland's Aosdána Scheme, only with the 'Scotland Brand' and community-from-above 'social cohesion' ceremonials.

The Commission's 539 page work was published in late June 2005, in time for the Parliament's Summer recess in which to digest it.

It is against this acrimonious background of political horse-trading, allegations of cronyism, and central government imposed structural changes that the Commission's findings will be interpreted, implemented or ignored by the Executive.

Other than a pledge in the form of a painful, clip-art adorned, end-page poem (written on behalf of the people of Scotland in absentia) to 'honour our best artists', what's key to the proposals?

In place of hard politics, it's saturated with think-tank hokum on 'Leisure' and 'Cultural Industries', with 'creativity', 'confidence' and 'well-being' collectively presented as an economic panacea, aligning 'Culture' still further with orientating the poor into ever more flexible labour markets. At its core is the further opening up and aligning of the public sector to private interests and deregulation. It advances yet more 'consultation', 'measuring' and 'monitoring'