

Glasgow's Merchant City: An Artist Led Property Strategy

Neil Gray

"Urbanism is the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism, which, true to its logical development towards absolute domination, can (and now must) refashion the totality of space into its own peculiar décor."

Guy Debord¹

In Ian Sinclair's 'Downriver', early indications of the gentrification of London's Docklands arrived with the wave of bohemians, squatters, and artists who descended on the area to take advantage of the spacious, dilapidated buildings and cheap rents: "When artists walk through a wilderness in epiphanous 'bliss-out', fiddling with polaroids, grim estate agents dog their footsteps. And when the first gay squatters arrive, bearing futons...the agents smile, and reach for their cheque books. The visionary reclaims the ground of his nightmares only to present it, framed in Perspex, to the Docklands Development Board"². Last year, from the window of my flat in the Gallowgate (Glasgow's near east end), I looked on as a group of artists moved into a disused, shuttered shop to set up a temporary gallery for the duration of the Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Visual Art (Gi). When I asked one of the artists how they had 'found' the space, she replied that a representative from Glasgow City Council had led the artists on a tour of disused shops in the 'edge of success' area around Trongate and the Gallowgate offering free leases for the duration of the festival. The Gi brochure alluded to this process – as well as borrowing carelessly from urban frontier language³ – by suggesting gallery visitors embark on a 'cultural safari' in both celebrated arts venues, and, "in 'found' or temporary locations throughout the city". From a situation where artists and squatters had once led gentrification, albeit unconsciously, an instrumental policy framework is now firmly in place whereby city officials do the

leading as they seek to enhance property values through the cultural capital of artists and the creation of a 'creative cluster' in the area now re-branded as the 'Merchant City'.

As Neil Smith, and many other critical urban theorists, have noted, the ad-hoc, almost accidental nature of gentrification that Ruth Glass had in mind when she first coined the term in 1964⁴ has now been replaced by gentrification as a global urban phenomenon; a (once) *productive* pillar of investment capitalism, that weaves together global financial markets with a phalanx of real-estate developers, local merchants, property agents and brand name retailers – all lubricated by generous state subsidy⁵. As Sinclair has observed, the potential of 'the arts' to rehabilitate 'unproductive' urban space, and stimulate the property market has long been established by gimlet-eyed developers. In this context it should come as no surprise that Gi are preparing for re-location to 'Trongate 103' – a much-vaunted proposed 'hub' for the diverse arts community in the Merchant City area – alongside a host of other arts organisations in the area. Trongate 103 (which names itself to let us know it is a *place*) is a symbolic marker of city boosters' attempts to foster a 'cultural quarter' in the Merchant City; a city centre area which has seen significant gentrification and displacement since the '60s, when clothing manufacture, warehousing and the regional fruit market were the main activities. Despite the failed promises of cultural quarters in London⁶, Dublin⁷ and Liverpool⁸, the area has now been designated as the prime site to 'pump-prime' Glasgow's creative industries⁹ and bolster the city's 'Glasgow: Scotland With Style' marketing strategy. The policy of subsidising arts space must be seen in the context of an overall strategy by the City Council to revalorise property values and land rents in the Merchant City area through the City Council's unambiguous 'Artist Led Property Strategy'¹⁰.

'The Merchant City Five Year Action Plan 2007-12', the strategic document for the development of the Merchant City area, inevitably pays homage to Richard Florida and his ubiquitous, but increasingly shopworn 'creative city' thesis¹¹. Florida, a self-confessed product of the '60s, who always liked to consider himself "a bit edgy or cool"¹², is responsible for much of the hyperbole surrounding the potential of the 'creative industries' to 'regenerate' the post-industrial city. Florida's thesis, outlined in detail later in this article, is that regional economic growth is powered by creative people. These creative people prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas. *Place* in this matrix is thus the 'central organising unit' of the economy, the key lever in attracting talented and creative people to a city region. The task of the city region is then to increase its place-attractiveness (understood through such measures as 'gay' and 'bohemian' indexes) so that it can compete for the services of the 'creative classes', who will then generate *economic value* through their creativity, thus ensuring the city will achieve 'winner' status in something called the 'creative economy'.

As urban geographer Jamie Peck has noted, the Florida thesis, despite its 'sophomore sociology' has provoked a reaction that has bordered on the ecstatic in urban policymaking communities around the world¹³. It is hardly revelatory that Glasgow's city development agencies reference what Peck calls Florida's "creativity fix"; Florida's thesis, as Peck notes, has been artfully crafted for the contemporary political-economic landscape: "In this neo-liberalised urban terrain, a receptive and wide audience has effectively been pre-

constituted for the kinds of market-reinforcing, property- and promotion-based, growth-oriented, and gentrification-friendly policies that have been repackaged under the creativity rubric"¹⁴. Despite increasing skepticism around the hyperbolic claims of Florida, the creative city policy framework is still being applied by countless slow-learning global cities worldwide. Florida himself acknowledges the 'creative classes' as the vanguard of gentrification, displacement and inequality – depending as they do on an "extensive venture capital system" on the one hand, and on the other, an increasingly impoverished and insecure service class as their "supporting infrastructure"¹⁵, yet Glasgow City Council seem oblivious, or unconcerned. However, rather than have us submit to boosterist overstatement, Peck usefully contextualises the competitive creative economy mantra as the afterbirth of a wave of self-defeating entrepreneurial urban strategies which preceded it.

The Production Of 'Place': An Economy Of Appearances.

