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From cultural industries to creative industries and back? Towards clarifying theory and rethinking policy

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Abstract

In this paper, I draw attention to the complexities and confusions in the shift in discourse and praxis from “culture industry” to “cultural industries” and then “creative industries.” I examine how this “creative turn” is fraught with challenges, highlighting seven issues in particular: (i) the difficulties in defining and scoping the creative industries; (ii) the challenges in measuring the economic benefits creative industries bring; (iii) the risk that creative industries neglect genuine creativity/culture; (iv) the utopianization of “creative labour”; (v) the risk of valorizing and promoting external expertise over local small- and medium-scale enterprises in the building of “creative industries”; (vi) the danger of overblown expectations for creative industries to serve innovation and the economy, as well as culture and social equity; and (vii) the fallacy that “creative cities” can be designed. I suggest that the move towards creative industries discourse represents a theoretical backslide, and raise the possibility that a return to “cultural industries” would be more beneficial for clarifying our theoretical understanding of the cultural sectors and the creative work that they do, as well as enabling better policymaking.

Keywords: Cultural/creative industries, cultural/creative policy, creative cities, creative class, creative turn

Introduction

The creative industries have been hailed as a key driver of the new economy, with their promise of being a source of growth and wealth creation. Over the past two decades, creative industries discourse has dominated academic and policy discourse in many arenas, replacing earlier references to the cultural industries. Many governments have turned to the creative industries in their planning of economic strategy, while scholarly interest in this area has also intensified. Yet, amidst the rush to embrace the creative industries, critics have pointed to a host of complexities and problems associated with the concept that need first to be addressed—urgently—before policy makers hasten to implement creative industries policies. In the absence of conceptual clarity and careful research, a more cautious approach is warranted in policy arenas.

In this paper, I trace the shift in discourse and praxis from “culture industry” to “cultural industries” and then “creative industries.” In the second section of this paper, I remind readers of the genesis of scholarly interpretations of “culture industry,” how this then became understood in the plural as “cultural industries,” and then shifted quite precipitously to “creative industries” following the discursive change in policy circles. In the third section of the paper, I examine how this “creative turn” is fraught with challenges, highlighting seven issues in particular: (i) the difficulties in defining and scoping the creative industries; (ii) the challenges in measuring the economic benefits creative industries bring; (iii) the risk that creative industries neglect genuine creativity/culture; (iv) the

utopianization of “creative labour”; (v) the risk of valorizing and promoting external expertise over local small- and medium-scale enterprises in the building of “creative industries”; (vi) the danger of overblown expectations for creative industries to serve innovation and the economy, as well as culture and social equity; and (vii) the fallacy that “creative cities” can be designed. Following this analysis of the challenges associated with the “creative turn,” I suggest in the fourth section of the paper that the move towards creative industries discourse represents a theoretical backslide, and raise the possibility that a return to “cultural industries” would be more beneficial for clarifying our theoretical understanding of the cultural sectors and the creative work that they do, as well as enabling better policymaking (fifth section).

From “culture industry” to “cultural industries” to “creative industries”

The term “culture industry” has its foundations in the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory with its background in Marxist ideology and critical social theory (Barker 2004a, 46). As is well known, the term is attributed to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whose essay “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944) established the understanding of the culture industry as one in which the cultural commodities produced are standardized and exist for the benefit of achieving monetary gains for those in power (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944, 120–121). In fact, they claim that “culture now impresses the same stamp on everything” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944, 120). Specific industries that Adorno and Horkheimer identify as being perpetrators of a standardized cultural commodity include the film, music and magazine sectors. In the face of public regulation, dependence on corporate funding/sponsorship and competition, these industries are engaged in a race to find the lowest common denominator of public appeal, and in the process, sacrifice talent, individuality and creativity (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944, 121). Aiming particularly at the commodification of popular culture, Adorno and Horkheimer attacked the products of the culture industry as artificial products fuelled by market demand and capitalistic aims (Witkin 2003, 2). Further, Adorno felt that the easy consumption of the standardized and uniform products of the culture industry created a public that was in turn unquestioning, uncritical and similarly, standardized and uniform (Witkin 2003, 2). In other words, by the commodification of culture (which causes a standardization of its production and consumption) and by institutionalizing cultural production as an “industry,” culture becomes less of an individualized and unique form of representation, but rather a mass-produced commodity that perpetuates the status quo (Barker 2004b, 3). Thus, the culture industry, rather than freeing oppression, serves to reinforce current ideologies, and may even stifle genuine creativity from flourishing.

Adorno and Horkheimer's negative conception of the culture industry stemmed from their association of culture with art and human creativity, which is meant to reflect life, to critique social circumstances and to provide a means for society to aspire to a utopian way of life (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 24). With the commodification of culture, especially with the mass nature of popular culture, culture and art have failed to play a role in guiding society towards a utopian state.

