Nice work if you can get it:

the mercurial career of creative industries policy

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ABSTRACT

Driven by the belief that culture-based enterprise can be promoted as a driver of economic development, governments all over the world have developed policies aimed at boosting their creative industries. These policies ought to present some new, long-term opportunities for cultural workers, but in practice they seem more likely to universalise the traditionally precarious work profile of artists. Focusing on the career of creative industry policy in the UK, the USA and China, this paper calls for an assessment of its model of job creation from the standpoint of quality of work life.

The newfound affection of governments all over the world for boosting their ‘creative industries’ presents a conundrum. This emerging policy consensus assumes that culture-based enterprise can be promoted as a driver of economic development for cities, regions and nations that want to keep up, catch up, or not be left out of the knowledge society. At the very least, then, the policy spotlight ought to present some new, long-term opportunities for cultural workers accustomed to eke a fragile, makeshift living out of art, expression, design, and performance. So far, however, the terms and framework of the kind of development envisaged by policy-makers seem guaranteed merely to elevate this traditionally unstable work profile into an inspirational model to be emulated by employees in related industrial sectors. If the creative industries become the ones to follow, jobs, in short, may well look more and more like gigs; nice work if you can find it.

The shift in nomenclature – from the rusty coinage of ‘cultural industries’ to the newly minted ‘creative industries’ – is usually credited to the UK’s incoming New Labour administration of 1997, whose zealous modernisers renamed the Department of National Heritage as the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and promoted, as its bailiwick, a paradigm of self-directed innovation in the arts and knowledge sectors of the economy. In the pages that follow, I will summarise how this policy paradigm has fared in the years since the establishment of the DCMS. Focusing on its career in the UK, the USA, and China, I will describe some of the reasons for its enthusiastic reception and will try to assess its model of job creation from a qualitative standpoint. For while statistics about the growth and productivity of the creative sector have been legion, there has been precious little attention to the quality of work life with which it is associated.

The concept of the creative industries was initially introduced in Australia by Paul Keating's government in the early 1990s, but its definitive expression, in the founding documents of Blair's DCMS, bore all the breathless hallmarks of New Economy thinking: technological enthusiasm, the cult of youth, branding and monetisation fever, and ceaseless organisational change (DCMS, 1998). Regardless, the paradigm survived the New Economy burnout, and was further endowed with statistical and fiscal backing from the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry. While this renewed interest stemmed, in large part, from militantly optimistic estimates of the export trade potential of 'British creativity', few could have predicted that the creative industries model would itself become such a successful export. In the space of a few years, it had been adopted as a viable development strategy by the governments of countries as politically and demographically disparate as Russia, Brazil, Canada, and China, to name just a few of the largest. As the global competition for talent heats up, it has been relatively easy to persuade bureaucrats that high-end human capital and intellectual property are the keys to winning a permanent seat in the knowledge-based economy. But those same officials are ever tormented by the task of finding the right kind of industrial strategy to deliver the goods. On the face of it, the carefully packaged policy of the 'creative industries' appears to fit the bill.

It may be too early to predict the ultimate fate of the paradigm. But sceptics have already prepared the way for its demise: it will not generate jobs; it is a recipe for magnifying patterns of class polarisation; its function as a cover for the corporate intellectual property (IP) grab will become all too apparent; its urban development focus will price out the very creatives on whose labour it depends; its reliance on self-promoting rhetoric runs far in advance of its proven impact; its cookie-cutter approach to economic development does violence to regional specificity; its adoption of an instrumental value of creativity will cheapen the true worth of artistic creation (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005). Still others are inclined simply to see the new policy rubric as 'old wine in new bottles' – a glib production of spin-happy New Labourites, hot for naked marketisation but mindful of the need for socially acceptable dress. For those who take a longer, more orthodox Marxist view, the turn toward creative industries is surely a further symptom of an accumulation regime at the end of its effective rule, spent as a productive force, awash in financial speculation, and obsessed with imagery, rhetoric, and display (Arrighi, 1994, 2005).

Scholars and activists with ties to the labour movement can ill afford to be quite so cynical or high-minded in their response to these developments. Industrial restructuring over the last three decades has not been kind to the cause of secure, sustainable livelihoods, and indeed many of the changes have been aimed directly at destroying the power of trade unions. In OECD countries, the traditional cultural industries have been a relatively significant union stronghold with a long and fruitful history of mutual support between craft-based locals. While capital owners have succeeded in offshoring production wherever possible, the power of organised labour has held on in core sectors, especially those dependent on a heavily localised urban supply of skills and resources that cannot be readily duplicated offshore. In some cases, the migration of an industry to new regions has even helped to gener-

ate a pioneer union presence. For example, when Walt Disney created Disney World in Central Florida in the 1960s, he had little option but to bring along the unions, instantly making his company the largest union employer in the state.

Certainly, new patterns of investment, rapid technological change, and global production have all taken their toll on employees' capacity to engage in collective bargaining. But fair labour at union rates and conditions remains an institutional feature of cultural industries (film, radio, TV, theatre, journalism, musical and other performing arts) as they were classically constituted from the 1930s. By contrast, the non-commercial arts have long been a domain of insecurity, underpayment, and disposability, interrupted only by those few who can break through into an often lucrative circuit of fame. Maps of the 'creative industries,' as pioneered by the DCMS, include the traditionally unionised commercial sectors, but the entrepreneurial paradigm touted by the policy-makers defiantly points away from the fair standards commonly associated with a union job. The preferred labour profile is more typical of the eponymous struggling artist, whose long-abiding vulnerability to occupational neglect is now magically transformed, under the new order of creativity, into a model of enterprising, risk-tolerant pluck. So, too, the quirky, nonconformist qualities once cultivated by artists as a guarantee of quasi-autonomy from market dictates are now celebrated as the key for creative souls with portfolio careers to integrate into the global value chains that are central to the new topography of creative markets.