Peck's materially-grounded critical analysis emerges from theoretical foundations laid down by David Harvey, particularly his seminal analysis of the paradigmatic shift from a *managerial* mode of urban government – nominally associated with 'thick' government, redistribution, and the provision of services and amenities to local citizens – to an *entrepreneurial* market-led mode of governance, firmly pre-occupied with facilitating economic growth for capital¹⁶. The broad context for this shift is the transition from 'Fordist-Keynesian' modes of accumulation to new rounds of what Harvey characterised as 'flexible accumulation' – a 'spatial fix', engineered in response to the early '70s crisis of over-accumulation, characterised by de-industrialisation, de-unionsiation, accelerated international capital flows (globalisation), privatisation, and the exploitation of an increasingly 'flexible' and geographically diverse labour market. In this formation, space is annihilated by time, and economies of *scope* vanquish economies of *scale*. As neo-liberal modes of flexible accumulation have gained hegemonic status over the collective bargaining powers of nation-states, so the matter of inward investment has increasingly taken the form of negotiations between international finance capital and local *city* powers. Lacking the power derived from large-scale, planned state investment in regional economies, inter-city competition for global investment capital has intensified in parallel. As a consequence of this, city governments are increasingly obliged to take an entrepreneurial turn, and act as *active state partners* in an attempt to lubricate capitalist investment in the city.

In a fiercely competitive inter-urban environment, rather than service the needs of its citizens on a universal basis, the key issue for the entrepreneurial city is the provision of "a good business climate"¹⁷. In order to obtain this business-friendly regime, cities are forced into a highly competitive "race to the bottom"; a "zero-sum" game routing scarce public resources (land and assets), and driving down labour conditions, so that increasingly benevolent measures can be offered to entice investment capital. Unsurprisingly, these booster activities only accentuate and diversify the geographical mobility and flexibility of capital, forcing urban governments to produce ever more competitive policy cocktails, and subsuming policy ever





more within the groove of uneven capitalist development: “Indeed, to the degree that inter-urban competition becomes more potent, it will almost certainly operate as an external coercive power over individual cities to bring them closer into line with the discipline and logic of capitalist development”¹⁸. Ultimately, the end game is capitulation to market forces: under the “external coercive power” of neo-liberalism, even the most resolute of city governments, “find themselves, in the end, playing the capitalist game and performing as agents of discipline for the very processes they are trying to resist”¹⁹.

The discriminatory deployment by the nation-state of nominally Keynesian measures, has led the entrepreneurial city to concentrate on the political economy of *place* rather than *territory*. By territory, Harvey means the type of economic and infrastructural projects (housing, education, etc.) designed to improve the universal conditions of living and working in a particular jurisdiction. The construction of place, however (shopping malls, sports stadia, conference centres, iconic buildings, ‘cultural quarters’, etc.) is cultivated through public-private partnership, and designed, in large part, to enhance and upgrade the *image* of the city – primarily for the investor and the tourist. In this model, city branding, place marketing, and the production of urban spectacle take precedence over the amelioration of general, structural conditions in the wider terrain. Despite thoroughly discredited promises of Thatcherite ‘trickle-down’, urban spectacle and an uneven and limited focus on place, typically functions to divert attention from broader problems in the overall economy and to mask the brutal demarcations between winners and losers, and the included and excluded in the neo-liberal city. As Peck argues, it is precisely in this unequal policy nexus that Florida’s feel-good ‘creativity fix’ has found a willing audience amongst urban policy makers.

Moving Up The Value Chain? The Art Of Gentrification

A “key policy message” from the Glasgow Economic Forum (a partnership body between Scottish Enterprise Glasgow and Glasgow City Council responsible for overseeing economic regeneration and development in the city) is that cities and city regions are *the* key drivers of economic growth, and that investment must be located in priority locations and industries within the metropolitan core. Glossing over the debilitating national and regional context outlined in Harvey’s thesis, and neglecting to offer any real challenge to the hegemony of neoliberalism, the Forum instead, in typical booster form, talks up the “positive policy environment” for entrepreneurial cities²⁰. With an emphasis on place-specific, inevitably competitive inter-urban policy, a stated ambition of the Forum is to attract tourist revenue and to attain ‘Top UK destination status’. In a typical formulation from the Florida-inspired creative city handbook, the Forum aspires to “develop, retain and attract people and talent” by “building on Glasgow’s distinctive diversity and city ‘buzz’, increasing its place attractiveness, and

developing the city’s cultural and leisure offer”²¹. Thus, one of the key themes in the Forum’s ‘A Step Change For Glasgow: Action Plan To 2013’ is to develop the city center as a retail and cultural environment. A key component of this plan is to develop the Merchant City as a ‘cultural quarter’ through the ‘Merchant City Action Plan 2007-2012’ and an ‘Arts Property Strategy’²².

The Merchant City Initiative (whose key partners are *also* Scottish Enterprise Glasgow and Glasgow City Council) is the agency charged with delivering the Merchant City Five Year Action Plan and overseeing the distribution of a programme of grants to renovate the built environment in the area through the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) – funded by Glasgow City Council, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, and the Heritage Lottery Fund (£3 million of subsidy grants have been targeted at owners of historic buildings within the Merchant City). The plan’s manifesto is a Floridian utopia: “To create an area of design and inspirational excellence, individuality and style – a unique urban quarter where the cultural and artistic can mix with retail and residential to generate energy, where quality architecture re-enforces the sense of place and creates activity and where boldness and innovation is positively encouraged at the expense of mediocrity”²³. Ten million pounds of ‘public realm’ beautification works have already been committed by Glasgow City Council to help encourage this project, with a list of sixty-five physical developments either committed, proposed or in discussion at 2006²⁴. The ultimate aim is to make the Merchant City (through strategic marketing and pump-priming investment strategies), “Glasgow’s foremost mixed-use, creative, cultural, business and residential quarter”²⁵. The mantra is ‘Glasgow: Scotland with Style’...*ad infinitum*.