Later understandings of the culture industry similarly adopted Adorno's conceptions of which sectors made up the culture industry. In addition, there was recognition that the culture industry is also made up of institutions that are concerned with “the production of social meaning” (including for-profit, not-for-profit and government organizations). They aim to communicate a message to their audiences. Thus, the culture industry as understood from the late 1960s onwards, was viewed less pessimistically. Led by later thinkers such as Walter Benjamin (1969) and Bernard Miège (1989), the incorporation of culture within a capitalistic framework is viewed as a site of struggle and contestation (as opposed to Adorno and Horkheimer's pessimistic view of culture as being lost to capitalism). In fact, capitalism, with its injection of resources and technologies, may aid the further development and innovation of the creative process (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 25). At the same time, the singular term (culture industry) was converted to its plural form (cultural industries), in a bid to acknowledge the complexity and interconnectivity of the different sectors of cultural production, alongside with the uniqueness of each specific field (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 24).

The shift from “culture industry” to “cultural industries” has been followed by emergence of the concept of “creative industries,” which was led by a policy shift from cultural to creative industries. A key moment that heralded the age of the creative industries occurred in 1997 when the UK government coined the term “creative industries” as a classifier for one of its main policy sectors, replacing the previously-used notion of “cultural industries” (Mommaas 2009, 51; O’Connor 2011, 38). This change reflected the broadening scope of cultural industries policies and allowed room for a new creative industries agenda to differ from existing cultural industries policies. For example, the creative industries were defined to include the entertainment and leisure business, a segment not previously considered part of the cultural industries. The 1990s and 2000s witnessed heightened interest in the creative industries as an urban regeneration strategy, with creativity more purposefully integrated into economic and social policies, and the intensified commodification of artistic and creative activity. The creative industries were strongly promoted for their benefits to the economy, as supported by growing revenue and employment figures in the case of the UK (Banks and O’Connor 2009, 365). Given their apparent success, UK policymakers were able to promote the idea of the creative industries to other nations (Cunningham 2003). Across the Asia Pacific, the creative industries began to feature in national and city policy agendas, as evident in places such as Singapore, China, South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India and the Philippines (Tschang 2009, 30; Kong and O’Connor 2009, 1; Banks and O’Connor 2009, 365).

The policy shift from the cultural industries to the creative industries was accompanied by a corresponding discursive shift in academic writings—from “cultural economy” to “creative economy,” from “cultural clusters” to “creative clusters,” from “cultural worker” to “creative worker.” For example, “cultural economy,” referring to the investment in, and production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods and services, was overtaken by “creative economy,” with research focused on those industrial components of the economy in which creativity is an input, and content or intellectual property is the output (Potts and Cunningham 2008, 233). This explains the interest in four particular sectors, as identified by Howkins (2001)—the copyright, patent, trademark and design industries. Such a shift was accompanied by popularity gaining around the idea of the “creative city”: the annual number of citations of the term “creative cities” as recorded by Google Scholar rose significantly from 1990 to 2012, reflecting the growing amount of attention dedicated to the emerging concept (Scott 2013). A “creative city” offers an environment that enables people to think, plan and act with imagination in harnessing opportunities or addressing urban problems. It possesses the hardware of supporting infrastructure (high grade amenities such as museums, art galleries, concert halls, green spaces and other facilities that would attract creative talent to the city) and the software of a skilled, flexible and dynamic labour force (Landry 2008). Creative cities are typically characterized by aestheticized land use intensification, including the recycling of old building stock, and city branding that emphasizes the lifestyle, culture, heritage and other offerings by the city (Scott 2013). The promise of the creative city is so compelling that there are now more than 60 self-professed “creative cities” in the world, such as Bilbao, Darwin, Dubai, Hualien, Huddersfield, Milwaukee, Seattle, Sudbury, Taitung, Wuhan and Yokohoma (Scott 2013). Overall, the shift in emphasis towards the creative industries, creative economy and creative cities that has occurred over the last few decades reflects the overriding emphasis on creativity and its role in driving the economy. The centrality of “creativity” in the 2000s was noted by the geographer Jamie Peck when, in summarizing Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class*, observed that “[W]e have entered an age of creativity, comprehended as a new and distinctive phase of capitalist development, in which the driving forces of economic development are not simply technological and organizational, but human (Peck 2005, 742–743, emphasis in original).

Problems with the “creative turn”

The “creative turn,” with its shift in focus to the creative industries, creative economy, creative labour and developing creative cities, has been welcomed with enthusiasm by policymakers at municipal and national levels in many countries. Yet, there are serious and fundamental issues that need to be acknowledged and clarified. These are addressed below.

