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Regional imaginaries of governance agencies: practising the region of South West Britain

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Abstract:

Changes in government and governmentality in the UK have witnessed what has been termed a 'regional renaissance' over the last decade. This has led to an increase in the number of offices, institutions and agencies operating with a regional remit that is based upon a notion of fixed territorial containers. One sector that has increasingly been brought into the orbit of the new regional policy framework is that of the creative industries, and research is required in order to understand how creative industry governance agencies imagine and interpret the regional spaces that they administer. Notwithstanding the supposedly agreed upon and bounded nature of the territories over which they have competence, we find that personnel working within these regional bodies negotiate and imagine regional space in a number of ways. Drawing on empirical work with three creative governance agencies in the South West of Britain, we consider a range of dynamic and sometimes contradictory understandings of regional space as practised through their policy development and implementation. The paper traces how the practice of creative industry governance challenges the governmentally determined region and, by implication, any territorial unit as a naturally given container that is internally coherent and a discrete space available for governance. In doing so, the paper has broader lessons for effective policy delivery more generally.

Introduction

The region remains as an important category in human geography: closely intertwined with the discipline's history, it has mirrored geography's epistemological twists and turns. Indeed, Thrift (1994: 200) argues that 'around the practice of doing regional geography can be found most of the important problems that human geography faces'. In parallel, a practical interest in the region that has blossomed over the last decade or so with state-theoretic concerns that are connected to complex restructuring in the face of globalising and localising processes (Peck 2001: 446). As a backdrop to these scholarly concerns there has been what has been described as a 'regional renaissance' in policy with greater attention being paid to the region as one of the key arenas through which policy is delivered and governance increasingly happens.[1] This regional resurgence has been happening globally, and at a number of scales (Pike and Tomaney 2004: 2091). This paper, however, will focus on the UK.

During the later 1990s, the UK witnessed a resurgence of regional institutional structures, in what Deas and Giordano (2003: 233) describe as 'a partial and hesitant rediscovery of regionalism by UK policy makers'. This development was underscored by the New Labour government's plans for devolution in Scotland and Wales from 1997, and reached a watershed in England in 1999, with the creation of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and parallel establishment of Regional Chambers within England's nine standard administrative divisions (Deas and Giordano, 2003: 235-6). This scalar fix was seen by many as a crass exercise in functionalist boundary construction (Macleod and Jones,

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[1] 'Regional renaissance' is from Jones and MacLeod (1999). See also Jones (2009); Jones and MacLeod (2004); Jones (2007); Jones et al (2004); Macleod and Goodwin (1999); Pearce and Ayres (2007); Pike and Tomaney (2004) and Tomaney (2000). For work on the rise of the region more broadly, see Gilbert (1988); MacLeod and Jones (2001); Paasi (2002; 2003; 2004); Peck (2001) and Storper (1997). For work that is contextualized at a European level, see Deas and Giordano (2003); Deas and Lord (2006) and Giordano and Roller (2004).

2001: 671), exhibiting a 'gauche insensitivity to local civil society and a staggering lack of imagination'. In effect, within both political strategy and academic discourse, the region is still often 'scripted unreflectively and treated as [a unit within] a pre-given boundary' (MacLeod and Jones, 2001: 670). Administrative thinking often conceives of the territories as bounded social and political spaces that can be effectively controlled and managed. The scale, structures and politics involved in these changes to the regional terrain have been mapped and explored, and an increasing body of work has examined how the region as a discrete and homogenised territorial unit that is organisationally available can be challenged. For instance, work by Jones and MacLeod (2004) has unpicked how the standard English regions may be undermined by sub-regional challenges, while research by Jones et al (2004) and Jones (2007) has examined how the region is understood and expressed by the people who work at the Regional Development Agencies. This paper develops work on the peopled state by recognising the analytical value of thinking about the geographical imagination, and explaining how powerful regional imaginaries that are being (re)produced by regional governance organisations are challenging ideas of a fixed, stable and homogenous region. Rather than focus on the Regional Development Agencies, we look at the regional agencies and institutions that have been established to deliver policy in the South West. This focus on agencies that deliver policy across the region allows us to explore how the circulation of policies and ideas results in different articulations of regional space.

One sector that has had to respond to this 'regional renaissance' is the creative industries, which are becoming ever more prominent both on policy agendas and in academic research.[2] Despite the long history of economically orientated arts and cultural activities,

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[2] In defining the 'creative industries', we refer to the UK Government's Department of Culture, Media and

Christophers (2007) sees the 'creative industries' as actually being constructed and created as an industrial sector through the process of administrative change during the 1990s. In the UK, the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) established a creative industries 'task force' with the strategic objective to 'analyse the needs of the creative industries and develop policy across government' to ensure their value to the UK was sustained and developed (DCMS 2000:4.). One of the major outputs of this task force was the publication, in 2000, of a regional agenda for the co-ordination of national creative industries support and development, entitled *Creative Industries: the Regional Dimension* (DCMS 2000. See also Brown et al 2000 and Jayne 2005).[3] Increasingly seen as an important element in the economic and social development of post-industrial areas, this emergence has been remarked on, with a hint of cynicism, by Ross (2003: 32) who notes how 'creatives' have become of 'apple of the policy maker's eye', with creativity being the new 'wonderstuff' of economic transformation, and intellectual property being the 'oil of the twenty-first century'.