Central to plans for lifting the Merchant City and Glasgow “indisputably into a UK league of creative cities”²⁶, is the creation of a ‘creative cluster’ around the Trongate area: “The economic and social impact of the presence of the arts community and the cluster effect of a successful ‘arts quarter’ is one of the central tenets of the Council’s recent Five Year Action Plan for the regeneration of the Merchant City, Trongate and Glasgow Cross area”²⁷. By “harnessing” Glasgow’s creative and cultural energy, the initiative aims to position the area as the ‘natural’ home for these “new explorative and innovative developments in technology and attitude”²⁸. Key to these plans are the proposed creation of a “business centre for cultural and creative industries” at the City Council’s cleansing Depot on Bell Street, or in King Street (South Block); the establishment of an artists studio/gallery ‘hub’ at ‘Trongate 103’ in King Street (North Block); and the renovation of the Briggait building as the new home for the Glasgow Sculpture Studios and Workers And Artists Studio Provision Scotland (WASPS). These developments are designed to consolidate the ‘arts quarter’, alongside current institutions such as The Tron Theatre, The Ramshorn Theatre, St.Andrews In The Square and The Gallery Of Modern Art (GoMA), and proposed developments such as the Bathhouse project. The £8.5 million Trongate

103, perhaps the centrepiece of the strategy, will ‘consolidate’ several arts organisations currently housed in City Council property nearby, including Glasgow Independent Studio, Glasgow Print Studio, Glasgow Media Access centre (GMAC), Sharmanka, Project Ability, Street Level Photoworks, Transmission Gallery, and the Russian Cultural Center. Gi will take up residence in June this year.

The long-term rationale for the ‘Artist Led Property Strategy’ is made perfectly clear in the City Council’s ‘Housing the Visual Arts in Glasgow’s Merchant City’ strategy report. By consolidating arts organisations in single premises, the City Council hopes to capitalise on the assumed ability of the arts to thrive in “edge of success” urban areas like the Trongate and Glasgow Cross. The arts are seen as a potentially “major regenerative tool” for the raising of general perceptions and confidence in the area’s future potential. Whose confidence needs to be raised, and what kind of ‘future potential’ is envisioned, are of course key questions – the consolidation of a “strategic partnership for the arts” is considered central to the raising of “external investment confidence” for the proposed development of the adjacent St.Enoch East car park site into a cinema complex, incorporating car parking, by Stannifer Developments.²⁹ Meanwhile, the pursuit of an arts strategy that consolidates different organisations chimes with the increasingly *instrumental* face of National Lottery funding. The Lottery has intimated that it will not entertain large capital funding for Glasgow-based arts organisations unless the city produces a strategic plan for housing the visual arts³⁰.

Further, in light of the austere and worsening fiscal climate, and the collapse of commercial property markets in particular, and in line with Glasgow City Council’s policy to generate revenue from the sale of publicly held land and assets, the Council and the Merchant City Initiative intend to promote the area’s ‘renewal’ through the refurbishment and pro-active marketing of a number of City Council properties in the Merchant City. Stephen Purcell, leader of the City Council, recently clarified the City’s position when he made clear at the State of the City economy conference that ‘Team Glasgow’ was still very much open for business: “The first thing that all public bodies, including my own Council, must do, is to examine where we can help business by being more flexible and willing to do things differently. This is no time for unnecessary rules and processes; this is a time to do everything we can to help”³¹. As part of this ‘flexible’ approach, Purcell ensured the business community that it can expect more “slack” from the Council in terms of ‘land disposal’ and leasing of Council property. Thus, the Merchant City Initiative website (in its ‘Trade into Trongate’ section) assures readers and investors that these “freshly shelled out retail spaces” will have very “flexible” and “attractive” lease terms³². A large percentage of the arts organisations included in the creative cluster rubric are currently housed in separate council-owned buildings, which are leased at what were considered “below market values”; by pulling these groups together, the City Council

intend to capitalize on the vacant properties, or, as they put it, to “rationalise property aspirations with available space”. Agglomerating these varied arts and cultural groups into one space will also assist the “freeing up of other surplus property for re-use and potential conversion/sale, thus increasing Capital receipts to the Council and removing property from its portfolio which has *ceased to perform in an economic manner*”³³ [my emphasis].

The transition from use value, which may not perform ‘in an economic manner’, to exchange value, which by definition must add economic ‘value’, is of course a central imperative of growth-orientated capitalism – an imperative, which by its very nature leads to monopoly. While the Housing The Visual Arts Strategy, talks up the benefits of a sustainable, secure, ‘arts quarter’, the effects of the ‘arts led property strategy’ are manifested throughout the Merchant City. A look through Glasgow City Council’s inventory of physical developments in the Merchant City area, dated 2006, shows an overwhelming preponderance of high-grade *private* residential, retail and office developments³⁴. Despite oft-cited Floridian claims for plurality and diversity in the residential make up of ‘creative cities’, the Merchant City, is already geared towards the retail and housing consumption demands of middle-class taste – this strategy is likely to be intensified rather than mitigated in the coming years. Out of sixty-five proposed or confirmed developments, only two proposals involve social housing organisations (both of them in Duke Street it should be noted, far away from the ‘arts quarter’ epicentre). Meanwhile, arts organisations and the ‘cultural quarter’, concentrated in the newly branded ‘lower east side’ of the Merchant City, despite the hyperbole, play a very small, increasingly agglomerated, and place-specific part in the development of the Merchant City overall. Indeed, only five of the new developments could be said to involve arts or cultural organisations, and two of these developments are dedicated to rationalising a diverse mix of existing cultural organisations into single premises.