Defining and scoping the “creative industries”: ambiguities and opacities

Agreeing on a universally-accepted definition of the “creative industries” is difficult due to the lack of consensus over which subsectors should be considered part of the creative industries. No international classification system exists for the creative industries. The term “creative industries” is therefore understood differently in various international contexts, and these definitions can vary widely due to the influence of local politics, histories and geographies (Banks and O'Connor 2009, 366). For example, in Europe, arts-related activities are considered to be the “core” creative industries, whereas fields such as advertising, design, architecture and the media industries are viewed as peripherally important parts of the creative industries (Throsby 2001; European Commission 2006; Work Foundation 2007). In contrast, definitions of the creative industries in Asia and Australia tend to be wider and may include industries such as online-gaming and even the wedding industry (Creative Asia 2013). The ongoing debate over how to define, measure and classify the creative industries remains (Banks and O'Connor 2009, 366), a debate that began even when the notion of creative industries was first broached (Cunningham 2009, 18). In particular, the classification of the creative industries by the United Kingdom's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)¹ has been questioned for its exclusion of sectors such as entertainment, heritage and tourism (Hesmondhalgh 2007).

Others have also argued that, based on the creative industries concept, additional sectors currently left out should, in fact, be included. The creative industries rely on creativity to produce creative products that can be used to generate intellectual property and economic benefits. Following this line of reasoning, there is little reason why the creative industries should include cultural activities, while excluding sectors in science, research and development (Howkins 2001; Jürisson 2007, 1). It is apparent that in much of the discourse and analysis of creative industries and creativity, the focus is on the purely cultural and aesthetic, but not scientific and technological (Scott 2013). Another issue is that creativity is not limited to those working in the so-called creative professions as every industry is thought to require creativity to thrive (Morgan and Ren 2012). Furthermore, creativity itself is an ambiguous concept with different conceptions of what constitutes creativity. This again contributes to the complexities of determining which industries should be included as part of the creative industries. Contending categorizations and definitions make it hard to gather accurate data about the creative industries (Cunningham 2009, 18), and leads us to the next problem of how to precisely measure the economic contribution of the “creative industries.”

Estimating economic benefits: challenges and uncertainties

Much of the enthusiasm for the creative industries in policy circles is fuelled by the belief that developing the creative industries will generate significant economic benefits and thus constitute a key driver of economic growth. At first glance, the data are impressive with the contribution of the creative industries to the economy reportedly high in many cases. A DCMS publication, for example, highlighted the impressive performance of the creative industries, in which economic output, employment and exports of the creative industries within Europe apparently exceeded that of car manufacturing and the chemical industries combined (Pratt 2008). Similarly, data collected by agencies in various countries indicate that the creative industries greatly boost revenue and jobs (European Commission 2006). In one report, the annual growth of the creative economy in OECD countries was cited as being several times more than that of the service industries as well as manufacturing (Howkins 2001, xvi).

However, the data supporting the supposed economic benefits of the creative industries must be carefully interrogated. Statistics such as those reported above may be misleading due to definitions of the creative industries (Banks and O'Connor 2009). Because there is no consistent definition and classification of the creative industries, and confusion or disagreement over which subsectors should be included or excluded in the creative industries, it is difficult to gather accurate and comparable statistical data on the performance of creative industries over time and across economies. In fact, it

has been suggested that policymakers, who were already interested in implementing creative industries policy, were in a hurry to establish evidence to back up claims about the economic benefits of the creative industries (Banks and O'Connor 2009, 365), and contributed to the selective inclusion of data in the reporting process, thus making the performance of the creative industries appear more positive than necessarily the case. For instance, critics have argued that including the software, computer gaming and electronic publishing industries in the DCMS's list of creative industries was done to inflate the size of the sector and make it appear more economically significant than it really was (Flew and Cunningham 2010, 114).

In addition, some domains considered part of the creative industries are undergoing changes, such as the merging of computer, cultural and content industries, in a continuing dynamic that presents further challenges to measuring the exact value of the creative industries to the economy. Another complication arises when new industry sectors that qualify as creative industries emerge, but are not added to the existing creative industries classification in time. This means data on the creative industries may not be up-to-date and completely accurate. Attempting to measure the output of the creative industries is also complex due to the nature and form of creative output. Creative output is more likely to take the form of creative services than physical products. Because services are more intangible than physical products, collecting accurate data on the number and value of the delivery of creative industries services, such as digital media, is thus difficult (Cunningham 2009, 18).

Given the potential for numerous inaccuracies and incompatibilities, there is no conclusive answer as to whether the value of the creative industries is overstated or understated. The fact remains that statistics indicating the economic contribution of the creative industries may not be reliable, and gathering accurate data on the size, growth and output of the creative industries continues to be a challenge (Cunningham 2009, 19).