Spatial metaphors are a key motif of the creative industries lexicon. Indeed, a striking feature of much academic research on the creative sector has been the general trend to frame it through the discourse of the 'cluster', with its development understood through a notion of agglomeration (see, for instance, Bassett et al 2002; Brown et al 2000; Coe 2000; Coe and Townsend 1998; Cole 2008; Gibson and Kong 2005; Kong 2005; Pratt

Sport's (DCMS) recognition of thirteen creative sectors, and broadly follow Gill and Pratt's (2008, 2) regarding of the 'creative industries' as a political rebranding of the so-called 'cultural industries'. The DCMS (http://www.culture.gov.uk/ what_we_do/creative_industries /default.aspx, last accessed 29/11/09) who refer to the *creative sectors* as: advertising; architecture; art and antique markets; crafts; design; fashion; film and video; software and computer games; music and performing arts; publishing and television.

[3] DCMS publications show an expansion of 'regional thinking' between the 1998 mapping document, in which there was very little reference to regions, through the 2000 *Creative Industries: the Regional Dimension* report, in which regions were seen as key structures, to the 2001 mapping document that is further 'regionalised'. (1998 document last accessed on 12/08/2010 at www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4740.aspx; 2001 document last accessed on 12/08/2010 at www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4632.aspx.)

2000; Rantisi et al 2006; Scott 2000 and Turok 2003). Alongside this established literature is an emerging body of work that engages creative industries policy in relation to the region (Jayne 2005; Chapain and Comunian 2010). This paper contributes to this work by addressing the intersections between the creative industries and the territorial regions in the UK context. By examining three UK case studies of governance agencies that are required to operate at this governmentally determined regional level, this paper explores how such agencies imagine their regional remit. Building on Jayne's (2005) policy analysis, which explores the complexities of national governance of creative industries and the emerging regional picture, this paper examines what the people in these agencies actually do – how they interpret territorial directives and put into practice creative industry policy through the lens of their regional imaginations. Concurring with Jones' (2007: 6) contention that 'state personnel have been key producers of state apparatus' our empirical case study focuses on the way that the regional imagination of governance organisations and personnel affects the delivery of policy. This paper considers the regional consciousness of three creative industries governance agencies in South West England: Culture South West (hereafter CSW), Arts Council England, South West (hereafter ACE-SW) and South West Screen (hereafter SWS), presenting an analysis of the imaginaries and practices of these creative agencies. We find that recent shifts in these agencies' strategies have sought to meet, on the one hand, governmental requirements based on the assumption of the validity of discrete territorial blocks and, on the other hand, the largely topological nature of creative practice. Our empirical examination of how certain governance agencies practise regional space shows how the South West region emerges as a far from discrete and unitary object. Rather than a fixed and immutable 'subject' of governmental policy, the region emerges as a practised and peopled space (see also,

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Gibson, 2001) and as a site that is both a production, and also productive of complex spatial relations.

Combining policy discourse analysis and interviews with key personnel, we place ourselves within the networks of South West creative industry governance, understanding both its dynamic processes and its temporal depth. This work is based upon interviews, lasting between 2 and 4 hours, with six individuals who hold key strategic positions with regards to policy development within the three case study agencies. Interviews were also carried out with two key representatives of the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA). As well as being important creative industry governance organisations, our case study agencies have very different relationships with the creative sector and with both national and local government, and they also demonstrate distinct, yet intersecting, notions of the governmentally-determined 'South West'. Thus, CSW was a newly created organisation with limited funds, existing only in the context of (and, specifically, to deal with) the newly emerging regional framework. Following several spatial re-organisations, ACE-SW evolved from a complex history of post-war planning, with statutory existence and (significant) central funding, while SWS is contracted to deliver policy by the UK Film Council as a response to (but not solely bound to) the growth of the Regional Development Agency framework. The organisations' understanding of the South West as a region, together with the territorial organisation of their policy implementation, was further explored through a detailed analysis of policy documents, websites and reports.

Through our analysis, we examine how the supposedly solid territory of the 'South West' is negotiated, resisted and re-articulated. We find how these agencies are both adapting to the longstanding and embedded practices of the creative milieu, while also becoming

entangled with the emerging (and increasingly influential) territorial frame of governance reference. Further, the paper points to how each of the agencies negotiate the narrative of regional consciousness in different ways; adopting and deploying elements of regional rhetoric and spatial logic. We find the South West is both unstable and permeable and that it can, and does, change its nature at great speed. This synthesis, therefore, brings a more nuanced understanding of regional spaces of governance together with a deeper comprehension of how the spaces of creative industry governance are a continually negotiated and mutually constitutive phenomenon. The region emerges as an accomplishment of institutional operation together with embedded regional imaginaries (Paasi, 2004 and Philo and Parr, 2000). Such imaginaries play out in the development of regions as 'relatively permeable, socially constructed, politically mediated and actively performed' (Jones and MacLeod, 2004: 434).

Regional understandings

The South West is the largest and perhaps the most complex of the new English regions (Jones and MacLeod, 2004: 440). Stretching from Wiltshire to Cornwall, and from Dorset to Gloucestershire (see figure 1), the current 'South West' has been brought into being by the UK Government's inception of the South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), alongside the Government Office (South West) and the South West Regional Assembly. These regional institutions provide important financial support and strategic guidance for the creative industries. Employing over 144,000 people and generating £5.5 billion a year, the creative sector is the region's fastest growing industry (SWRDA, 2007: 4, Culture South West, 2006). Indeed, the South West region has been used as a pilot region for a national creative strategy, *Creative Britain* (DCMS 2008; 59). With the rise of the creative industries has come a steady increase in the number and