The Art Of Rent: The Manhattan Model

“Certainly artists are only the forerunners of high-income, youngish, non-minority residents. But after the artists, a rising tide of high-rents and condominium conversions seems unstoppable.”

Sharon Zukin, 1982³⁵

Artists have been used for some time now as ‘urban pioneers’ for canny developers in the property market. David Panos of ‘The London Particular’ (an artists group charting the gentrification of Shoreditch and the east end of London through film-making and urban theory) has observed how the London Development Agency (LDA) in its ‘Creative London’ programme had formalised, through ‘The Creative Space Agency’³⁶, what had often been an ad-hoc relationship between artists and developers, whereby space was leased to artists at rent-free or peppercorn rents for prescribed periods. The Creative Space Agency now acts as a *pro-active* broker between artists and landlords whose property lies empty. As Panos acknowledges, this strategy is always likely to appeal to artists in search of cheap and spacious premises. But for the developers and city agencies the agenda is quite different. Attracting seemingly upwardly mobile artists to ‘edge of success’ urban areas simultaneously helps rehabilitate and increase the property values of ‘uneconomic’ premises and changes the perception of ‘run down’ areas. Meanwhile, as Panos notes, government intervention aids a ‘soft’ policing and regulation of space, discouraging squatters (in the London context) and vandalism, as the artists, in effect, act as “free security guards” for the properties. Moreover, with increasing state intervention, arts projects can be “vetted, behaviour regulated, and the process brought under centralised control”³⁷. For Panos, The Creative Space Agency makes clear



the exceptional, *instrumental* role of art in the gentrification-led economy. But if the celebrated example of Shoreditch is anything to go by, the fostering of a ‘creative hub’ in the Merchant City will only have a negative effect on local, working-class residents. The net effect of Shoreditch’s transformation into a cultural hub, according to Panos, “has been to escalate property prices out of the reach of all but a privileged minority, and drive up the overall cost of living”³⁸.

The Shoreditch example, has an exemplary precursor in the artist led gentrification of Lower east Manhattan. Sharon Zukin’s ‘Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change’ (1988), captured how New York City became “both the harbinger and the model of loft living”³⁹. By charting the conversion of industrial and light industrial manufacturing units to spacious ‘loft-living’ style residential apartments, the book proved seminal in marking the transition from a manufacturing to a ‘post-industrial’ service economy in Manhattan. For artists in the ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘60s, Manhattan lofts were often merely a question of marginal utility: cheap rooms and plenty of space. Yet these lofts, and the arts production that took place within them, played a crucial role, both symbolically and materially, in an embryonic arts led property market. Zukin argued, convincingly as it turned out, that the concern for loft style apartments as objects of consumption reflected changes in patterns of consumption in the ‘60s: a more active appreciation of the arts; and a nostalgia for the aesthetic of the industrial machine age. As Manhattan-based artists such as Robert Rauschenberg began to hit it big their celebrity increasingly attracted the attention of the mainstream – as did the way they lived. On the one hand, artist’s lofts were vicariously identified with a sense of adventure or bohemian ambience. On the other hand, the massive ‘raw’ spaces of the industrial lofts began to exert a powerful aesthetic appeal. By choosing a return to an industrial aesthetic, the return to the city was a return to the industrial past, but this time a more *manageable* past. Lofts thus became both the site and symbol of the transition to a service sector economy, concretising the process of de-industrialisation: “Lofts that are converted to residential use can no longer be used as machine-shops, printing plants, dress factories, or die-cutting operations. The residential conversion of manufacturing lofts confirms and symbolises the death of the urban manufacturing centre”⁴⁰.

In Manhattan, the arts’ presence was crucial in helping to destabilise existing uses and redefine the terrain for new markets of middle-class consumption – “as patrons, public, and, ultimately tenants”⁴¹. As the art market developed around the bohemian atmosphere of the lofts, and art institutions sprang up to support the market (making art both a career and an investment opportunity) an appreciation of ‘the arts’, and historic preservation, went hand in hand to

preserve loft apartments and the artists within them. State subsidies for artists in New York during the ‘60s and ‘70s allowed artists to become major producers in the emerging arts economy. But by attracting a new vanguard of middle-class art consumers, and those ‘enchanted’ by the raw (but now domesticated) spaces of the industrial past, arts producers unwittingly enhanced property values to such an extent that those people who tried to live off artwork or performance were effectively priced out of the market through gentrification. The succession of uses and users over time is directly analogous with typical processes of gentrification: “A market of small manufacturers slowly yields to demand for space by artists and artisans and middle- to upper middle-class residents. The sequence of users converts loft space to increasingly ‘better’ use and, in so doing, alters the quintessential form in which that space is used”⁴².

The concentration of artists and a bohemian ‘artistic community’ offered middle- and upper-middle class consumers ready made ‘cultural capital’, and made it possible for developers to charge escalating rates for housing in ‘edgy’ areas like SoHo. Up until this point, artists, benefiting from subsidy, had little reason to interfere in market forces, but sooner or later, as Zukin has pointed out, a contradiction arises between the production of art, and developing higher-rent uses: “At this point real estate development reasserts its dominance over the arts economy”⁴³. After the arts’ presence revalorised property prices in areas of the city like SoHo to the extent that artists could no longer afford to live there, they simply moved on to another ‘run-down’ area to establish the same process of gentrification and displacement elsewhere. Subsidy for the arts in NY, as Zukin pointed out, soon became, by proxy, a subsidy for the property market: “Regarded in the short run as a bonanza for creative and performing artists, production subsidies for arts infrastructure proved, in the long run, to be a cornucopia for housing developers”⁴⁴.