Nurturing culture and creativity: inattention and neglect

The important nexus between art/culture and economy is longstanding, and by no means a recent development nor a novel inclusion on the social science agenda. As Harvey pointed out in his foreword to Zukin's (1988) *Loft Living*, the artist, as one "representative" of the cultural class, has always shared a position in the market system, whether as artisans or as "cultural producers working to the command of hegemonic class interest." Recognizing for the moment that cultural industries are part of or synonymous with the creative industries, the question arises as to why there should be any objection to the notion of the creative industries and its harnessing of creativity for economic benefits? Resistance to the idea of the creative industries stems from concern over the purely economic rationale behind development of this sector. It is not so much uneasiness over the introduction of economic motivations in the production and consumption of arts and culture, for that has existed for a long time. Rather, it is how creative industries discourse tends to neglect culture and shift the focus to an exclusively economic agenda (Kong and O'Connor 2009). What is unacceptable to critics is that the framework, policy aims and measures of success are all based on economic analysis and economic terms. Culture and the arts are valued only because they are seen as drivers of economic growth. The shift from cultural to economic priorities consequently encourages the development of those kinds of cultural production that generate the largest economic benefits, rather than cultural returns (Banks and O'Connor 2009, 367–368). Culture therefore loses its importance because of the prevailing emphasis on economic goals. The intensified commodification of culture is another detrimental outcome of creative industries policy as governments attempt to mine the cultural sector for more profit-making opportunities (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 1). The commodification of culture involves turning cultural activities and goods into commodities to be "sold" or marketed for commercial benefits. For example, arts and cultural spaces may be built solely for the purpose of urban regeneration and the hope of encouraging economic growth. In effect, cultural goods are produced and designed for the consumption of local, national and international markets (Krätke 2011, 130) to fulfil the goal of wealth creation.

Concern over the commodification of culture for economic gains has arisen for good reason. The value of cultural activities and products lies in their originality, but their commercialization and mass

distribution causes them to lose the very qualities that make them unique and distinct. Once products of artistic creativity, they are now reduced to mass reproductions. The economic agenda therefore runs counter to creative endeavour, and puts pressure on the creative industries to develop products with the overriding intention of responding to commercial demand (Krätke 2011, 134). This economic impetus is detected in the original definition of the “creative industries” set by the United Kingdom's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which clearly takes a commercial orientation by prioritizing creativity and creative industries that can generate intellectual property for economic profit. Specifically, the definition states that creative industries are “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS 1998; Flew and Cunningham 2010, 114). The emphasis on creativity and the creativity industries purely because of their role in generating intellectual property for economic benefits is worrying (Flew and Cunningham 2010, 114; Hesmondhalgh 2008), as focusing on intellectual property for economic benefits encourages a narrow focus on producing what is “new” and has commercial value. The danger is that culture is recognized not for its intrinsic value, but solely for its ability to generate economic benefits. This is a familiar critique that returns full circle to Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of “culture industry” and represents a theoretical backslide. Later conceptions of “cultural industries” by Benjamin and Miège had already moved beyond the notion of “culture industry.” As previously mentioned, these conceptions positioned culture within a capitalistic framework as a site of struggle and contestation. Capitalism was viewed more positively due to recognition of its ability to provide the necessary resources and technologies to drive development and innovation of the creative process. A more nuanced notion of the creative industries and its potential for cultural development is needed than a simple return to Adorno and Horkheimer's pessimistic belief that culture has been neglected in the face of capitalism (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 25).

Utopianization of “creative labour”: over-valorization, under-provision

The development of a workforce of “free” and creative workers is a key part of creative economy discourse, with the belief being that the creative economy enables a more flexible, multi-skilled and mobile workforce. Characteristics of creative labour point towards a workforce made up of largely self-employed individuals, typically freelancing for multiple employers simultaneously or working in semi-permanent work groups (Gollmitzer and Murray 2008, 3). They have been labelled “entreployees” (Pongratz and Voß 2003), or people with “portfolio careers” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2013). The cultivation of a free and creative workforce in line with the development of the creative industries is portrayed positively, with the associated flexibility perceived as aiding creativity (Gollmitzer and Murray 2008, 18).