Even more challenging, from a strict labour perspective, is the rapid flourishing of activities tied to self-publication or amateur content promotion. The most admired artefacts on the new information landscape are websites like YouTube, Flickr, YourGallery, and MySpace, which, along with the exponentially expanding blogosphere, attest to the rise of amateurism as a serious source of public expression. Hailed as a refreshing break from the filtering of editorial gatekeepers, they are also sources of free, or cut-price content – a clear threat to the livelihoods of professional creatives whose prices are driven down by, or who simply cannot compete with, the commercial mining of these burgeoning, discount alternatives. The physical construction of the World Wide Web has itself been a mammoth enterprise of free, or undercompensated labour (Terranova 2000); its adoption as a commercial delivery model (based on the principle of 'disintermediation') has taken its toll on jobs and small businesses in the brick-and-mortar world of sales, distribution and retail; and its use for unauthorised file-sharing has been legally opposed by all the entertainment unions as a threat to their industries' workforce. The rapid flowering of these networked media channels has hastened on the process – initiated with the onset of a consumer society in the early twentieth century – by which the burden of productive labour is increasingly transferred on to the user or consumer.

Nor is the web-enabled 'liberation' of individual creators an easy escape from corporate capture. Self-generated Internet buzz has been hailed as a viable avenue for artists looking to market their work independently of the entertainment majors. Recent examples include: the musical careers of Sandi Thom, the Arctic Monkeys, Lily Allen, and Gorillaz; films like *The Blair Witch Project*, and *Snakes on a Plane*; and

Chinese Internet celebrities like the brazen blogger known as Sister Hibiscus and the Sichuanese mountain girl known as Tianxian MM. Arguably, the largest beneficiaries of these innovations are the corporate majors, for whom the profitable cooption of amateur strategies has long been a studied preoccupation: as in ‘cool hunting,’ the adoption of ‘indie’ aesthetics and attitudes, the manufacture of microbeers, and the tactic of viral marketing among college students. In traditional media enclaves, the allied discount practice of reality-based programming is by now an indispensable principle of profit. Nothing has more radically undermined union efforts to preserve the integrity of pay scales for talent in the media industries than the use, in TV and radio, of amateurs on reality (and talk) shows of every genre and description.

Where unions side with corporate employers – in the IP clampdown against file-sharing, for example – there is every justification for lamenting the conservative character and outcome of ‘business unionism’. But in non-unionised industries like IT and software design, the labour implications of non-proprietary activities waged against the big corporate powers are equally fraught. For example, the cooperative labour ethos of the FLOSS (Free/Libre Open Source Software) networks of engineers and programmers has been lauded as a noble model of mutual aid in the public service (Stallman, 2002; Weber, 2004). But FLOSS has been much less useful as a model for sustainable employment. Seduced by the prospect of utilising unpaid, expert labour, tech multinationals have increasingly adopted open source software like Linux, reinforcing concerns that the ethical principle of free software for the people equals free labour for corporations.

Like corporations in pursuit of non-proprietary public goods, national economic managers are keen to discover fresh and inexpensive sources of value – hidden in off-the-chart places or unexploited cross-industry connections – that can be readily quantified as GNP. The biggest returns are in high-tech industries, of course, and so it is not surprising that the creativity bandwagon is being driven by the much lionised experience of lucrative fields like software design. The original inclusion of this sector in the DCMS map of the creative industries helps to explain why governments have been so willing to promote the new policies¹.

But what if the newfound interest of states and corporations were a genuine opportunity for creative labour? After all, creatives, in any field, yearn for attention and recognition, and habitually bemoan neglect on the part of institutional authorities. So, too, wasn’t the demand for creative, meaningful work in factories and offices a rallying cry of the 1970s ‘refusal of work’? Calls to humanise the workplace by introducing mentally challenging tasks and employee innovation have long been pushed as an alternative to the humdrum routines of standard industrial employment. Could some of those hopes be realised through the elevation of creativity to a keystone of industrial policy? Critics of the new policy paradigm have an obligation to look for emerging profiles of a ‘good job’ that might stand the test of time in

¹ The DCMS boosted employment by 500,000 and income by £36.4bn by adding in the UK’s software sector. Even so, influential DCMS consultant John Howkins, author of *The Creative Economy* (2001) regrets that the majority of science-based industries were left out of the DCMS definition, seeing no justification for excluding them from the rubric of creativity other than the administrative claim of another government department, Trade and Industry. (Howkins, 2004)

an economic environment where the ground now shifts underneath workers with disturbing frequency.