Gentrification may appear – and be represented as – a visible sign of economic growth by local state officials, tourists, and business elites, but, as Zukin argued, what is really at stake is “...the reconquest of the downtown for high-class users and high-rent uses”⁴⁵. Manhattan was not only the harbinger of ‘loft living’ and industrial conversion, it was also a seminal precursor of artist-led gentrification – now writ large as global urban strategy. By the 1990s, according to Zukin, no matter how restricted the definition of art that was implied, or how few artists were included, or how little the benefits extended to all social groups, “making a place for art in the city”, went along with establishing a “marketable identity” for the city as a whole⁴⁶.

The Creative Classes, Or, Middle Class Masquerade?

“In essence, Florida’s advice is what savvy consultants might tell a brand trying to boost market share: Attract lots of young people, project an image of authenticity, and generate buzz. It works for TV networks, soft drinks and cars. Why not cities?”

Adweek⁴⁷

Richard Florida argues that place is now the “central organising unit” of the so-called creative economy. In contrast, to those who argue that people travel and migrate in search of jobs, not places, Florida argues that the gathering of people, companies and resources into particular places with particular qualities generates economic growth: “Places provide the ‘thick’ and fluid labor markets that help match people to jobs. Places support the ‘mating markets’ that enable people to find life partners. Places provide the ecosystems that harness human creativity and turn it into economic value”⁴⁸. Believing that the somewhat nebulously defined ‘creative classes’ are the prime movers in this new economy, Florida’s theory decrees that regional economic growth is driven by the location choices of creative people – the holders of creative capital – who prefer places that reflect their own supposedly open, diverse and

pluralistic values. Members of the creative class, come in all shapes, sizes, colours and lifestyles. Therefore, to be truly successful, cities and regions, if they are to obtain a significant 'edge' in the new economy, *must* create and foster places which will attract their diverse and divergent lifestyle needs. This, after all, is a class whose economic function, Florida breathlessly declares, makes them "the natural – indeed the only possible – leaders of twenty-first-century society"⁴⁹.

Florida's 'big story' is that the creative class is "the great emerging class of our time"⁵⁰. Broadly agreeing with Peter Drucker's 'knowledge economy' thesis (which argues that *knowledge* is the basic human resource), Florida claims to make an advance on Drucker by arguing that *creativity* – and the creation of 'useful' new forms derived from knowledge – is the key driver of the economy. The philosophical background for Florida's thesis emerges from a right-wing school of economic thought called 'New Growth Theory'. The theory, as espoused by Paul Romer, whom Florida approvingly cites in 'The Rise Of The Creative Classes', assigns a central role to creativity or 'idea generation' as a means for creating economic surplus value: "We are not used to thinking of ideas as economic goods [...] but they are surely the most significant ones that we produce. The only way for us to produce more economic value – and thereby generate economic growth – is to find ever more valuable ways to make use of the objects available to us"⁵¹. Romer argues that ideas are especially "potent goods" because a good idea can be used over and over, and in fact grows in value the more it is used, offering increasing returns. Florida, being a good entrepreneurial type, accepts Romer's instrumentalist, and thoroughly market-orientated conflation of ideas and economic growth, but gives it a feel-good *creativity* spin: the creative class, as defined by Florida, is made up of people who "add economic value through their creativity"⁵². With creativity now instrumentally wedded to productivity and growth, and with place as the 'key organising unit' of the economy, Florida argues, those cities and regions that attract and retain the creative class are most likely to be the 'economic winners' in a framework of inter-urban competition for talent and growth.

But was this ever true? And who are the creative classes, anyway? The creative class is made up of a 'creative core', according to Florida's classification, which is comprised of scientists, engineers, university professors, poets, novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers and architects, as well as the 'thought leadership' of our society, including non-fiction writers, editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts and other opinion-makers. The creative-core group is supported by a phalanx of 'creative professionals' who work in a diverse range of 'knowledge intensive' industries such as high-tech, financial services, the legal and health care professions, and business management. While Marx understood class in terms of conflicting class interests dominated by uneven power relations, Florida, a keen supporter of growth-based free market economics, is keen to stress that the creative classes will work *with* rather than against the prevailing economic system: "The Creative Class has made certain symbols of non-conformity acceptable – even conformist. It is in this sense that they represent not an alternative group but a new and increasingly norm-setting mainstream of society"⁵³. In this sense Florida argues capitalism has pulled off a major coup, 'capturing' people who would have been seen as "bizarre mavericks" operating on the fringes of bohemia, and "setting them at the very heart of the process of innovation and growth"⁵⁴.