Critics recognize that the development of the concept of “creative labour” or “creative class” with its positive attributes has over-valorized and utopianized the work and life of creative workers. In reality, there are many difficult challenges that creative workers on flexible working arrangements encounter (Deuze 2006; Cunningham 2009; Banks and O'Connor 2009). Precarity of labour has become a key issue, with a significant portion of creative workers experiencing job insecurity, uncertainty and anxiety over the contingent nature of their work, and feelings of isolation (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010). As temporary employment becomes the norm, the relationship between employer and employee weakens, as do the bonds between fellow employees. Fellow employees may not even have had the opportunity to meet one other because the nature of their work means they could be freelancers working from home (Rossiter 2003; McKercher and Mosco 2007; McRobbie 2005). The lack of a common workplace means such forms of creative labour do not have the opportunity to come together to interact and socialize. Greater autonomy and flexibility in the work of creative labourers also affects income stability. For instance, working on projects with different employers at the same time may make it difficult for creative workers to access job benefits such as corporate pension plans (Gollmitzer and Murray 2008, 18–19). Hence, the very freedom and autonomy that creative labour promises is a double-edged sword that can contribute to negative working conditions experienced by creative labour.

Given the working conditions for creative labour, there is need for careful consideration of the needs of this group of workers before wholly embracing the idea of the creative industries. Policies to improve the working conditions of creative workers are lacking, in part because of the utopian discourse about creative labour. To enable a better chance at policy intervention, there is value in reminding ourselves of the notion of “cultural workers,” a term that predated the celebrated “creative class,” and which more commonly connotes a “poor struggling artist.” In some ways, the theoretical middle-ground has to be formulated, recalibrating the utopian concept of “creative workers” from one of celebration to problematization, while reshaping the concept of “cultural workers” from one of dejection to one of possibilities. Only with greater conceptual clarity of what this group of workers experiences can there be more effective policy to harness their potential while improving their working conditions.

Attracting big international players or developing local SMEs?

While many city and/or national governments have formulated and administered policies to support the development of the creative industries, critics have justly asked if these creative industry policies serve big companies (and external expertise) or support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (and local cultures). Detractors are critical of policies that favour the attraction of foreign established companies, particularly in what may be considered a misplaced effort to boost the creative industry locally. They argue that local SMEs then find it difficult to compete with the large foreign companies, at the expense of developing local cultures and idioms. They also argue that such large foreign companies also tend to be led and dominated by foreign expertise, leaving local creative workers contributing at lower levels of appointment, with no opportunity for leadership. Critics also argue that this dampens the wage levels of local creative workers.

These criticisms find expression in the context of Singapore, and a closer look offers further insights into the issues. Creative industry policies in Singapore have been criticized as tending to favour external enterprise. In recent years, the Singapore government has welcomed the presence of more and more companies from abroad in the country—such as LucasFilm, Tecmo Koei, the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers, MEC (a media agency), Electronic Arts and United International Pictures—which has put SMEs in a more vulnerable position. Such policies include assisting external media companies with their infrastructural set-up and manpower pool, as well as a reduced corporate tax rate on incremental income for foreign companies (EDB 2014). The inflow of international companies has brought about anxieties for SMEs that cannot compete on the same terms. Local workers are also worried about losing out on jobs as international companies bring their own workers at the senior level, while at the lower levels Singapore's “pro-business” strategy has allowed businesses access to cheaper foreign workers. This has forced Singaporeans to compete by raising their skill levels or lowering wage levels, most commonly the latter. (Parenthetically, this easy access to cheaper foreign workers has changed in the last year or so since a major pushback from the local population.)

Another example where the international and local interests intersect in potentially negative ways is borne out in the case of Australia. O'Connor and Xin (2010, 125) argue that policy-makers in Australia have neglected to take into account local histories and cultural nuances in their designing of creative industry policies, choosing instead to import (successful) policies designed elsewhere. When developing a creative urban policy, foreign “experts” were brought in for consultation who paid little attention to the colonial, indigenous and migrant history of the state, and failed to recognize the significance of the mining industry in Western Australia (Brabazon 2012, 182). The celebrated speakers and consultants (some from academia) who work the circuits, visiting cities and giving advice as highly-paid consultants, sometimes after visiting the said city for a day or two, contribute to the inappropriate travel of policy.

Creativity for innovation and economy, or culture and social (e)quality?

Whereas creative class/industry strategies have been lauded for their contribution to innovation and economic growth, they have also been criticized for their potential to worsen social and cultural inequalities. Peck (2007, 10) believes creative class strategies are not appropriate for reviving declining cities because they promote rather than challenge the existing neoliberal urban agenda, and are designed to “coexist” with urban socio-economic or socio-spatial problems rather than solve them. He argues that creativity strategies are not designed to address “entrenched problems like structural unemployment, residential inequality, working poverty, and racialized exclusion” (Peck 2007, 10). Instead, they contribute to widening the income gap and the emergence of a low-wage service underclass. They contribute to dispossession through gentrification. The result is a class of workers who struggle to find stable employment, affordable housing, and social support (Leslie and Rantisi 2012, 466). Further, Parker (2008) argues that there are implicit gendered and racialized assumptions packed into Florida's “progressive” creative class thesis that reproduce socioeconomic inequalities and valorize “hegemonic masculinity” (Parker 2008, 202). Women, minorities, and households are largely obscured in the creative class dialogue as they are not considered the chief “sites of creativity” (Parker 2008, 210). Low-income individuals and families are even less visible. The ideal creative worker is rarely portrayed as a woman or mother, but rather an overworked individual, whose labour is not split between home and work (Parker 2008, 211). The cumulative effect of all these criticisms is a view that creativity-based strategies are problematic because that they “ignore social problems of segregation and poverty, and instead try to transform the image rather than the reality of the central city” (Peck 2007, 10).