A Very UnBritish Coup

At the dawn of the post-war Labour government, its policy architect, Aneurin Bevan, depicted Britain as 'an island of coal surrounded by a sea of fish'. It was a memorable image of the nation's natural assets, and it captured his own party's mid-century appetite for nationalising them. Fifty years later, in the wake of de-nationalisation, film honcho David Putnam offered an update: Britain had become 'an island of creativity surrounded by a sea of understanding' (Ryan, 2000: 16). Not a winning phrase, for sure, but Putnam's characterisation was an equally faithful reflection of the temper of the New Labour government he would shortly join as an advisor on science and culture. From the outset, Tony Blair's Cool Britannia would be a massive PR campaign to persuade the world that the country Napoleon once mocked as a nation of shopkeepers was now a nation of artists and designers, with the future in their enterprising bones. 'Creative Britain' was rolled out under the kleig-light scrutiny of the tabloid media, and, for several years, resembled one never-ending launch party, with artists and arts grandees playing front-page Eurostar roles ordinarily reserved for sports and movie celebrities.

The real story behind Creative Britain was much more prosaic, of course. By the 1990s, the nation's economy was no longer driven by high-volume manufacturing, fuelled by the extractive resources that Bevan had extolled. Like their competitors, Britain's managers were on the lookout for service industries that would 'add value' in a distinctive way. In the bowels of Whitehall, an ambitious civil servant came up with a useful statistic. If you lumped all the economic activities of arts and culture professionals together with those in software to create a sector known as the 'creative industries,' you would have, on paper at least, a revenue powerhouse that generated £60 billion a year. (In 2000, revised and improved estimates put the figure at £112 billion). Even more illustrative, the sector was growing at twice the rate of growth of the economy as a whole. For an incoming government, looking to make its mark on the sclerotic post-Thatcher scene, the recent performance and future potential of the creative industries were godsend. Britain could have its hot new self-image, and Blair's ministers would have the GNP numbers to back it up. Unlike Bevan's coal and fish, or Thatcher's North Sea oil, creativity was a renewable energy resource, mostly untapped; every citizen had some of it, the cost of extraction was minimal, and it would never run out.

As far as cultural policy went, almost every feature of the old dispensation was now subject to a makeover. When the Arts Council was established in 1945, its first chair, the serenely mischievous John Maynard Keynes, described the evolution of its famous 'arms-length' funding principle as having 'happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way – half-baked, if you like' (Keynes, 1945: 142). Keynes would have us believe that Britain acquired its arts policy, like its empire, in a fit of absent-mindedness. In truth, it was simply falling in line with every other Western social democracy by acknowledging that the market failure of the arts should be counteracted through

state subsidies. Keynes's batty boosterism – 'Let every part of Merry England be merry in its own way. Death to Hollywood' – was a far cry from the regimen of requirements demanded fifty years later by Chris Smith, the first DCMS minister, who declared *ex officio* that he did not believe in 'grants for grants' sake' (Smith, 1999: 14).

To qualify for public funding under Smith's department, artists had to show a demonstrable return on investment; they had to prove that their work furthered public goods like diversity, access, relevance, civic pride, community innovation, and social inclusion. DCMS policies asked artists to play directly functional roles in society: assisting in the improvement of public health, race relations, urban blight, special education, welfare to work programs, and of course, economic development (Smith, 1998). Politicians began to recount visits to homeless shelters or hospitals where the introduction of some worthy arts program had transformed the lives of residents. Soon, they were speculating on how a savvy application of arts skills could help reduce crime, truancy, teenage pregnancy, poverty, and neighbourhood degradation. Naturally, most working artists, suspicious of their newly designated role as instruments of social policy, saw these functions as more appropriate to glorified social workers than to traditional creative practitioners. For those who had never hewed to the principle of arts autonomy, and who subscribed instead to the more progressive ethos of service to political ideals, New Labour was demanding that artists be socially conscious in passive and complicit ways, and to eschew any real opposition to the state. Harold Rosenberg spearheaded a similar complaint in the 1930s, when he declared that the New Deal's WPA programs, offering a government wage in return for socially useful art, heralded the death of the bohemian avant garde, as a radical force, at least (Rosenberg, 1975).

But to see the policy changes simply as a way of reining in, and exploiting, artists' often wayward citizenly energies is to miss much of the rationale for the shift in government focus. Nicholas Garnham has argued that the new policy paradigm was driven, in large part, by innovation fever around IT development, and therefore should be seen primarily as an extension of information society policy (Garnham, 2005). The key creatives and the highest economic performers in this scenario were the engineers and technologists whose entrepreneurial efforts as change-agents in New Economy start-ups rode the trend of business management away from the stifling, cumbersome domains of the large hierarchical corporation. The IT industry buzz around creativity caught the imagination of British politicians who saw a convenient bridge to other sectors that were potentially rich in IP exploitation. Indeed, by 2003 the figures for software, computer games, and electronic publishing clearly dominated (at 36.5 per cent) the revenue statistics for the creative industries as a whole (Prowse, 2006).

With the Creative Industries Task Force lighting the way, every region of Britain soon had its own Cultural Consortium, along with designated 'creative hubs' and 'cultural quarters.' Development of the sector has been recently acknowledged by Gordon Brown, Blair's heir apparent, as the vital spark of the future national economy. Pushed as an all-purpose panacea, the development formula was even embraced as common sense by left-leaning academics weaned on critical cultural policy studies (Hartley, 2004). Most conspicuously, the triumph of the paradigm was achieved in the absence

of any substantive data or evidence to support the case for culturally-led regeneration (Oakley, 2004). After all, what quantitative measures are useful in assessing the impact of cultural activity, in any given community, on reducing crime, binge-drinking, adult illiteracy or sexual intolerance? Common sense observation tells us that these results are much more likely to be offshoots of the gentrified demographic changes typically associated with cultural quartering.