Florida's claim that the so-called creative class make up the 'mainstream' of society is deeply contentious. In Glasgow, for instance, around nine out of ten of the city's jobs are in the service sector, which as the Glasgow City Council Plan (2008-2011) acknowledges, is characterised by a preponderance of lower paid and lower skilled services. Meanwhile, about a quarter of Glasgow's working age population are on benefits and

outside the workforce altogether. There is no point in arguing either that Glasgow's benefit claimants and low-paid service sector workers can be rescued by "the leaders of twenty-first-century society"; for beneath Florida's hyperbole a disturbing acknowledgement is made: "There is a strong correlation between inequality and creativity: the more creative a region is, the more inequality you will find there"⁵⁵. As Florida admits, this inequality has "insidious dimensions". The service economy ultimately operates as the "support infrastructure" of the creative age: "Members of the Creative Class, because they are well compensated and work long and unpredictable hours, require a growing pool of low end service workers *to take care of them and do their chores*"⁵⁶ [my italics]. Florida himself suggests that the growth of this burgeoning, increasingly precarious service class must be understood *alongside* the rise of the creative class. Moreover, another troubling element arises in Florida's thesis. In his tabulation of the classes (which includes 'the agricultural class', 'the service class', 'the working class', 'the creative class', and a subset, 'the super-creative core') traditional class actors – the middle and upper classes – are entirely absent. Could it be that their new homes are in the upper echelons of the 'creative class' and the 'super-creative core'?

Like the ideologues of New Labour, the creative classes are a class that believes in the 'values' of meritocracy: work hard, be rewarded; *Arbecht Macht Frei*. In interviews that Florida conducted with the 'creative class', he came across people, "who no longer defined themselves mainly by the amount of money they make or their position in a financially delineated order"; rather, they were "...valiantly trying to defy an economic class into which they were born"⁵⁷. This is particularly true of the young descendants of the truly wealthy, says Florida, "who frequently describe themselves as just 'ordinary' creative people..."⁵⁸. Like the Blairite myth of a classless society, however, disavowal stalks the narrative. As Terry Eagleton, paraphrasing Marx, has tellingly observed, the division of labour between mental and manual labour marks the first point of *ideology*: "Now thought can begin to fantasize that it is outside of material reality, just because there is a material sense in which it actually is"⁵⁹. Yet Florida himself, frequently acknowledges his own complicity – and the complicity of the creative classes as a whole – in uneven power relations: "I have, in short, just about all the servants of an English Lord except that they're not mine, and they don't live below stairs; they are part-time and distributed in the local area". He admits that meritocracy has its 'dark side': "By papering over the cause of cultural and educational advantage, meritocracy may subtly perpetuate the very prejudices it claims



to renounce"⁶⁰. Moreover, he concedes that the influx of affluent creative class types into working class areas doesn't necessarily create more opportunities for local residents: "Instead, all it usually does is raise their rents and perhaps create more low end service jobs for waiters, house-cleaners and the like"⁶¹. The creative class may *wish* for diversity in lifestyle choices and social classes, but as Florida admits: "to some degree it is a diversity of elites, limited to highly educated, creative people"⁶². Florida, in fact, always seems to be falling behind the ramifications of his own theory – that any growth in the 'creative class' is far outstripped by the concomitant growth of an increasingly insecure service class.

Governing Through Crime: Managing 'The Dark Side'

"The city-as-landscape does not encourage the formation of community or of urbanism as a way of life; rather it encourages the maintenance of surfaces, the promotion of order at the expense of lived social relations, and the ability to look past distress, destruction, and marginalisation to see only the good life (for some) and to turn a blind eye towards what that life is constructed out of".

D Mitchell⁶³

Florida states the obvious when he acknowledges a 'dark side' to the 'meritocracy' script of the creative class. The cultures of cities, as Zukin points out, are always framed within a symbolic language of exclusion and entitlement: "The look and feel of cities reflect decisions about what – and who – should be visible and what should not, on the concepts of order and disorder, and on the use of aesthetic power. In this primal sense, the city has always had a symbolic economy."⁶⁴. Despite Florida-style references to "Glasgow's distinctive diversity and city 'buzz'", the Merchant City is a characteristically punitive, selective and heavily policed neo-liberal urban terrain. As urban theorist Mike Davis commented in the context of 'fortress LA', while architects and city planners may be oblivious to how the built environment contributes to segregation – designated pariah groups read the meaning immediately⁶⁵. The Merchant City, as part of the heavily surveilled city center, has accessed the full panoply of human, physical and technological methods to regulate behaviour on its streets. These measures include the City Centre Enhanced Policing plan, Strathclyde Police's 'Stop and Search' policy which saw 129,563 searches last year. While figures for the Merchant City in particular are difficult to disaggregate from city center figures generally, I personally witnessed an excessive spate of stop and search incidents, targeting beggars and the homeless, in the 'edge of success' frontier area around Glasgow Cross and the Trongate last year. Meanwhile, nine CCTV cameras at a cost of £300,000 were recently installed in the Merchant City to add to over 300 security cameras Glasgow-wide (in an indication of the converging agendas of 'public safety' and the business community; the city's CCTV system is jointly funded by Glasgow Community and Safety Services and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow – Scotland's main economic, enterprise, innovation and investment agency⁶⁶).

The major crucible in the Merchant City for all these regulatory, policing mechanisms has been the raid on Paddy's Market which lies in Shipbank Lane on the southern fringes of the Merchant City near the river Clyde. The market – whose name is derived from the high number of Irish traders, many of whom were migrants from the Irish famine – is the oldest in the city with origins dating back to the 1820s. The market has been in Shipbank Lane since 1935, and has been popular for decades with Glaswegians in search of bargains. A petition set up to save the market gives a positive account of its place in local history: "Initially a second-hand clothes market for the city's poor and dispossessed, its traders now sell a wider range of secondhand and new goods to a wider community. More importantly, it is a city landmark, a tourist attraction and, at heart, simply a place for locals to meet and work together"⁶⁷.

However, in August 2007, Councillor Gordon Matheson brought negative media attention to Paddy's Market by describing it as "crime-ridden midden", and arguing for the closure of the Glasgow institution: "The days when Paddy's Market made a contribution to the city are over, it has changed, and in my opinion it should be closed down"⁶⁸.