forms of governance agencies that have a remit to observe, manage, orchestrate and 'strategize' this newly constructed sector (see Christophers 2007; Jayne 2005). Regional development policy guidelines have tended to focus on the productive side of these industries, although there is an increasing awareness of the need to understand consumption patterns alongside this focus on production, particularly through the 'value chain model' used to define the creative sector (NESTA 2006; 55).
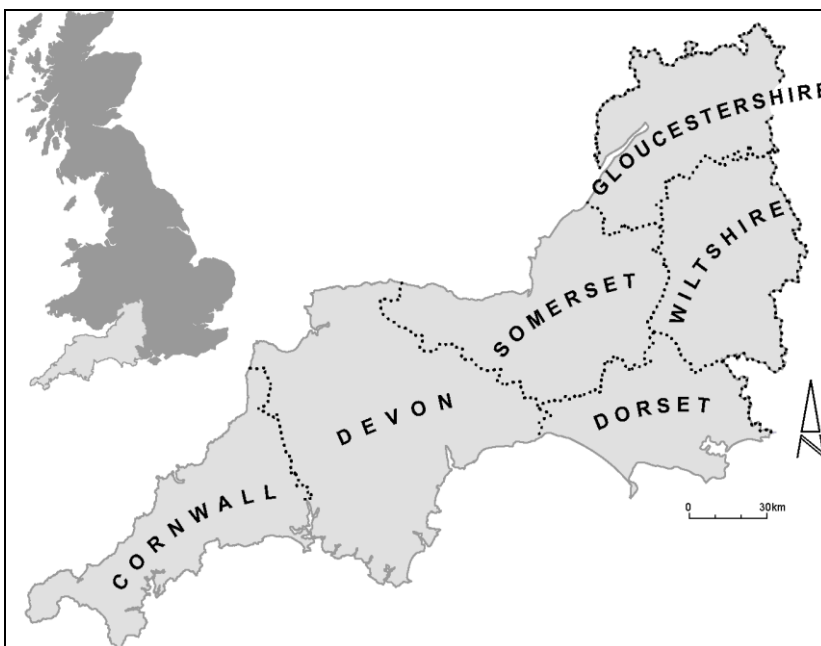

Figure One: The 'South West of England' one of nine of the English 'regions' established in 1998.
Source: University of Exeter, Geography Drawing Office.

The organisational availability of the South West as a discrete and homogenous unit has been challenged by Jones and MacLeod (2004), who begin to develop more historically and culturally contingent work that embeds a notion of the region within local politics and society. They distinguish between what they term *regional spaces* and *spaces of regionalism*, and investigate how the regional consciousness of various individuals and organisations serves to illustrate the 'incessant processes of destabilization and re-stablization in and through which regions and territories are institutionalised, demarcated, contested and restructured at varying scales and at particular historical moments' (Jones

and MacLeod, 2004: 447). Regions, therefore, are active agents, whose interpretation and imagination is far from stable, discrete and coherent.

While Jones and MacLeod (2004) have challenged the one dimensional stability of the South West through examining the politics of resurgent regionalisms, this paper carries out a similar manoeuvre through an exploration of the regional imaginaries of governance agencies operating at the level of the South West region. Following Harvey (1990), Gregory (1994), Said (1978) and Cosgrove (2006), we must take seriously the power that geographical imaginaries have in shaping both discourses and practices of governance understandings of regional space. Thus, to use Castree's (2002: 119) phrase, we need to 'step inside' the governance networks in order to understand the multiplicity of the South West region. For instance, although the rhetoric of policy development is determinedly that of the governmentally-delineated territorial region, SWRDA recognises some problems in the organisational remit that it has been presented with:

> [The South West is] a really quite big region, so if you went to Advantage West Midlands region, that's really quite a compact region, you can drive anywhere within an hour or something, and therefore businesses are quite happy to cluster and conglomerate around one particular centre. We're far too big for that, so we … have a number of sub regional areas, so we have area teams within the agency.
>
> Interview with SWRDA officers 19/03/10.

The complexity of dealing with the territorial South West is underlined as SWRDA struggles to come to terms both with treating such a large area as a singular territory and

also with treating its boundaries as solid. When marketing the creative industries in Bristol, for instance, SWRDA supported the production of a glossy promotional brochure, noting that '…it was mostly sent overseas, London and distributed around Bristol, … it didn't go very broadly across the region; it went outside of the region' (Interview with SWRDA officers, 19/03/10). Even as they set out a strong territorial basis for policy development, therefore, SWRDA had to make space for different articulations of creative industry practices. Such ambiguities are underlined, for instance, when SWRDA talk about the creative networks around Bournemouth, which are 'a little bit odder, in the sense they go up to London rather than to the rest of the region, so from a regional perspective they don't quite mesh' (Interview with SWRDA officers, 19/03/10).

Drawing from the experience of how SWRDA negotiates the South West, we suggest that there are three different imaginaries working within their practices. First, the unwieldy nature of the South West requires them to *think and work within the region*. Secondly, situating the South West within a national and international context, SWRDA *works within but thinks beyond the region*. Thirdly, through their recognition that personal and professional networks are inevitably ambiguous in respect to regional boundaries SWRDA *works and thinks both within and beyond the region*.

Through our analysis of the three case studies, we find that the delivery of effective creative policy requires the recognition of a geographical imaginary of regional space that is porous and allows for the multiplicity of regional practices that SWRDA's own imaginary indicates. The rest of this paper traces this negotiation of different regional imaginaries, focussing on the practices of creative governance personnel as they seek to produce effective policy for the creative sector. Thus, we find a set of pragmatic responses through

which agencies *think and work within the region*; *work within and think beyond the region*; and *work and think both within and beyond the region*.