On the other hand, it may be argued that there are misplaced expectations and excessive pressures on the creative industries to address a host of economic issues, and deliver on social equality as well. Multiple goals beyond economic development have been heaped on urban policy to develop the creative industries, including social inclusion, development of social capital and community cultural programming (Foord 2008). The multiple expectations may be unrealistic. Further, there is, in fact, currently little evidence to support the claims that the creative industries can play a role in fostering social inclusion or enabling greater community participation (Oakley 2004, 71). What this could suggest is that creative industries need/should not be seen as the panacea of all ills. Rather, there is a need to rethink theory and policy, so that a separation is made between creativity for innovation and economy, and creativity for culture and social (e)quality. While it would be ideal for different goals to be achieved through one policy, there is need to recognize that this need not always be the case, nor is it realistically achievable.

Creating “creative cities”: a fallacy?

The desire to nurture creativity and benefit from its potential in industry has led to the use of “creative cities” as an urban planning concept, its fundamental goal being the construction of an environment where creativity would thrive and serve as an economic stimulus. While the concept of “creative cities” first emerged in the 1980s, it gained real momentum and popularity in the 2000s in part due to Richard Florida's writings, and has since become a global movement. Creative cities are understood as urban areas where creativity, knowledge and innovation flourish; aided by the presence of a critical mass of diverse peoples who, through sharing and interaction, spark creativity (Hospers and Pen 2008, 259–264).

Debate centres on the question of whether “creative cities” can be deliberately constructed. Florida believes that with the right formula, a creative city can indeed be constructed, and offers strategies that governments can implement to attract creative professionals (Long 2009, 212). Cities aspiring to become creative cities are advised to invest in developing an environment rich in cultural facilities and the kinds of amenities that will attract creative talent, such as green spaces, arts and music scenes and farmers' markets (Scott 2006, 11; Peck 2005, 745). They must also be welcoming of diversity and offer enhanced tolerance, for example, towards alternative lifestyles, in order to encourage creative individuals to congregate there (Scott 2006, 11).

Others, however, believe that “creative cities” cannot be designed and constructed through deliberate action. They argue that putting in place conditions such as those described above will not guarantee that creative individuals will be attracted, nor induce them to settle for the long-term. More importantly, creative cities do not result simply from the congregation of “creative” individuals, and certainly, a concentration of creative people alone is not enough to sustain creativity (Scott 2006). Furthermore, the spontaneous and unpredictable nature of creativity means that devising strategies to produce creativity to increase the competitiveness of a city is not practical. Local governments may be able to increase the probability of creative output by creating certain conditions and making investments, but even then, the outcome is not guaranteed (Hospers 2009, 373). In addition, as creativity is “relative and situational, not universal or independent,” policymakers must be aware that creative city policies have to be tailored to suit local conditions, instead of following a standard formula (Pratt 2011, 129).

Doubts also persist over whether “creative cities” can stimulate economic growth as claimed. “Creative cities” are believed to be more competitive and instrumental in revitalizing socio-economic growth. Yet not all empirical evidence supports the touted benefits that creative cities are supposed to bring. Steven Malanga from the Manhattan Institute pointed out that cities in the United States with the best economic performance, based on statistics such as employment and rate of formation of high-growth companies, were not creative cities such as San Francisco or New York, but places such as Memphis and Las Vegas, which had low-tax and policies conducive for business (Malanga 2004; Peck 2005, 755). Likewise, Kotkin and Siegel point out that economic growth has been shifting to suburban areas that do not match Florida's idea of trendy, liberal cities, such as Riverside, California and Rockland County, New York (Peck 2005, 756). Krätke also calls for a more critical look at the idea of “creative cities” and contends that economic development is not dependent on urban development projects that attempt to increase a city's attractiveness (Krätke 2010, 850). Rather, what truly matters and serves as a determining factor in attracting people to cities is that people will ultimately go to where the jobs are, irrespective of the kinds of amenities cities hold. Cities should therefore focus on supplying high-quality career opportunities rather than becoming a “cool” city, which means “growing the economic base; sharpening skills, connectivity and access to markets; ensuring local people can access new opportunities and improving key public services” (Nathan 2007, 447). Education and skills development are other areas that should be supported as well (quoted in Sands and Reese 2008, 10).