Despite the lip service paid to supporting independent artistic initiatives, which are liable to evolve in unforeseen shapes and sizes, the preferred framework for business development in this sector remains some version of the New Economy start-up, a micro-business or SME structured to achieve a public listing, or geared, in the short-term, to generating a significant chunk of IP by 'bringing ideas to the market.' Thus, in the Creative Economy programme, the latest DCMS productivity initiative 'to make Britain the world's creative hub,' the government offers its services as a broker between creative entrepreneurs and potential investors in the understanding that creators are not always the best placed to exploit their ideas. Though they might win awards, they will remain commercially weak, incapable of breaking through to the market, unless they are incubated and groomed for growth or for hitting the jackpot.

While creative work can surely be organised and channelled in this enterprising way, and to patently profitable ends, it has yet to be shown that the nature of the enterprise produces good work, never mind good jobs. The productivity statistics that orbit, halo-like, around creative industry policy, do not measure such things, nor has there been any DCMS effort to date that assesses the quality of work life associated with its policies. This omission is all the more remarkable if we consider the high status that governments, historically, have accorded cultural creativity when it comes to maintaining a nation's quality of life in general. A fuller, multi-faceted appraisal of creative worker profiles would go a long way to answering the questions that labour advocates have about this sector.

The Great American Bootstrap

In the British case, as I have shown, the state has taken a more active role in cultural policy, elbowing aside the 'arm's length' tradition, but only to ensure that reliance on state assistance will diminish as rapidly as possible. Government action, in the creative industries model, is aimed at stimulating and liberating the latent, or untutored, entrepreneurial energies that lie in reserve in every pocket of cultural activity; a hand up, in other words, rather than a hand-out.

The American case-history is complicated, from the outset, by the selective lip service paid to the First Amendment. As Toby Miller and George Yudice have argued, the widely accepted claim that the USA does not dabble in cultural policy because it strives to maintain a strict constitutional separation between the state and cultural expression, is somewhat disingenuous. The state, for example, has long nurtured the entertainment industries – especially Hollywood – through tax credits, a range of other subsidies, and lavish trade promotion (Miller and Yudice, 2003). These myriad forms of market protection have been extended, more recently, to the US-based media Goliaths – General

Electric, Disney, Time Warner, Viacom, Liberty Media, NBC, News Corporation – whose conglomerate operations and properties dominate almost every sector of cultural expression in the USA. Their ability to secure government-granted monopoly franchises brings untold wealth and power (McChesney, 2004). Who could maintain that this long-established reliance on government largesse does not amount to cultural policy in all but name? Nor is the practice limited to domestic operations. Though the USA took the best part of two centuries to become a net IP exporter, its strong-arm overseas efforts to enforce the IP rights of Hollywood and other content exporters through international agreements such as TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) along with those brokered by the WTO (World Trade Organisation) has been a driving preoccupation of US trade policy since the 1960s. Indeed, from the perspective of many developing countries, IP protection vies, currently, with the projection of pre-emptive military force as the dominant face of US power abroad. In the case of the conflict in Iraq, for example, State Department plans to privatise that country's economy gave extraordinary prominence to the sanctity of IP rights.

While the state's market protections for these industries are not necessarily content-specific, cultural content has long been an active component of US foreign policy. This was especially the case during the era of the Good Neighbor policy in Latin America, when Nelson Rockefeller headed up the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (Yudice, 2004). It would be impossible, moreover, to ignore the explicit use of targeted cultural policy in the Cold War in the staggering range of activities sponsored by CIA fronts like the Congress for Cultural Freedom (Saunders, 2000). While more formally abstract, the profile of free artistic expression promoted by government agencies like the USIA (United States Information Agency) to highlight the virtues of living in the 'free world' was no less ideological. With the end of the Cold War, the propaganda value of the autonomous artist evaporated overnight; the spectacle of American artists strenuously exercising their freedoms was no longer serviceable. In 1997, the same year as the New Labour turnaround, the National Endowment for the Arts policy document, *American Canvas*, laid out a remarkably similar template for applicants to follow, in order to apply their work to socially useful ends, 'from youth programs and crime prevention to job training and race relations' (Larson, 1997). Just as in the British case, the artist was reconceived as the model citizen-worker – a self-motivated entrepreneur who is able to work in a highly flexible manner with a wide range of clients, partners and sponsors.

While American fine arts policy, strictly speaking, has been mired in the moralism of the Culture Wars, the commercial cultural industries have been consumed with the gold rush to secure ownership of IP rights in every domain of expression. For the most part, they have enjoyed a 'first mover' advantage in global markets, and so there has been little need for the change in nomenclature that New Labour initiated, or for institutional authorities to view creativity as a development strategy for 'catching up.' Instead, in the USA, the creative industries are more routinely, and bluntly, referred to as copyright or IP industries.

By contrast, it is in urban policy that the USA has witnessed the most visible expression of the turn to creativity. The 'creative cluster' was pioneered in the 1990s

as a development strategy for cities that had lost their industrial job base (Landry, 2000). These often involved costly investments in museums or heritage centres, in the hope of attracting a steady tourist stream, if not the kind of destination payday eventually achieved by the Bilbao Guggenheim. In the USA, this strategy dovetailed with the fiscally disastrous policy of building downtown stadia, mostly at taxpayer expense, for major league sports teams (Rosentraub, 1997). In the world of inter-urban competition, managers of second and third tier cities were persuaded that they had no alternative but to enter into this beggar-thy-neighbour game of attracting prestige (Cagan and DeMause, 1998). Unlike the sports teams, the museums and heritage centres were not nomadic franchises of a monopoly cartel, but they were often a harder sell in provincial cities.