Thinking and working *within* the region?

When Jones and MacLeod (2004: 441) sought to illustrate the problem of how new institutions of regionalisation are struggling to get to grips with their task, their reference point was a cultural strategy document for the South West of England produced by the 'regional cultural consortium', Culture South West, entitled *In Search of Chunky Dunsters* (CSW 2002). Established in 2000, CSW, as one of nine cultural consortia for the English regions, was a part of the newly created regional governance apparatus. Acting on behalf of DCMS for the entire territorial region, CSW aimed to 'champion the whole spectrum of cultural and creative interests in the region'; 'forge collaborative links'; create a 'regional cultural strategy'; and help to 'release the potential of culture to improve quality of life'.[4] In practice, it is clear that CSW were able to exercise some flexibility, being specifically tasked to 'respond to regional needs' (interview with CSW official, 12/5/08). As a product of New Labour's regionalisation programme, therefore, CSW was perhaps the organisation most closely linked to, and invested in, an idea of regionalisation. For our purposes, CSW provides an example both of how a newly established agency is involved in practising regional space across the whole South West, and also of how quickly the terrain of governance can shift. On the 31st March 2009 CSW was dissolved, and its role and associated imaginaries were integrated into the remits of other organisations coordinated through an action plan entitled *Delivering DCMS Cultural Priorities in the South West* (CSW, 2009).

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[4] www.gosw.gov.uk/gosw/culturehome/rcc, last accessed 19/01/09. In 2007-2008 CSW had a turnover of approximately £500,000 and a core team of six staff working out of SWRDA offices across the region. (Annual Report, downloaded from http://culture.swo.org.uk/resources/. Last accessed 17/03/09).

CSW understood regional space in terms of networking. This was particularly manifest in their literature and website. Their slogan *Joining the Dots* was repeated in a quarterly newsletter (*Dot 2 Dot*) and a research bulletin (*Finding the Dots*); the 'dots' being individuals and organizations who are embedded in cultural networks, including funders, researchers, developers, other agencies, local government officers and community groups (see CSW 2008a; 2008b). CSW functioned as match-makers, linking together stakeholders to deliver projects and strategy for the sector. This reflects a wider rhetoric of networking that was filtered down from DCMS through instructions on how to operate and deliver policy at a regional level. The effect of this proliferation of networking activity, supported by CSW and its publications, was the development of a series of sub-sector and, at times, sub-regional networks, including the South West Cultural Sector Research Group, the Cultural Leadership Programme and South West Screen. The anchor role of CSW and the growing prevalence of such networking organisations reflected, as well as reproduced, the 'institutional thickness' of creative industries within the region (see Amin and Thrift, 2007; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999).

In contrast to Jayne's (2005: 552) claim that creative sector networking policy often contains empty rhetoric, the CSW personnel we spoke to appeared keen to provide the practical delivery which ensured that, in their eyes, any policy void was filled:

> It made sense to us to say "we're Culture South West, we've got the network",
> … [W]e are aware that there isn't a strong infrastructure network of cultural
> officers within district councils [i.e. local government], so this is our role.
> Interview with officer of CSW, 12/05/08.

In operating their regional remit, CSW had to negotiate place-based identities, including the internal 'insurgent' politics that Jones and MacLeod (2004) highlight as a 'space of regionalism' in the form of a narrative of Cornwall being a separate and specifically 'non-English' entity. The manner in which all of the 'English' cultural consortia were rolled out from Westminster across the UK placed CSW in a seemingly difficult position with regards to existing local politics that challenged an official 'South West' regional discourse. In coping with what they saw as an internally complex region CSW coined the expression of the South West being a 'region of regions' (interview with officer of CSW, 12/05/08; see also CSW 2002; 2008a; 2008b). These sensitivities led CSW to express an awareness of this complex operation of regional imaginaries through a wish not to impose structures from above by questioning DCMS imposition: 'The DCMS doesn't really understand because they're in Cockspur Street [offices in central London], and not really seeing the role that they play' (interview with officer of CSW, 12/05/08).

A key aspect of CSW's practice was the manner in which they had both the independence to operate outside prescribed governance structures, while maintaining a fruitful relationship with cultural agents across the whole of the South West:

> We rejected the structure that was prescribed for us by DCMS, which gave us a great feeling [laughter]. … We had a system of [pause] 'four corner' meetings, we called them, where we brought together [different teams]…
> Interview with officer of CSW, 12/05/08.

Rather than replicating the apparatus and rhetoric of governance structure in an unthinking fashion, CSW negotiated what Jones (2007: 45) calls 'a difficult route between total subservience to, and outright contestation of, state organisations'. As these 'four corner' meetings suggest, the rhetorical language of *Joining the Dots* was matched in practice through a networking function that drew together what CSW perceived as an otherwise fragmented region through examining what they call the region's 'infrastructural ecology' (interview with officer of CSW, 12/05/08). From a practical point of view, CSW noted that such networking activity was crucial due to the large size, complex geography, diversity and largely rural nature of the south west, and can be contrasted with Jones and MacLeod's (2004) criticism of SWRDA's insufficient sensitivity to local distinctiveness. CSW's attempts to try and form a coherent 'regional consciousness', that avoided rendering the region as an homogenous plane points to the beginnings of what Amin (2004: 38) has termed a 'politics of propinquity'; a politics of place, which makes for a vision of priorities that are established as open, but fair, power-play between a series of actors and their potentially competing claims. CSW's 'four corner meetings' might be also be seen as 'nodes in relational settings', (Amin, 2002: 391), yielding a different local politics to one that assumes no local cultural or economic coherence, or, indeed, one that too easily blankets the 'local' as homogenous and singular.

