

A more critical view of the creative industries: Production, consumption and resistance

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The UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) defines the creative industries as being comprised of:

Advertising
Architecture
Art and Antiques
Crafts
Design
Fashion
Film
Interactive Leisure Software
Music
Performing Arts
Publishing
Software Design
TV and Radio
Visual Arts

This relatively new re-designation of artistic and creative activity as the 'creative industries' is a term that seems to have growing contemporary currency. This is, to a large extent, born of a particular focus on the role that artistic and cultural production and consumption plays within the capitalist economy. Consequently, many current discussions of the creative industries display a rather 'one dimensional' (Marcuse, 1964) analysis of cultural life, understanding it from a position firmly located within the locus of market mechanisms. The DCMS's approach to the creative industries is similar to orthodox approaches to other industrial sectors

within the national economy, and its attention is routinely devoted to auditing earnings, turnover, exports and jobs within the creative industries.

Wu (2002) has charted the shift towards the commercially-oriented focus on cultural production that has underwritten this new designation of the creative industries since the Thatcherite 1980s. Wu particularly highlights the encouragement of increased interfaces between artistic production and private business sponsorship; between cultural events and corporate advertising; between culture and the 'value added' to corporations; as well as the advent of privately-owned artistic collections as economic investments during this period. This shift towards a commercial agenda was accompanied by policy changes in public organisations such as the Arts Council of England, from policies that emphasised the support of the arts as a public good to those concerned with 'value for money' and the cutting of public funding for the arts.

The acceptance of an essentially commercial framework for the understanding and development of arts and cultural production has continued within the UK public sector. After the Labour Party's 1997 election victory, Chris Smith, the incoming minister for Culture at the DCMS, signalled a celebration of the role that culture and creativity could play for a national resurgence, after years of Thatcherite cultural philistinism. However, his focus on the creative industries is still very much a commercial one, located within the context of national economic growth (Smith, 1998) and seen through the lens that attendant assumptions about capitalism and markets provide. In the UK, cultural economists, government officials and cultural policy-makers at regional and local levels have taken this agenda on board, and limit themselves to the role that creativity plays in terms of regional economic growth and inward investment; job creation, business growth and start-ups; and to the development of new consumer markets such as local cultural tourism. Some aspects of this cultural policy agenda, such as urban regeneration and improved 'quality of life', social inclusion, cultural diversity and heritage protection, are to the public good; it would be crass to suggest otherwise. However, the nature of creativity, cultural production and the cultural values that inform it suggest something much wider than the current, commercially-oriented 'universe of discourse' (Marcuse, 1964) allows for, including issues about the economic and social significance of new forms of interaction

and exchange within cultural production, and the politics that are expressed through acts of creativity. This is not to say, of course, that discussion of the relationship between art, culture and politics is a new endeavour. Indeed, some of the contributors to this special issue of *Capital & Class* survey aspects of this long and rich history. But the changed nature of work and production, and the DIY cultural interaction and political expression that are often found in certain aspects of contemporary cultural life, are throwing up new issues and have implications for how we understand these changes within the disciplines of economics, sociology and politics.

This special issue is intended to offer a more critical dimension to considerations of the creative industries. It brings together articles that, in different ways, situate aspects of cultural production within a wider social, economic and political context.

The consolidation of capitalism and cultural containment?

In *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse suggested that contemporary cultural capitalism contained two contradictory trends: one tending towards the greater consolidation of capitalism and the 'containment' of the potential for cultural political change, and another tending towards the breaking of that containment. We can identify examples of these counter-tendencies in some of the social, economic and political changes that the rise of the creative industries suggests.

Significant economic and work-related changes, at both structural and micro-levels within the creative industries, have potential implications for the future of Western capitalist economies as a whole (Hodgson, 1999). For instance, new creative technologies offer the capacity for consumerist customisation of products and experiences in an increasingly open-ended way, so that the traditional distinction between production and consumption is itself breaking down. The act of consumption *becomes* the moment of production. Given this, many aspects of cultural production and the rise of the creative industries are central to the continued propagation of a consumer society. The production of lifestyles, cultural experiences, constructed heritages, fantasies, images, meanings and emotions are coming to replace objects and things as the locus of the consumer society (Rifkin, 2000),

and may serve to consolidate a culture of capitalism. The creative industries stand as a model for the collapse of the traditional distinction between work and leisure, which may encourage more consumerist identification with work identity and consumerist lifestyles, and may be a significant model for the future organisation of capitalist work. Cultural capitalism has historically demonstrated a capacity to assimilate new cultural values and production 'back into' the mainstream economy, to sanitise cultural critique and so commodify culture as a passively-consumed series of 'events', participated in as something extrinsic to one's own life and capacity for creative expression.