Richard Florida's 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, gave city managers a new rationale for upgrading their competitive status. Urban fortunes, he argued, depend on the ability to attract and retain the creative workers whose capacity to innovate is increasingly vital to economic development. Since these cherished souls are highly mobile, they are choosy about their live/work locations, and the cities they tend to patronise are rich in the kind of amenities that make them feel comfortable. Tolerance of ethnic and sexual diversity, for example, rates high on Florida's indices of liveability. Though Florida estimated the Creative Class in the USA to be 38 million strong (lawyers and financiers are lumped along with artists, entertainers and architects) its demographic was unevenly distributed, and heavily skewed toward liberal enclaves in the blue states (Florida, 2002). Aspiring cities in pursuit of better regional leverage in the 'creative economy' would need to become eligible suitors by submitting to a makeover, somewhat along the lines of the television programme *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

Civic leaders rushed to embrace Florida's vision, express-ordering a 'creative strategy' from Catalytix, his private consultancy group. Announcing that Detroit, Dearborn, and Grand Rapids would soon be 'so cool you'll have to wear shades,' Michigan governor Jennifer Granholm commanded her state's mayors to adopt hipsterisation strategies that were part of a new 'Cool Cities' commission (Michigan, 2004). A hundred signatories from almost 50 cities gathered in Tennessee to agree on the Memphis Manifesto, a blueprint for turnaround communities willing to compete for creative talent (Creative 100: 2003). In 2004, the US Mayors' annual conference passed a resolution on the role that creative industries could play in revitalisation. Jobs in these sectors, it was agreed, were unlikely to be outsourced to other countries, and could prove more sustainable than the high-tech employment that cities had spent so much money trying to attract in the previous decade. Aside from the domestic impact, the mayors also acknowledged the potential for global export: overseas sales of creative products were estimated at \$30billion (US Mayors, 2004).

The zeal for jumping onto the creativity bandwagon was also inspired by some supporting data. A 2004 mapping of the country's creative industries by the non-profit body Americans for the Arts showed almost three million people working for 548,000 arts-centric businesses (2.2 per cent and 4.3 per cent, respectively, of US employment

and businesses). One in 24 US businesses was estimated to be arts-centric, and these belonged to the fastest growing sector of the economy (Americans for the Arts, 2004). The World Bank reported that more than half of consumer spending was on outputs from creative industries in G7 countries, and that, globally, creative industries accounted for 7 per cent of world GDP (Nabeshima and Yusuf, 2003). The export data encouraged the view that the competition for creative talent was being waged on a global scale. In 2005, Florida published his alarmist sequel, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, warning that the Bush administration's domestic and foreign policies were driving the best and the brightest overseas (Florida, 2005). City officials in Europe and East Asia responded by rolling out the red carpet for Florida's consultancy. In tune with the hapless efforts of Midwestern mayors to attract gay college graduates, the Governor of Singapore relaxed his city-state's prescriptions against homosexuality (Economist, 2000).

The solutions being prescribed for strivers hoping to move up in the creativity rankings are easy to satirise: Jamie Peck has described them as 'another variant of the Papua New Guinean cargo cults, in which airstrips were laid out in the jungle in the forlorn hope of luring a passing aircraft to earth' (Peck, 2005). Nonetheless, the cures are advertised as low-cost, and almost pain-free, often consisting of little more than image regeneration around public amenities, such as the creation of bike paths, the makeover of some centre-city ex-industrial warehouses or the stimulation of hip entertainment and consumption zones. Compared to the lavish tax exemptions and infrastructural outlays used to attract large corporations, creativity initiatives are soft budget items, requiring minimal government intervention with little risk of long-term commitments from the public purse. Moreover, traditional Chamber of Commerce businesses can rest easy that no significant public resources will be diverted away from serving their interests. As Peck observes, 'for the average mayor, there are few downsides to making the city safe for the creative class – a creativity strategy can quite easily be bolted on to business-as-usual urban-development policies. The reality is that city leaders from San Diego to Baltimore, from Toronto to Albuquerque, are embracing creativity strategies not as alternatives to extant market-, consumption- and property-led development strategies, but as low-cost, feel-good complements to them' (Peck, 2005, 763).

Left wing critics of these development strategies have pointed out that cities high in the creativity rankings also top out on indexes of class polarisation and social inequality; that the gentrification of creative neighbourhoods drives out those most likely to innovate; and that Potemkin cultural zones which are too obviously staged for consumption scare away the precious recruits (Marcuse, 2003; Maliszewski, 2004; Peck 2005). Moreover, those unlucky enough to be designated as uncreative have little to look forward to but trickle-down leavings since they will almost certainly be performing the low-wage service jobs that support their lifestyling superiors. Right-wingers has been even harder on the Florida cult, seeing nothing but a policy to elevate liberal havens as models of growth (Malanga, 2004; Kotkin, 2004, 2005). In fact, they argue, Republican cities that don't rate as particularly creative. Low-tax, business-friendly suburban cities, like Phoenix, Houston or Orlando are the ones with the best performance on job and population growth.