While CSW practised a strong networking discourse *within* the region, their activities, knowledge and active relationships beyond the territorial space of the South West was limited. When asked about possible relationships that might be developed between the South West and Wales, for instance, the CSW executive answered: "I don't know what the structure is in Wales, I must admit. There isn't a sort of 'UK coalition' or something" (interview with officer of CSW, 12/05/08).

Even amongst the nine English regional cultural consortia, whatever the rhetoric and practices of networking occurring *within* the regions, such a language was not followed *beyond* the confines of the territorial blocks for which they had been given responsibility: 'we don't have the ability – that's ridiculous – of course we have the ability, [but] there's been no encouragement to look beyond the boundaries. … any real overt encouragement and funded work would be in region' (interview with officer of CSW, 12/05/08).

In many regards, it is ironic that the relatively high level of independence that was awarded to the regional cultural consortia, and which allowed them to develop distinct and locally-responsive practices, was also a factor that limited their ability (and, indeed, incentive) to develop networks beyond the confines of their regions. In other words, while CSW's flexible and networked approach operated *within* the South West, the statutory confining of their activities (especially in connection to funding) within external boundaries reinforced the impermeability of the region's territory. The territorial apparatus of governance may have molded CSW operations, but simultaneously, their actions and discourses also contributed to the production of the territorial imagination.

CSW's networking activities sought to respond to local conditions and challenges posed by the scale and variegated economic, political and social terrain that makes up the South West. In order to negotiate the tensions of place specificity, CSW sought an ethically inclusive engagement through their oft-used descriptor of the South West as a *region of regions*. In practice, however, the deployment of such language tended to underline the operation of an intra-South West system of networking that worked to reproduce an

internally focused and locally embedded set of regional imaginaries: discrete territorial blocks, available for governance (See, for example, CSW 2008a; 2008b).

Working *within* and thinking *beyond* the region?

The Arts Council England, South West (ACE-SW) is part of Arts Council England and has a broad remit as an arts development agency with a particular focus on audience development. In contrast to the short life of CSW, the Arts Council developed from the Council for the Encouraging of Music and the Arts and received its Royal Charter in 1946, going through a major regional reorganisation in 1994, when separate Arts Councils for England, Wales and Scotland were established.[5] With John Maynard Keynes as the first chairman and with strong links to the Royal Opera House, the Festival of Britain and the Haywood Gallery, the Post War years saw this strand of creative governance having great influence, operating through largely elite circles. The early Arts Council espoused the idea that there was strength to be found in the creative tension between the regions and the metropolis, setting out a challenge of how one can be both an international modernist and regionalist (Causey, 2006: 34-8). These regional debates have continued in the Arts Council's contemporary articulation, notably in 2002, following wider patterns of regional devolution, the Arts Council merged with the Regional Arts Boards, establishing regional offices in each of the nine English regions. A central issue for the Arts Council remains the tension between the relational nature of the artistic practices they support and the demarcated territorial region within which they are required to operate. For a deeply embedded and long-established organisation, therefore, the redrawing of regional boundaries in the late 1990s greatly impacted upon ACE-SW activities: 'when Wiltshire

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[5] In 2008-2011 ACE-SW planned to invest £62 million in to the arts in the South West. Following restructuring in 2009, a much reduced team works from a base in Exeter. Information from http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/browse/?content=publication&region=7 Last accessed 26/11/2009.

became part of the South West, this redrawing of boundaries caused problems … because it was part of Southern [area]. ... there was suddenly a whole lot of stuff which just fell apart and didn't happen anymore' (interview with officers of ACE-SW, 11/03/08).

In terms of service provision, the territorial boundaries of the region are strictly policed. However, the fixed and impervious nature of the regional boundaries, in terms of fiscal and organisational matters, does not spread to the agency's regional imagination. Indeed, the conflicts between the Government's territorially defined region, and the relational nature of much art practice, which often requires having to work *within* but think *beyond* the region, are something that ACE-SW has been forced to confront in both its development as an organisation, and in its everyday practice.

In order to alleviate what they see as an 'issue about how [they] manage the geography of the region', ACE-SW have been carrying out a 'mapping exercise' (interview with officers of ACE-SW, 11/03/08). Pinpointing a series of locations where ACE-SW funding activity occurs, these maps – literally dots placed on a base-map – sought to fix creative practice into the neat boundaries of the governmentally determined region. This exercise fits with the 'preoccupation with measurement' that Christophers (2007: 235-40) sees as a feature of UK creative industry governance. Thus, the act of measuring constitutes the sector, making both the subject and object 'available to power' through a process of *enframing*; rendering them separable, visible, discrete and calculable. On the face of it, the ACE-SW mapping exercise serves the purpose of fixing the South West's creative industries in order to allow the agency to manage their activities and measure their sphere of influence. Rather than serve to render the creative industries as static, measurable and controllable however, this exercise had the opposite effect on the officers' understanding of these

industries. As the exercise of producing such a normative map took place (with such resources as art centres and galleries appearing as 'spot points' on a Google Maps base), issues surrounding the impact, influence, temporality and dynamism of the creative arts, of both an intra- and extra-regional nature, emerged. In trying to produce a 'map', therefore, ACE-SW came to reflect on the region that they are required to administer:

> The fact that we spend our money in this way is imagined, because, actually that's the easiest way to divide the regions: to spread the wealth in that way, and the partners that we work with ... [it is all done] on governmental lines that are about management, not about the reality of what exists.
> Interview with officers of ACE-SW, 11/03/08.