Towards clarifying theory

The early shift in focus from cultural industries to creative industries in policy circles led to academic interest being directed in the same way. In turn, such academic attention further intensified and contributed to the spread of policy interest in the creative industries. Governments—sometimes municipal, other times, national—have embraced the concept with enthusiasm and actively implemented policies to support the creative industries, but many have overlooked the “dark side” of the creative industries and failed to discern the problems associated with them.

A fundamental issue underlying these problems is that “creative industries” is in itself an insufficiently robust category. This has not been sufficiently acknowledged, intellectually or practically, and the implications of this lack of clarity and consistency have not been sufficiently addressed.

As discussed earlier, there are many practical implications of this lack of clarity. Existing definitions of the creative industries often do not recognize creative work in industries beyond the cultural, aesthetic and affective, thereby excluding from consideration important sectors that generate creative output. Furthermore, the category “creative industries” is so broad as to confound analysis, covering a vast array of sectors and industries ranging from advertising, design, architecture, film, television, music, fashion, electronic publishing, software, online-gaming, arts and crafts, to the entertainment and leisure business. With such a diverse selection of sectors and industries under the creative industries, designing and implementing effective economic and social policy across all these sectors becomes either too non-targeted and too fragmented, or too blunted through using the same policy and

instrument for diverse sectors. Another problem with the lack of clarity surrounding the category “creative industries” is that it leads to the serious danger of misleading policy or at least impeding appropriate policy. Misleading growth data that exaggerate the economic value of the creative industries may prompt governments to design policies that divert resources and funds to initiatives that do not translate into the desired benefits. Policy-makers may blindly implement policies to encourage the attraction and cultivation of “creative workers” without simultaneously addressing the problems associated with creative labour discussed earlier, resulting in negative consequences. At the same time, policy efforts may be directed towards developing “creative clusters” without sufficient evidence that these initiatives will result in significant economic advantages.

Intellectually, a challenge to the continuing usefulness of the concept of “creative industry” is that its evolution, usage and, especially, critiques of it, represent a theoretical backslide from the advances made by Benjamin and Miège. In particular, those who criticize its usage return to an old argument regarding the culture industry, suggesting that, through the creative industries, culture and creativity are lost to capitalism. Yet, Benjamin and Miège had already gone beyond this argument, recognizing that the injection of capitalism may bring resources and technologies that enhance the creative process. It would appear that, theoretically, working with the category of “creative industry” has not helped to advance a more useful formulation. At this juncture, I propose a return to “cultural industries,” and four ways in which more productive theorizing might be pursued.

First, I urge a return to “cultural industries” for the following reasons. It places attention squarely on the cultural, aesthetic and affective industries that the concept actually deals with. It obviates questions about why scientific, research and development activities are not included, thus keeping the range of activities (already large) within a more coherent scope. Second, without the burden of reformulating a less problematic concept of “creative industries,” we might turn our attention to more productive theorizing. I offer four directions in this regard: concerning people, place, economy and creativity.

With regards to people, relieved of the burden of unpicking what the “creative class,” “creative worker” or “creative labour” stands for, a deeper analysis might proceed in terms of understanding the dynamics of precarity, enabling a better understanding of the challenges that a flexible and mobile workforce would encounter. Comprehending the balance between freedom and precarity, and certainty and risk in the context of working arrangements, has the potential to lead to a breakthrough in understanding how, despite precarity and risk, cultural workers continue the work they do. What is the place of factors such as the lure of freedom and expression, and other pragmatic factors such as flexible work regimes and dire economic conditions. With regards to place, such re-theorization has gained ground in recent years, interrogating the logics of clusters and recognizing the distinctiveness of industrial, business and cultural clusters (see Kong 2009). Cultural work differs in many ways from industry and business, and the logics of externalities and trust, cooperation and tacit knowledge, are far less relevant than the logics of reputation, cost, and environment. With regards to economy, a closer understanding of the dynamics between big business and small local enterprise is needed. Beyond the complaints about big business—particularly multinational presences—snuffing out local practice or exploiting local workers, is there evidence of fostering local expertise and mutually beneficial collaborative activity? Closer analysis of business relationships and in-depth research on the place of local cultural workers in different types of cultural industry organizations will yield clearer insights into different business environments, the relationships that lead to success and those that do not, and the experience of the individual worker in the larger scheme of things. Finally, an opportunity for improved theorization of creativity presents itself in the study of “cultural industries.” Creativity is constantly advocated for its ability to produce new ideas and drive innovation, yet the nature of the creative process is not fully understood. To effectively harness creativity, more must therefore be done to explore the concept, including the sociality, neurology, and psychology of creativity. In this regard, interdisciplinary work promises to be productive, involving sociologists, psychologists, neuroscientists, and others.