If the creative city is a liberal plot, it is a far cry from the liberal city of the post-war economy, which relied on federal block grants to oversee the basic welfare of its citizens. With budgets cut to the bone, and the citizenry increasingly cut off from institutional protections, American urban policy-makers have all but embraced the accepted neoliberal wisdom that self-sufficient entrepreneurial activity is the best, if not the most just, stimulant to growth. The individual career portfolio of the young, freelancing creative is a perfect candidate for this profile of self-reliant productivity. Whether the policies will generate employment remains to be seen. They cannot do worse than their stadium-based predecessor. Surveys over the last three decades have shown that the presence of professional sports teams or their facilities failed to register any significant impact on employment or city revenue (Noll, 1997). Indeed, one Chicago economist estimated that if the public money expended on a typical stadium project were dropped out of a helicopter over the city in question, it would probably create eight to ten times as many jobs.

But, unlike the helicopter drop, the creative jobs in question will not be scattered over a wide area. They have a tendency to cluster, and in zones that become socially exclusive in a short space of time. If the creative cities campaigns do result in more jobs, and if they prove to be economic accelerators, they will almost certainly intensify the polarisation of city life between affluent cores and low-income margins; any significant spoils will be captured in the zones of growth, and by a minority of creative workers at that. In this context, Florida's nostrum, that creativity is everyone's natural asset to exploit, is difficult to distinguish from any other warmed-over version of American bootstrap ideology.

China's Leap Forward

The creative industries policy model is a very recent import in mainland China, but the PRC is arguably the most important of the many developing countries that have seized on it to help drive its national economy towards the most prized IP fruit at the top of the value chain (Keane, 2004). The British Council (an unabashed leader in the policy export field) defines a state in 'transition' to full exploitation of its creative economy as 'one which has moved beyond the development stage but is still unable to protect intellectual property rights in creative goods and services'. To say the least, leading IP exporters like the UK have a vested interest in seeing Chinese authorities enforce IP rights protection in their 'transition' to fully-fledged capitalism. They are more ambivalent about the prospect of aiding the transition from a labour-intensive 'Made in China' economy to an innovation-based 'Designed in China' economy with domestic control over patents and IP rights. Nonetheless, this is the direction of the PRC's breakneck growth, and it is fully backed by a powerful, state-driven economy in the lock of a long-term policy of technonationalism. Whether the drive applies only to high-tech sectors, with large-scale capitalisation, or whether it extends to 'softer' creative domains, where smaller enterprises tend to flourish, remains to be seen. Because of the market's jumbo size and the broad spread of the industrial operations involved, the result will surely affect livelihoods everywhere. We have seen this in the case of

manufacturing and white collar services, and there is no reason to think that creative occupations will be any different.

For China's policy cadres, there are good reasons to welcome the shift in nomenclature from 'culture' to 'creativity'. The watchful officials who oversee all media content have been accustomed to subordinate cultural policy to the goals of developing a market economy. The Cultural Revolution, by contrast, is officially remembered as a period when too much primacy was given to culture, and the economy was in the passenger seat. Most of China's leadership cadre since the philosophically colourful rule of Mao have been sober engineers, sworn to uphold the technonationalist project. Policy about culture has been restricted, and thereby relegated, to the traditional domain of heritage arts and crafts, while the ongoing partial commercialisation of state-owned media, especially new media, is a politically fraught endeavour. On the face of it, creativity is a much safer term to promote. Not only is it unlikely to be inducted into a top-down political program of the kind that flourished in late Maoism. It is also understood to originate with individuals, whose appetite for self-expression is widely tolerated as long as it avoids politically sensitive topics. Indeed, if this appetite can be steered into appropriate industrial channels, then government elites can well imagine that they will have contained an otherwise volatile source of public dissidence.

But political expediency is not the primary reason for jumping onto the creativity bandwagon. The push for creative industry (*chuangyi gongye*) policy could not have arrived at a more relevant time for the Asian giant's economic development. China's march forward cannot be sustained unless it proves it can generate its own intellectual property by jumpstarting home-grown innovation rather than imitating or adapting foreign inventions. Speaking at a national conference on innovation in January 2006, Premier Wen Jiabao declared that 'independent innovation' (*zizhu chuangxin*) would be at the core of the country's development strategy over the next 15 years. Nothing less than the honour of the nation was at stake. Accordingly, leading brokers in the creative industries field are lobbying hard to have the concept fully incorporated into the nation's Eleventh Five-Year Plan (Rossiter, 2005).

The government can point to fledgling industrial design achievements in hard technology such as automobiles, white goods, and semiconductors, while global firms in a whole range of advanced industries have rushed to set up offshore R&D centres, employing local talent, in Shanghai and Beijing's free trade zones. But the creative sectors where the country's designers are expected to enjoy a running start are in video games, animation, advanced computer graphics and multimedia communications – fields directly relevant to consumer electronics and digital media. Online gaming (officially recognised as a 'competitive sport' by the state's sports agency) and mobile-media (in a country with several hundred million cell phone users) are already proven as dynamic sectors, and government backing in these areas is readily available. Moreover, the potential for promoting cultural nationalism, and limiting foreign content through the use of Chinese theming is bottomless. Producers of multimedia genres can draw on a reservoir of several centuries of myth and legend as well as courtly and folk narratives that are well-known elements of the national patrimony.