As 'state actors', ACE-SW are not automatons who replicate the state apparatus but, rather, are knowledgeable agents (Jones, 2007: 25). Indeed, whilst they are required to administer and map a fixed and bounded region, in talking about their work a discourse of relationality is invoked. They are fully aware of the mismatch between the territorial remit (and hence territorially-tied money), and the more topological nature of the creative worlds that they administer. Citing both contemporary and historical examples from across the region (from St Ives artists to contemporary theatre touring companies), their discourses reflect an understanding that the art worlds – the spaces and practices of production consumption and circulation – are not co-terminus with the administrative boundaries within which they work. For many ACE-SW personnel, thinking topologically taps into the art worlds debates that many of them would have encountered in their visual arts training. Indeed, it is interesting to note that many of the ACE-SW staff have an arts background, standing in contrast to those at CSW, who had more generic backgrounds in policy and

governance. Familiar concepts of the reconfiguration of relationships between audience, author and work that such a perspective develops is tentatively applied spatially to the art worlds they are administering.

A striking feature of the web and print publications of many regional governance organisations, both creative industry-related and otherwise, is a tendency to cartographically portray the region as an island, highlighted in such a way as to 'lift' it away from any wider locational context.[6] While being aware of the need to negotiate their territorial remit with the broader priorities of Arts Council England, the officers of ACE-SW were also keen to prevent such a discursive isolationism from appearing in their work:

> I'm going to open up conversation more with the South East about how do we manage that border area, and I think the other area we need to do more work with is Wales – just so that the region isn't seen as this island, because it is not. Interview with officers of ACE-SW, 11/03/08.

As well as challenging territorial fixity through inter-regional conversation, the officers noted the important international networks that were at the heart of the South West's art worlds, both historically and today. In particular, one officer cited the considerable funding to some galleries in west Cornwall specifically in order for them to pursue an externally-facing agenda, and open up an 'international dialogue'. Indeed, for these officers, it is only through such international dialogue that it is possible to develop art within the region, their practices focus on promoting dialogue within and beyond the region getting people 'out of

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[6] See, for instance graphics associated with the SWRDA (www.southwestrda.org.uk); South West Observatory (www.swo.org.uk); and South West Screen (www.swscreen.co.uk). All websites last accessed 30/11/09.

their silos… to refresh their work… and how they operate' (interview with officers of ACE-SW, 11/03/08).

Whilst ACE-SW are aware that the manifold relations, which constitute the creative industries, extend far beyond the administratively bounded territory of the South West, any map they produce that contained these connections would be un-useable under the territorially-focussed remit of their work. Reflecting on their mapping exercise, they framed a key concern that 'actually understanding the issue of relational practice is what we're talking about all the time, [both] in terms of the practice itself, [and also] how we operate. … [This] is something that's really, really important' (Interview with officers of ACE-SW, 11/03/08). Indeed, it was through the very exercise of mapping – of attempting to fix different creative practices – that they developed a heightened awareness of the ambiguities of trying to reconcile the practices of arts governance with the thinking of the region as a discrete, bounded unit.

The evidence from this ACE-SW example refutes the notion that there is some fixed and bounded territory over which governance actors can have any effective 'control'. This resonates with Amin's (2004: 33) suggestion that 'spatial configurations and spatial boundaries are no longer necessarily or purposively territorial or scalar, since the social, economic, political and cultural, inside and outside, are constituted through the topologies of actor networks, which are becoming increasingly dynamic and varied in spatial constitution'. Although we contest the apparent 'newness' of this order, we would concur with the networked nature of the region that is invoked. In other words, ACE-SW (or any such similar organisation) cannot be expected to manage or govern a 'regional space' when their activities exceed the limits of the South West's defined territory. Despite the fact

that a more fluid way of thinking might help ACE-SW to understand the nature of their task, however, they are still in the practical predicament of having to map, render visible and administer this cultural and economic sector: 'I suppose in terms of what I would like to see is that sense that people feel mobile within the region, at the moment I don't see that very much' (Interview with officers of ACE-SW, 11/03/08).

Working and thinking *within* and *beyond* the region?

Formed from the merger of digital media agencies in 2001, South West Screen (SWS) acts as the regional governance agency for all elements of the moving image.[7] Unlike ACE-SW or CSW, SWS are an autonomous body, with connections to the (national level) UK Film Council, but not as a 'regional branch' that is directed from Westminster. Their broad remit means that their activity covers the entire circuit of production, circulation and consumption, which has had important consequences for their understandings of regional space. On the face of it, SWS take a fairly pragmatic view of the region as an 'abstract space' – a phrase used several times in interview – but adding that: 'It's easy for us, because we do it through funding, and we stop funding at the barrier don't we?' (interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08). In practice, however, SWS's operation *within* these apparently 'easy barriers' and practical negotiation of the territorial region of the South West is far more complex. Nominally, SWS divide their working remit through the two imperatives of economic development (training and screen production), and social/cultural enhancement (audience development and consumption). Importantly, these two delivery zones appear to have different geographical scopes, which employ a variety of spatial practices.

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[7] In 2008-2009 SWS leveraged £5.4 million into the creative industries in the South West with a team of 22 people working out of offices in Bristol. Information from SWS's Annual Report 2008-2009, downloaded from http://www.swscreen.co.uk/about-us/policies-and-publications.html Last accessed 26/11/2009.