No doubt Councillor Matheson (as chair of Merchant City Tourism and Marketing Co-op Ltd) was aware of what was coming. In November last year, the market was raided by over 100 police officers accompanied by a phalanx of trading, customs and rail officials – and the blaze of media flashlights. As part of the investigation – codenamed 'Operation Bazaar' – fake CDs and DVDs, as well as counterfeit cigarettes and toys, some of which were allegedly smuggled into the country, were confiscated by the police. The investigation also led to eight men being arrested on suspicion of dealing class 'A' drugs. Superintendent Tom Doran, said of the operation: "My priority is to make sure the people who live, work and visit this side of the city, can go about their everyday business without fear or intimidation". Meanwhile, a Glasgow City Council Spokesman explained the rationale for the raid: "High levels of crime, anti-social behaviour have increasingly become a significant problem in Shipbank Lane. They have had a detrimental impact on residents and visitors and on the efforts to improve the Merchant City"⁶⁹ [sic].

On October 28th 2008, the decision to close down Paddy's Market was called-in by the City Council. Permission was granted to proceed with discussions to re-develop the market for "a combination of uses and sub-leases to business and arts organisations"⁷⁰. The city council are in discussions with site-owners Network Rail to take over the lease. After the deal is complete, the council intend to create a 'mini-Camden Market' on the site. Councillor George Ryan, the City Council's regeneration convener explained the plans last year: "We will be able to lift the whole area. What we want is to create a mini-Camden Market in Glasgow city centre. We see this as a tourist destination, an arts and crafts market and a cultural venue. Other cities in Europe would bite your hand off for this type of opportunity. It's near the Clyde and all the regeneration in St Enoch and the Merchant City". Councillor Ryan continued: "Glasgow has moved on and we will not be dragged down by a blight which detracts from our efforts to regenerate the city. We present ourselves quite rightly as a vibrant and cultural city, which is a good place to live and work and visit. Paddy's Market does not fit with that ambition"⁷¹.

Traders, understandably, were disgusted by the language deployed by senior City Council officials, and by the chronic lack of tolerance for the people who shop and trade at Paddy's Market: "It is important as part of Glasgow's history," said Hazel McGeachin, "but what's more important is that it's needed. A lot of my customers are pensioners, asylum seekers, foreign workers. They need a place as cheap as this"⁷². Michael Burns, meanwhile, said the council are turning their back on Glasgow's working class heritage. Many traders, according to the *Scotland on Sunday*, believed that what was going on was 'yuppification' ahead of the Commonwealth Games, while many linked the situation with recent protests about land use in Pollok Park and the Botanic Gardens⁷³. Brian Daly, a spokesman for the Paddy's market committee, said the Market played a vital role in providing affordable second-hand goods, as well as having a particular community role: "You can't create a community like this, it just grows. It would be a shame to lose this unique piece of Glasgow's heritage for the sake of creating a sterile precinct"⁷⁴.

While criminality, especially drug dealing, has been cited as the main reason to close the market down, traders have accused the City Council of stigmatising the market instead of dealing with the wider context of social polarisation in the area. In December, the *Sunday Herald* reported that a city centre task force set up to monitor the area



had acknowledged that that the main catalyst for crime was Hope House (a homeless hostel adjacent to the market). Strathclyde Police stressed that it wasn't the traders of Paddy's Market who were the main causes of crime: Hope House was seen as "a major crime generator", due to the large amount of homeless drug-addicts it houses, and thus the inevitable presence of dealers to service the addiction. Moreover, traders complained that the vast majority of crime in the market area takes place in the evenings when the market area effectively becomes a public lane. Market traders, however, close up by 2pm every day⁷⁵. The debate then, has been constructed not only about the viability of Paddy's Market, but of criminality in the area *per se*, and of its unsuitability for the new types of economic activity to be associated with the cultural quarter and the Merchant City overall. The City's regeneration convener, Councillor Ryan, expressed the intended message quite brutally: "It is the death-knell for the anti-social element. We want to move all that out. We want to up the bar of what we expect of a market right in the heart of the city. We want to bring in a better class of retail there"⁷⁶.

Entrepreneurial Statecraft

The highly disproportionate reaction to, and policing of, Paddy's Market, can be seen as a form of entrepreneurial statecraft. In an excellent study by Roy Coleman, Steve Tombs and Dave Whyte⁷⁷, they show how an emphasis on selective 'crime and disorder' issues reinforces a narrow sense of harm and danger in the city and forecloses scrutiny of the city-building process itself. They label this process 'governing through crime', but ask: what kinds of crime are cities and citizens being governed through? With the expansion of public private partnerships in the city, and business ever more entrenched in increasingly corporatised 'regeneration' processes, the 'moral capital' of business ideology has attained hegemonic status within regeneration discourses: "private enterprise, entrepreneurship, the pursuit of wealth and something called the 'market' have all become valorised as ends in themselves"⁷⁸. This elevation of business influence, the authors argue, has led to an *over*-regulation of the poor and marginalised who dare to interrupt the fetishised surface of the commodity realm, and an *under*-regulation of 'hidden' corporate crime and harm.

