

Glasgow: Creative City of the Spectacle



Source: 'Council in Road Cone Statue Plea', BBC News

On the UK and Europe's periphery, with its shipbuilding past, Glasgow has long been denoted a 'creative city'. Its latest peak in its "cycle of innovation" (Hall 1998: 500) has been as Europe's exemplary milieu developing this latest 'Growth Machine' policy discourse, pioneering post-industrial city branding in the 'Miles Better' campaign while its 1990 Capital of Culture programme remains the "the role model for culture-led regeneration" (Garcia 2005: 845). Simultaneous, and at first unrelated to this reputational redevelopment, traffic cones have regularly appeared upon the head of the Duke of Wellington statue, facing east from Glasgow's Royal Exchange Square. While this revelry occurs elsewhere in the UK, within Glasgow the practice has been co-opted into marketing and placemaking, elevated to a spectacle representative of the city's proclaimed humour, warmth and creativity. The power dynamics between this unusual 'bottom up' creative practice and its 'top down' nomination and appropriation as such reveal the discourse of the creative city to be a creative production in itself, a knowledge industry able only to intervene in representation rather than reality.

This revelation relies on the apparently functionless banality of the act, unorthodox to the discourse. The hatting of the Duke does not conform to acts of productive creativity that form contemporary measures of milieu, "basic drivers of innovation and regional and national growth" (Florida 2003: 3). Conducted in the leisure hours of the nocturnal economy, the practice does not aim to create quantifiable economic value. Furthermore, its unclaimed authorship, and collective continuation, renders the act without an artist, as such without a securely decipherable social or political position, message or meaning, revealing the assumption a 'Creative Class', and their personal intentions, are always identifiable through the material needs of self-presentation and promotion. However, anonymity also allows the neutralising of the act's possible intention as dissensus to Glasgow's urban order, despite the subversion of a symbol of the urban control of movement placed iconoclastically on a monument to the dominant order of the Union and its Empire, facing an inner city historically excluded from its benefits.

Without apparent meaning, the assumed archetypal 'anti-social' or student prank is forgiven and elevated to a spectacle, but bypasses comprehension as anything more, allowing for its marketing co-option as a positive representation of the city and its inherent irreverent creativity. Instead of bestowing collective authorship by 'the people', evoking the City's strong communal social and labour history, place, the City itself, is presented as the artist, the enabler of vernacular creativity. As such, urban social unity appears, "mediated by images" (Debord 1967: 7) against a backdrop of the increasing wealth and spatial inequalities within the city transforming Wellington's surroundings in the culture-led "gentrification" of the Merchant City (MacLeod 2002: 611).

Once elevated to iconic to Glasgow, the hatted statue reveals a fascinating virtuous dialectic between spectacle and its boost to the proclaimed milieu that ennobled it. The act reveals the ludicrous logic of state intervention to create inspirational environments, a promotion of inebriated statue-dressing stands in direct conflict to health and safety consciousness, the 'zero-tolerance' outlook of Strathclyde Police and prolonged efforts to address the "unbalanced relationship" (The Scottish Government, 2011) with alcohol that has long characterised Scotland, Glasgow and the East End in particular. Although the statue has inspired innovation for commercial



Source: Apple UK App Store

marketing agency have exploited its notoriety in promotional, leases for promotional hats and an iPhone App game that links to the city's Twitter feed. This new era of innovation, in creating the creative city, appears to confirm the importance of geography, history and thus social context to even wider defined cultural production than Florida understands (2003: 9). As marketing agencies creatively embrace co-option, the fast policy transfer of the discourse is likely to result in further attempts at spectacle creation, where "everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation" (Debord 1967: 8).

gain, most notably in the production of visual art and novelty hats, 'top down' interventions in the reality of an urban creative milieu appear ridiculous in the extreme, both contradicting the elementary state aims of health and social order and attempting to manipulate an individual cognitive process. Such confirms Glasgow's long-term success as a 'creative city' lies in its innovative promotional and spatial regenerative emphasis on its representation as a creative milieu. A modern art museum opened in the Royal Exchange in 1996, immediately centring the statue in an emerging cultural quarter. Despite regular removals, the city's award winning

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