In matters connected to consumption, SWS put effort into audience development on a region-wide basis. As well as displaying the importance of internal regional coverage, support for such resources as touring cinemas also highlight the agency's lack of concern with the region's external borders:

> If you go down into Dorset, we work with [a touring company]. It doesn't matter to us that the service goes into Hampshire [i.e. outside the South West], because what we are trying to do is just provide stuff for people and if they are from Hampshire, we hope that our regional screen agency there [Screen South], will come and work with us on it, so then it gives us a better way of working across [the borders].
>
> Interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08.

This pragmatism is most clearly shown in connection with the Roses Theatre in Tewkesbury, north Gloucestershire, close to the West Midlands regional border, 'which is on our patch, … but in fact most of its audience will come from outside the region, so for them I don't know where they think they sit' (interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08).

In contrast to such territorial pragmatism within their audience development narrative, SWS's practices within the economic and production 'delivery zone', at first sight, appears to adhere to the governmentally determined regions. As they say: things are 'made easy', since 'we stop providing funding at the barrier'. In order to fulfill their economic development tasks, therefore, SWS follows policy advice by deploying a matrix of geographical 'clusters' within the delineated territorial framework of the South West region. For SWS, this practice provided a simple, off-the-peg answer to concerns of statistical

measurement and surveillance providing a ready-made means of communication and creating 'a network of practitioners … within a specific place' (interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08).

Although seeming to reproduce the discourse of clustering, their actual practice and daily operation, however, supports the work of Turok (2003) in revealing a level of ambiguity, tension and complexity. Once again, rather than replicators of state apparatus, SWS negotiate and even challenge the apparatus through their practices. Thus, the Plymouth and Bristol clusters are reminiscent of the city-based clusters identified by Pratt (2000) and Basset et al (2002), in which proximity is held as being of paramount importance. In contrast however, the Cornwall and Gloucestershire 'clusters' have a county-wide scope, while the 'Wessex Media Cluster', at first sight, appears to cover everywhere else in the region that is not already 'clustered'. Although SWS may regard their media clusters as being in 'a specific place' the Gloucestershire, Cornwall and Wessex clusters can hardly be seen as tightly agglomerated around a focused geographical area. In contrast, the Bristol media cluster appears to be the tight-knit entity, constituted through social buzz and work-based interactions of companies that Pratt and others point to (see Gibson and Kong 2005; Grabher 2001 and Scott 2000). In interview, the Bristol media cluster's strong 'internal dynamic' acted to isolate it from the rest of the South West, alongside an otherwise London-facing viewpoint:

> I don't think Bristol's particularly interested in anything in the South West outside Bristol, … it's much more interested in "so how do I present Bristol creativity in London?", as that's the key market place. … so it's very focused on recruitment issues, … how do we make Bristol the new Shoreditch.

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Interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08.

Despite taking a pragmatic line on membership and networking activity, when it comes to funding, SWS have to uphold the impermeability of the region's boundary. This is shown well with their Wessex Media Cluster, in which 'half the people are in Southampton. … [T]hey stick everything in Bournemouth, and everyone in Bournemouth works in London. … [I]f we're providing funding via Wessex Media Group, I can't give it to anyone who's from Southampton' (Interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08). In terms of actual funding, therefore, SWS have to deploy a strict territorial framework on their decision making, but the very presence and activity of the Wessex Media Group acts to break down this territorial regime – and, indeed, resonates with Jones and MacLeod's (2004) highlighting of Wessex as a potentially disruptive entity within the Governmentally-determined South West: '[T]hey deliberately chose the name Wessex in order to locate themselves on that kind of border between South West and South East' (interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08).

Although specific funding initiatives have to cohere around the notion of impermeable boundaries, pragmatism and practice has, *de facto*, undermined this discrete territorial impermeability. The Wessex 'cluster' appears to challenge territorial notions of state organisation demonstrating that such territories are always fractured and fissured. SWS's media cluster policy can be understood as the strategic adoption and subsequent adaptation of governmental apparatus (see also Coe, 2000; Cole, 2008). For SWS, therefore, fidelity to their brief to 'work across the product chain', sometimes takes precedence over their territorially-bounded remit. For instance, just as practitioners in Bournemouth or Bristol are very 'London-centric', SWS are clear that global connections

are the key across the creative media sector, not only in terms of elements of production, but also in terms of audiences and market places:

> You're talking to large American corporate at an animation festival in France, it's all London to them, they don't care whether the fact that Sennen's 200 miles [*sic.*] from London; "From the UK, Great! Which part of London?"
> Interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08.

For SWS, therefore, working within a bounded territorial region is challenged when the entire product chain is taken into consideration. From one perspective, SWS actively courts and develops networks in a specifically international arena, drawing on contacts in Europe, North America and East Asia: 'Its about saying to writers "you can write in the middle of north Devon, you can write in the middle of Yeovil, but in fact your contacts have got be wider than that"' (interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08). From another perspective, however, SWS has also encouraged people from outside the region to relocate in the South West, particularly if they have skills that might plug the perceived holes in the region's existing creative media product chain. As Amin (2002: 387) notes, 'territoriality itself is becoming altered by the rise of world-scale processes and transnational connectivity'. Despite being enabled through regional funding mechanisms, SWS's working practices suggest that discrete regional containers fade away in this international arena. This is an international space in which relations are built through personal networks, and through which the region is cut loose from its locational moorings. Rather, the spatialities and temporalities become reconfigured to have purchase in what Norcliffe and Rendance (2003) refer to as the 'periodic social economy'. The SWS team describes

a rich set of globally-strung networks that they work hard to hook South West-based creative makers into:

> We'll take a group of [South West practitioners] and we'll prep them beforehand, [and take them to] film festivals, like Berlin or Cannes; … we've got a trip to Singapore, a trip to Washington, a trip to Barcelona, and we'll take companies there. … If you're in natural history then … the major festival is in Jackson Hole [USA], … but most of your buyers will be Nat Geo or Discovery who are based in Washington, or NHK who are based in Tokyo
>
> Interview with SWS officers, 7/10/08.