While the authors applaud efforts to critically scrutinise all those regulatory and disciplinary modes and discourses of governance like CCTV networks, targeting of beggars and the homeless, and policing 'hotspots', they argue for a shift of emphasis away from analysis of the heavily regulated spaces of consumption, to the underregulated spaces of production. The report usefully places the emphasis on *corporate crime or harm*, which has a catastrophic economic, physical and social cost, yet remains almost entirely absent from crime and disorder debates. The concept of corporate 'harm' is reserved for those acts of omissions which produce degradation of natural

and physical environments and injuries to and exploitation of workers and consumers, but which do not violate any legal code. Here, the authors note that those regulatory frameworks that impinge on, or, disrupt flows of production or consumption are routinely removed from dominant definitions of crime and disorder by a complex nexus of social and legal procedures. The authors point in particular at the UK wide deregulation of occupational safety and health, and breaches of consumer and environmental protection. For instance, the services sector, so central to the functioning of the consumption-led neoliberal city (with its tourism, cafes, bars and restaurants), is regulated largely by Environment Health Officers (EHOs), yet in a time of proliferating expansion in the industry, the authors cite a UK-wide 50% drop in full-time officials between 1996/7 and 2000/1, while half of all local authorities failed to lay one single prosecution in 2000/1. Another example is road traffic. The increase of commercial activity in cities is primarily dependent on the circulation of commodities by road transport: deadly air pollution, and a host of other negative social and environmental impacts are a concomitant by-product of this process⁷⁹.

While the study makes an important intervention in debates around crime and harm discourses, they may have left the most compelling crimes out of their research field. In 1991, Frederic Jameson felt compelled to remind his readers of an obvious but frequently repressed fact: "...namely, that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror"⁸⁰. Recent revelations about Primark's (Argyle Street) 'cheap-enough-to-chuck' clothing being manufactured by sub-contracted child labour in India⁸¹, and Tesco's (Argyle Street) continued abuse of its monopoly power through the exploitation of labour in China, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh⁸², merely hint at the full-scale of global, not to say local, exploitation that underpins the spectacular commodity realm. Glasgow's frequently boasted about position as one of the major retail shopping centers in Britain, masks and disavows a devastating trail of labour and environmental harm on a global scale. Yet, the trajectory of pro-business, entrepreneurial urbanism has led to a "stabilization of opportunity structures for corporate crimes and harms", whilst the relatively powerless and weak are further exposed to the "punitive gaze of extended surveillance capacity"⁸³. While the stick is delivered to the traders of Paddy's Market, Tesco Metro, that most potent exemplar of monopoly capitalism, middle-class consumption tastes and gentrification, is offered the carrot of 'competitive' lease rates to steal further up Argyle Street – an accomplished private-public corporate partner in the pioneering of new urban frontiers.

This Dull Rented World

In the context of Glasgow's wider redevelopment and regeneration ambitions, the location of the cultural quarter in the Merchant City is far from accidental. It is hoped that the 'arts led property strategy' will act as a 'regenerative tool' for property development in the area, thereby increasing 'external investment confidence' in the enormous gap site at St. Enoch car park and the 'unproductive' buildings and land at the Bridgegate by the River Clyde. City support for a 'cultural quarter', and the extremely heavy-handed and selective policing of the Merchant City, especially Paddy's Market, can be seen as parallel strategies of boosterism and stigmatization: on the one hand, to encourage gentrification, on the other to legitimise it. Developers' plans to explore the potential for a mixed-use redevelopment of the Union Railway bridge and the Hope House homeless hostel adjacent to Paddy's Market⁸⁴, reflect City Council and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow plans to extend the Merchant City down to the River Clyde as part of the delivery of the enormous 13-mile, £5.6 billion Clyde Waterfront development project⁸⁵. 'The Step Change for Glasgow Action Plan To 2013' makes clear that the 'redevelopment' of Paddy's Market is a central part of the 'Arts Led Property Strategy': a key 'indicative output' for growing the metropolitan core.

As part of the same 'Step Change' plan to move Glasgow up "the value chain", the removal of "barriers to growth and success" is seen as prerequisite for economic expansion. For the city center elite, backed by a whole panoply of civilising and criminal discourses, the solution to the problems of poverty, homelessness and drug addiction seem to be simple: removal and disavowal. In this potentially problematic context, the 'creativity fix' comes into its own as a 'soft policy' legitimization tool: "A creative strategy is easily bolted on to business-as-usual urban-development policies, while providing additional ideological cover for market-driven or state-assisted programs of gentrification. Inner-city embourgeoisement, in the creativity script, is represented as a necessary prerequisite for economic development: hey presto, thorny political problem becomes competitive asset!"⁸⁶.

The Creativity Fix is most insidious when it assumes that every city can win in the battle for talent and growth. Creativity scripts, however, are better understood as "zero-sum" urban strategies constituted within the context of uneven urban growth patterns in an increasingly polarized framework of inter-city competition. Intercity competition, as Harvey observed, has come to act as an external coercive power over urban governments, forcing them to adopt increasingly 'flexible', pro-business urban strategies that tend to enhance rather than constrict the mobility and 'external coercive power' of global finance capital. Cities are thus compelled to become collaborators in their own subordination to capital accumulation strategies. The result of these entrepreneurial strategies, Peck reminds us, has been the weak emulation of "winning" formulas, "quickly stacking the odds against even the most enthusiastic of converts"⁸⁷. As Peck astutely observes, the 'creativity fix' is less a solution to these problems and more a response to them. For all its aesthetic pretensions the 'creative economy', as Florida happily acknowledges, is underpinned by predatory venture capital: "Venture capital and the broader system that surrounds it provide a powerful catalyst to the chain of creativity and an even more powerful mechanism for bringing its fruits to the commercial market"⁸⁸. Glasgow's adherence to the creativity script is merely another soft policy option for compliant forms of corporate welfare, regressive social redistribution and 'trickle-up' economics. In fact, precisely the same forms of compliance that has allowed neo-liberal forms of capitalism to lead us into the deepest global recession since the 1930s.

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