China's foreboding bureaucracy stands in the way of creative producers, who depend on permits from a range of different industry regulators (the Ministry of Culture, State Administration of Industry and Commerce, State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, Ministry of Information Industry, and the General Administration of Press and Publication), each with its own prescriptions for a cultural field or genre (Cunningham, Keane, Ryan, 2005). This licensing system, which also functions as an instrument of content surveillance, is particularly fraught for new (or cross-) media production which customarily straddles several of these traditional industries. The more high-tech the activity, the more chance producers have of falling under the rubric of the Ministry of Science and Technology whose top-level mandate to back innovation generates the most fast-track results (Claydon Gescher Associates, 2004). Even so, the focus there is on getting big companies publicly listed. This policy of 'securing the big and letting go the small,' as Jing Wang observes, is a 'vision contrary to that of the creative industries,' and so the preferred PRC policy is to push the creativity initiatives in Hong Kong with the mainland export market in mind (Wang, 2004).

It took two decades of liberalisation to wean China's state-owned enterprises off the state subsidy system of non-performing bank loans. Many of the new creative industries post-date state ownership and are being developed with a minimal number of public purse-strings attached in the expectation that start-ups will become self-sufficient in the short term. If they fail to reach the threshold for market entry, or if they cannot secure the necessary licenses, creative producers will take their chances in the unauthorised grey economy where precariousness and uncertainty are a way of life. For new entrants who successfully navigate the ministerial agencies, government support is short-term, and highly conditional not only on the commercialisation of products but also on finding private investors or sponsors as soon as possible. The resulting imposition of entrepreneurial enterprise often results in unorthodox forms of investment that flout legality and transparency, exposing producers to chronic risk.

Though it is the world's most unionised economy (the national labour federation claims as many as 150 million members), China's trade unions are ineffective (mostly providing social services), and have only a weak foothold in the commercialised sectors where the new creativity initiatives are being launched. Mainland enforcement of labour laws and standards is notoriously feeble, and the labour markets that have formed in the most dynamic sectors of the economy are the most volatile and unstable, prone to high turnover and a chronic workplace culture of disloyalty, both on the part of employers and employees. In a country where, only yesterday, livelihoods were guaranteed by an 'iron rice bowl,' and fewer and fewer workers, whether skilled or unskilled, expect their current employer to be around for very long, job-hopping has become a national pastime. Moreover, it is in the high skill sectors, where contracts include no stipulations on maximum working hours, that seventy-hour workweeks are increasingly an expectation on the job (Ross, 2006). The new focus on creative industries is being developed in the heart of this superflex work environment, where pressures from market exposure and project deadline crunches combine to inject extra anxiety into the perennially immature labour markets that plague cultural production.

Unlike 'British creativity,' for example, which is a recognisable global commodity with a proven historical track record, the Chinese counterpart must be laboured into being in a media environment where content is still largely a state monopoly, and it must do so in the teeth of longstanding Orientalist stereotypes about the static and derivative nature of Chinese society. For sure, there are Chinese equivalents of the working-class characters in the film, *The Full Monty* (a feelgood allegory of New Labour's policy), laid off and down on their luck, but tapping into their latent creativity to stage their own entrepreneurial comeback. Yet they are unlikely to be lionised as 'model workers,' unless they produce some credible IP; nor is a one-party government obliged to sell the creativity paradigm to socially marginal and underemployed populations, as is the case in a democratic polity like the UK.

To ensure the market capture of IP, most of this activity is being placed in locations that are under surveillance. The Chinese government has endorsed the construction of creative industry zones in selected cities with proven talent pools: a constellation of creative districts in Beijing; multiple centres in Shanghai developed under the auspices of the Creative Industries Association; the 'Window of the World' zone in Nanjing, 'Creation 100' in Qingdao; and further-flung outposts in technology-driven urban economies like Xian and Chengdu (Sun, 2006). Investors who set up in these locations will enjoy the same kind of trade, tax, and operational incentives as in the export-processing and high-tech zones familiar from earlier phases of the reform era. Overseas investors with unrealistic expectations of fast profit will doubtless enter into the same kind of informal agreements as before, conceding technology transfers in return for the promise of government, or market, access. In the case of the new sectors, however, the proximity to fresh IP will render the transfers ever more sensitive to the foreign owners, and ever more attractive to home-grown entrepreneurs and the officials who back them.

As is the case in the high-tech manufacturing sector, the labour market for industry creatives is a tight one. In New York, an estimated 12 per cent of workers are from the creative sector, with the figure reaching 14 per cent and 15 per cent in London and Tokyo respectively, but in Shanghai, it stands at only one per cent². To ease the bottleneck, in 2004 Beijing announced a massive training and recruitment scheme to produce more than a million additional 'gray-collar' employees; the category includes software engineers, architects, graphic artists, and industrial designers (Xinhua, 2004). If the government succeeds, then the current labour shortage, and the accompanying wage spiral, may be short-lived. But the cause of the instability does not lie simply in the lack of supply. Workers are now as footloose as global corporations, and less likely to commit to employers beyond the short term. In stunning contrast to their parents, Chinese youth who are entering the urban labour markets have been weaned in a socio-economic environment where loyalty to anything other than the family is either an anachronism or a liability. Having witnessed the shredding of securities in all aspects of their lives, Chinese people of a certain age have truly seen all

2 These figures were cited by Li Wuwei, chairperson of Shanghai's Creative Industry Association, at a January 2006 session of the Shanghai People's Congress (SPC). [<http://www.designtaxi.com/news.jsp?id=1807&monthview=1&month=1&year=2006>]

that was solid melt into air, and their children have been raised to believe they must be authors of their own lives.