This suggests that mobilisation beyond the region is vital. Such comments highlight the need for policy that makes space for such supra-regional initiatives, which are based upon a topological understanding of space.

Discussion and consequences:

Our three case study agencies, each with a remit to cover the whole territory, challenge the governmental discourses of the region as a fixed, internally coherent, and bounded territory over which it is possible to govern. As the case studies have illustrated, while all three agencies are aware of their territorial remit, their practices demonstrate that the governing of regional cultures and creative practices is a task of negotiation that requires thinking beyond territorial boundaries.

CSW treat the South West as a 'region of regions': a heterogeneous space that requires an emphasis on networking within demarcated boundaries. For ACE-SW, the relational

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nature of much art practice, often lacking any fixed reference point, prompted them to imagine the South West amid a broader network of relations, while the practices of SWS reflected a negotiation of boundaries, both within and beyond the South West, with the permeable nature of boundaries emerging through their international agenda of imagination and operation. In many respects, therefore, the use by SWS of the porous regional cluster narrative, the CSW account of the South West being a 'region of regions', and the mapping practices of ACE-SW can all be seen as examples of practices that fulfill what Jessop (2008: 11) refers to as a key task that aids 'the organization of spatio-temporal fixes that facilitate the deferral and displacement of contradictions, crisis-tendencies, and conflicts'. In other words, each practice acts as a temporary fix that helps each of the agencies deal with the inherent contradictions bound up with trying to use the supposedly stable territorial governance mechanism that they have been given to work with, for the purposes of delivering administrative competence to a creative industry sector that refuses to fit within such a bounded territorial remit.

As literature from across art history and cultural studies ably demonstrates, the geographies of creative production, circulation and consumption do not map neatly onto particular territories, and certainly not the territorial demarcations of governmental administrative convenience (Becker, 2008; Guilbaut, 1985; Morris, 2005). Indeed, these geographies exhibit complex and emergent patterns of de- and re-territorialisation. This presents ambiguous and often competing challenges to any regional creative industries agency, with trans- and extra-regional connectivities throwing up dilemmas regarding the delivery of effective creative industry policy. This view seems to be reflected in Jones and MacLeod's (2004: 441) observation that some of the South West's new institutions of regionalisation are 'anxiously groping to define a territorial identity'. In studying the

geographical imaginations of these three governance agencies, we have witnessed a continuum from thinking and working almost completely *within* the territorial region, to increasingly working and thinking both *within* and *beyond* such a bounded entity. Despite acknowledging this relatedness however, the empirical material illustrates how efforts to think and work beyond the region are hampered by the understanding of the region that the agencies are 'allowed'. When understood as a 'peopled entity', therefore, the South West becomes 'heterogeneous, fractured and in a continual state of flux and emergence' (Jones 2007: 45).

The simultaneous rise of new regionalism alongside that of the creative industries as a politically framed sector, has led to a need to reconsider the geographies of these industries. In broadening the geographies of examination to include the region, this paper hopes to aid further spatial analyses of the creative industries. In exploring how the creative industries are practised and imagined through the lens of the region, the paper has sought to add empirical depth to recent debates about the region, thereby combining geographies of the creative sector and geographies of the region in an open ended fashion. In so-doing, the paper's focus on regional policy practice raises issues concerning the ontology of the region. The theoretical backdrop to the governance agencies' imaginaries of the region that we have considered pivots on the tension between thinking space territorially and thinking it topologically. The accepted spatialities of such imaginaries either 'fix' the region amidst a set of nested territorial hierarchies (e.g. local, regional, national, global), or understand it topologically, as the local articulation of a series of flows, networks and spatially distanciated linkages, which perhaps reaches its most extreme in Amin's (2004) unbounded region. In seeking a mediating position within this seemingly antagonistic dualism, the paper follows the work of Jones (2009: 3), which finds

'compatibilities between, rather than the mutual exclusivities of, flow-like (networks, etc.) and more fixed (scales, territories, regions, etc.) takes on space'. With its emphasis on fluidity, together with its recognition of socio-political networks, a topological understanding provides this 'terrain' with an emergent relational politics of co-constitutional becoming (Amin 2002, Jones 2007: 43-4). One should be wary, however, of being seduced into a supposedly 'new' world of 'flows', which appears to be both all and nothing. As Jones (2007: 14) notes, a territorial framework should not be set up as a 'relic' against which to position a supposedly brand new politics of topology. In particular, the role of specific personnel, together with an understanding of the temporal depth that is imbued within these imaginaries is crucial to recognise. As the case of CSW demonstrates, the terrain of governance, both in terms of detail and delivery is highly dynamic.

With the status – and even existence – of New Labour's territorially-based regional governance apparatus in limbo, it is perhaps a good time to think through the policy implications for allowing a more relational understanding of the region. Our analysis of how three creative industry governance agencies practise the region suggests that the 'reality' of the South West of Britain as a governmentally-defined bounded territory has been unhelpful at best. The increasing drive to open new markets (especially in China, Singapore and India), together with the ubiquity of creative practices operating through fluid, ephemeral and distanciated networks, mean that governance agencies will continue to negotiate such structures with a knowing eye to some of the emptiness of territorial rhetoric with which they are presented.

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