However, certain aspects of the cultural economy suggest a change in the nature of 'work' and labour. They signal an alternative economic organisation of creativity, and a fundamentally different relationship between work and life that hints at the potential for an expansion of autonomy (Gorz, 1999). The fraying of the traditional distinction between work and social life may encourage alternative, self-organised social, economic and cultural forms to emerge. The rise of the creative industries and the 'creative class' (Florida, 2002) may mean that new economic and political spaces are created 'from below', which reject culture as something externally organised and managed. Many examples of new forms of economic interaction both come from and take on cultural forms and expressions, and represent a very vital politics.

Resistance has always been integral to many art forms and movements. The articles in this special issue discuss two aspects of creative resistance. Firstly, we survey some specific examples of overtly political art, discussed in connection to wider notions of cultural politics, which implicitly or explicitly relate to the wider sweep of new social movements and 'new politics'. A second notion of creativity within this theme of resistance is the creativity that informs people's everyday lives. This creativity may not culminate in actual artistic, cultural or overtly political *outcomes*, but is found in the seemingly mundane *processes* by which people live their lives. These more everyday kinds of cultural resistance can be seen in the way people use cultural spaces, and in the new ways in which people are developing ownership and authorship of their own DIY culture, as an actively-produced aspect of their lives rather than as a series of passively-consumed cultural events. This signals the way

that culture is produced and responded to in an alternative, non-consumerist way, as a felt and intrinsic aspect of life, rather than as something supplied by official institutions and markets. These political processes of creativity are often intimately connected to underlying political values, to 'new sensibilities', new forms of cultural solidarity and conviviality.

The subtitle of this special issue is *Production, Consumption and Resistance*, and the individual contributions are divided into three sections that relate to this general trajectory. The first deals with *Cultural Economics*, and the implications that the creative industries might have for a critical political economy. Firstly, Andreas Wittel's contribution discusses the relative failures of Political Economy to adequately come to terms with some of the issues arising from the expansion of creativity in the new cultural economy. He surveys the relationship between Cultural Studies, Political Economy and the Political Economy of Communications. He suggests that there is a lack of mutual understanding and recognition; a failure to learn from each other; a paucity of breadth in their respective fields of research and, perhaps most significantly, a lack of clear focus upon the changed nature of labour, subjectivity and creative work within the new cultural economy. This translates into a failure to develop adequate perspectives with which to critically grasp political economic change. Given the tendency towards subjectivity and creativity occupying a central place in new forms of cultural production, Wittel points to the need for methodological innovations within political economy in order to enable the development of a 'political economy from below'.

Owen Worth and Carmen Kuhling continue this theme, theoretically exploring the potential antimonies involved in situating the anti-globalisation movement within a neo-Gramscian analysis. Their argument highlights the difficulties of providing a sensitive account of these counter-hegemonic struggles that contextualises them within the political economic structures of global capitalism, while also dealing with the cultural specificities and the differentiated and diffuse natures of these forms of cultural politics.

Gerry Strange and Jim Shorthose, taking a largely Gorzian perspective, highlight artistic labour as something that transcends traditional notions of economic motivation, and occurs in particular socio-economic spheres that may relate to an expanded realm of autonomy. Given that aspects

of artistic labour seem to transcend traditional economic motivations, their argument, similar to Wittel's, highlights the poverty of orthodox economic theory in understanding and valuing this labour. Their article culminates by pointing to a political trajectory that revolves around the defence and expansion of autonomy, as a social configuration that allows such artistic labour to proceed more widely, and to resist economic colonisation and commodification. Neil Maycroft provides a polemical exploration of the concept of life-style. He places the concept at the centre of contemporary economic and cultural propagations of consumerism—the creative industries' selling of consumerist identities, meanings and experiences—and highlights the extreme banality with which the concept is often used. In this sense, Maycroft's work can be seen as a provocative case exposing the containment of cultural life to which Marcuse refers, which many of us will recognise, and for which certain sections of the creative industries should take much of the blame. His work is informed by a fundamental distinction between 'life-style' and life, as the capacity for creative self-expression.