The advent of the creative industries sector as a tentative object of state attention comes at a moment well before the maturing of the requisite labour market. Will this sector produce its own version of the exploitation endemic to the low-wage, labour intensive sweatshops of South China's export-processing and assembly zones? Will we see the same ominous combination of demographic pressure, sky-high turnover, lax regulation, and cut-price bidding emerge in the microbusinesses and SMEs of the creative economy? If so, then China's pivotal position in the global economy means that its creative sector, like its other industries, could set norms that will affect wages and working conditions in other parts of the world. The 'China price,' so feared by domestic producers in OECD countries, may well come to be associated with 'Designed in China' just as it has been the overseas hallmark of 'Made in China.' This is already beginning to happen in architectural and software firms, where the quality of the work being outsourced to mainland China is leaping up the value chain. The downward pressure felt on employees will not just be felt onshore. For most young Chinese, the pristine opportunity to work at a creative craft under their own initiative is likely to come at the cost of a high-stress worklife dictated by chronic uncertainty, where self-direction morphs into self-exploitation, and voluntary mobility is a fast path to disposability.

Conclusion

The conditions for the emergence of creative industries policy differ from state to state, as do the resources available in any country to fit the policy requirements. At the very least, the quicksilver adoption of the concept can be taken as evidence of the ready globalisation of ideas about governance. But there are other, more tangible reasons for its mercurial career: its core relationship with the exploitation of intellectual property; its connection, in urban development, with property revaluation; its potential for drawing marginal cultural labour into the formal, high-value economy; and the opportunity to link dynamic IT sectors with the prestige of the arts. Most mundane of all, the creative policy requisites are generally cheap to implement, involving relatively small investments on infrastructure and programmes, and even smaller outlays on human capital, since the latter rely mostly on stimulating the already proven self-entrepreneurial instincts of creative workers, or on mining the latent reserves of ordinary people's creativity. The returns on these slight investments, if they are realised, promise to be substantial. In sum, it is fair to observe that all of the above-mentioned attributes are familiar features of global capital formation, with managers and investors who are ever on the lookout for fresh sources of value, labour, and markets.

While the rage for creative industries policy has sparked scepticism, and even contempt, from radically-minded artists and artist groups, mainstream organisations have gone along with it in general, seeing the potential for greater economic leverage, more direct access to patronage, and an expanded range of partners and clients. To the degree to which the policy returns are envisaged as a high-stakes lottery – with hot tickets in the hands of those quickest to go to market – there are indeed likely to be some handsome winners, reinforcing the residual Romantic concept that creativity resides in select geniuses (albeit a genius for business). Yet, for

most of the players, the lottery climate of sharpened risk will only accentuate the precarious nature of creative work, with its endemic cycles of feast and famine, and generally reinforce the income polarisation that is by now a familiar hallmark of neoliberal policymaking.

So, too, the rhetoric about taking creativity seriously has won admirers in unlikely places. For one thing, it feeds into longstanding demands for humanising the workplace. Who would pass up the promise of inventive, mentally stimulating alternatives to the repetitive routines of assembly lines or data entry pools of the recent past, not to mention the dark Satanic mills of yore? A self-managed working life free from rigid supervision and conformity, where independent initiative was prized above all? But business owners can also take heart from the proposition that such workplace permissiveness is not so much a concession to pushy employees as a proven source of profit in and of itself. Indeed, the record of work restructuring shows how easily the original worker demands for liberation from boredom – dating to the 1970s ‘refusal of work’ — have been interpreted as opportunities to increase productivity and shed ‘surplus’ employees. Managerial innovations in the last three decades have been devoted to freeing up the workplace in ways somewhat different from the employees’ Utopia – by stripping away layers of security, protection, and accountability. So, too, technological innovations have also made it possible to prise work away from its fixed anchoring in a single job with a single job-holder; work tasks can now be broken down, reassigned all over the world, and the results recombined into a new whole through the use of work-flow platforms.

Consequently, wherever work has become more feelgood and free, it has also become less just, and this formula has perilous consequences for an industry that takes creativity as its watchword (Ross, 2002). Job gratification, for creatives, has always come at a sacrificial cost – longer hours in pursuit of the satisfying finish, price discounts in return for prestige, and disposability in exchange for mobility and autonomy. Yet there is nary a shred of attention to these downsides in the statements and reports of the creative industries policymakers; only a passing concern that the ‘instrumentalising’ of culture might bring undue harm to the cause of aesthetics, as evinced by Tessa Jowell, Blair’s successor to Chris Smith as DCMS Minister in the UK (Jowell, 2004).

If sustainable job creation is to be a true goal of the new policymaking, then it would be best to acknowledge from the outset the well-known perils of precariousness that afflict creative work, and then build in some guarantees of income and opportunity to protect those who won’t ever win the IP jackpot prizes. There is no shortage of documentation on these perils, dating back to the rise of culture markets in the late 18th century. Policy-makers would do us all a favour if they put aside the productivity statistics and solicited some hard analysis about what it takes to make a ‘good’ creative job as opposed to generating opportunities for occasionally finding ‘nice work.’

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