In the second section, on *Artistic Production and Politics*, the contributions share a focus upon particular artistic productions that resonates, in some ways, with contemporary cultural politics. Ian Waites provides a hidden history of nineteenth-century artistic representation that expressed opposition to the Parliamentary Enclosures as a cultural politics of space. His article surveys both literary and visual resistance to the Enclosures; resistance that constituted an overt political response to the conservative cultural hegemony of the time, which was geared towards the privatisation of land and cultural spaces and the corresponding denigration of vernacular cultures that had previously used them. He hints at the way in which the radically new form that such artistic production took, over and above its overt political content, expressed an embryonic cultural resistance that echoes some of the radical artistic forms that emerged within twentieth-century modernism.

This theme is taken up by Adam Barnard in his discussion of the Situationist International. He demonstrates how the development of new artistic forms and techniques contributed as much to the texture of their cultural politics as did their concrete political perspective, and how the techniques of *dérive*, *détournement* and the construction of 'the situation' enabled a new form of critique of the contemporary specta-

cular society and consumer culture. Inga Scharf continues this theme in her history of New German Cinema. She explores the shifts in political motivation, cultural position and filmic techniques in Germany during the 1960s and 1970s. She notes the resonance of the new cinema with the new politics of the time, and sets this against the backdrop of wider cultural shifts in post-war Germany: from a largely conservative, inward-looking society, in 'denial' and producing rather kitsch cinema, towards the cultural revolutions of the 1960s.

Tony Burns discusses the work of Ursula Le Guin in the context of contemporary critical politics. He explores the resonance between Le Guin's science-fictional writing and her own political outlook, and the way such creative work can be situated within wider Marxist and anarchist political perspectives. Burns's account of Le Guin's work is something of a case study in a wider debate, which highlights the rich, nuanced and sometimes difficult relationship between, in this case, her ethically-oriented creative writing, and more overt and developed political theories of the world.

The third section, on *Cultural Spaces and Cultural Lives*, includes contributions that look at wider notions of culture; at how specific examples of culture and cultural spaces are produced; and how the everyday cultural processes within them signal forms of resistance. In the context of a discussion of the European Social Forum, Simon Tormey recounts the perhaps inevitable tensions within a culturally-oriented notion of politics and political action. These tensions revolve around the interplay between the issues of open, playful and participatory *socio-cultural* politics on the one hand, and overtly *political* mobilisation, raising issues of effectiveness, on the other. This account draws attention to the tensions within the very notion of 'political organisation' itself, and within the relationship between an organisation-as-effectiveness strategy, and the 'disaggregation' that more cultural orientations tend towards. Indeed, Tormey's article relates to a central tension between *culture as political resistance* on the one hand and *politics as effective strategies for change* on the other.

Jim Shorthose discusses different forms of cultural development and interaction, and the underlying rationale that cultural policy takes, through his comparison of cultural quarter development in Leicester and Nottingham. He uses the distinction between the 'engineered' and the 'vernacular',

explored by Ivan Illich, to highlight the institutional and 'one-dimensional' nature of orthodox cultural policy-led developments. He contrasts this with the DIY nature of vernacular culture, which offers the potential for new forms of cultural production and creative expression. Steven Miles explores similar themes in that, while he recognises the official, commercial and 'global' nature of the cultural development of the 'NewcastleGateshead' Quayside area, he suggests that working-class cultures are receiving and responding to such developments in an active and creative way so as to create their own meanings, and author their own cultural space inside overtly corporate cultural spaces.

Dave Byrne and Chris Wharton's polemic takes a far more sceptical view of cultural development in Newcastle-Gateshead. They argue that the kind of culture offered by official cultural institutions—and by projects such as the 'NewcastleGateshead 2008 City of Culture' bid—underplays working-class cultural vibrancy, and weakens the scope for political expression through culture. Mark Jayne discusses similar attempts at cultural development and urban regeneration in Stoke-on-Trent. Jayne shows how a lack of policy co-ordination, combined with local political competition and inappropriate micro-cultural management, has culminated in the failure of cultural development to connect sufficiently with the felt needs and experiences of cultural producers and participants in the local community.

Carmen Kuhling concludes this section with a discussion of the economic and cultural impact of the country-wide smoking ban in Ireland. She situates this piece of cultural legislation within the wider context of Irish politics and policy, linking it to an 'accelerated (cultural) modernisation' currently underway in Ireland. Despite the relative lack of cultural political resistance to the ban, she explores how the smoking ban has given rise to some forms of informal cultural resistance and how pub culture, as a specific site of cultural activity, has responded to it.

Some of these contributions are more overtly (neo) Marxist than others; some have more overtly macro-political implications; others are more micro-orientated. However, they share a common interest in exploring the potential of culture and creativity within people's everyday lives for the expression of alternative social, political and economic forms of production, consumption and resistance.

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