Towards rethinking policy

Just as theory urgently needs clarification and (re)formulation, careful rethinking and redesigning of policy is needed. I offer three interventions in rethinking cultural industry policy. First, to avoid simplistic and ineffective policy design, clarifying the focus is a major first step (Watson and Taylor 2013). A rethink of policy needs to take into account the complex dimensions of creative production, and sharpen the focus. If we accept that “cultural industries” rather than “creative industries” constitutes a better, sharper focus theoretically, it follows that policies will have greater clarity and efficacy if directed at the former rather than the latter. This does not mean that there cannot be policies to pursue biomedical industries or infocomm industries, to name just two examples of other types of “creative industries.” Rather, they are better served when addressed separately, recognizing difference, and avoiding conflation through the categories we use. Even more fundamentally, it would be necessary to recognize the differences of individual sectors within the cultural industries, such as the arts, media, and design sectors and to understand the specific challenges they face, in order to tailor policies appropriate for these industries. Evaluating each industrial sector individually, instead of collectively under the category “creative industries” or even “cultural industries,” will enable policymakers to avoid the pitfall of conflating data and policy instruments.

Second, there is a need for governments to be clear about policy intent, so that instruments and interventions serve with clearly specified intents. It is critical to recognize that it is difficult for the same policy and instrument to be a cultural and arts policy, and a social and economic policy all at the same time. There is no magic bullet. Too often, urban policies group multiple goals together, resulting in unfocused objectives and unrealized goals.

Third, good policy needs to be clear whether it set out to achieve balance, or to accord privilege or protection to particular groups or goals. A lack of clarity and certainty often results in policies that seem (work) at odds with one another. I cite three examples. In the area of support for appropriate business models, clarity in policy objectives is critical: is a balanced approach of simultaneous support for large multinational/international companies and local, small and medium-sized enterprises preferred, or is the former to be privileged, or the latter to be protected? Is one approach adopted purposefully, or is there simply a blind spot that explains the absence or relative lack of attention to another? In the area of hardware (cultural infrastructures) and software (talent development, both cultural workers and local authorities that administer the arts and cultural sector), is the objective to finance the development of cultural hardware in the hope that the software will develop and evolve organically, or should there be efforts to evolve software before hardware investment is pursued? Can they be pursued simultaneously? Equally important in the approach to rethinking policy is the need to hold to a clear position about whether policies are to contribute to the protection of local history and culture, or whether policies treat cultural industries as a global currency that can be replicated wholesale across difference locales. In recent years, policy enacted in one location is often borrowed and subsequently implemented in numerous other locations, with little hindsight or deference to local nuances, histories and circumstances. Such “Xerox” policies (Pratt 2009) result in policies that are forced into the local context in a damaging or unrealistic manner (Kong 2000). Clarity about this from the start, and through the policy implementation chain, is an important condition for successful policy formulation and implementation, although unfortunately it is not often apparent.

Conclusion

Over some 70 years, from the 1940s to the early 2010s, academic interest has shifted from “culture industry” to “cultural industries” to “creative industries.” Whereas the notion of “culture industry” evolved into the concept of the “cultural industries” in acknowledgement of the complexity and uniqueness of different sectors of cultural production, the notion of “creative industries” emerged following policy rhetoric, with the same lack of clarity plaguing both academic and policy discourse. Associated with this “creative turn” is the emergence of related concepts such as the creative economy, creative clusters and creative city. This “creative turn” has proven problematic. In this paper, I have sought to highlight the diverse theoretical and practical challenges that the “creative turn” has wrought. I have also begun to suggest ways in which theory urgently needs to be clarified

and attention paid to theoretical questions other than the challenges related to using the concept of “creative industries.” I believe that more productive theoretical insight can be gained once the intellectual community is relieved from the burden of defining “creative industries,” distinguishing it from “cultural industries,” and straining over why certain industries that rely on creative endeavour are not embraced within the fold of creative industries. To free ourselves from this imbroglio, I propose that we return, fundamentally, to the concept of “cultural industries” as the appropriate category, and expend our intellectual energies interrogating, instead, the nature of cultural industries in these four dimensions—people (cultural workers), place (cultural spaces and places), economy (business models and relations), and creativity in cultural activities (mental, social, psychological activity).

Apart from reformulation of theory and redirection of theorizing activity, I urge a rethinking of policy, informed by greater conceptual clarity and theoretical depth. To achieve effective policy formulation entails a fundamental unpacking of the category of “cultural industries.” It requires that policymakers address individual sectors within the broader category as distinct sectors with unique characteristics and needs, while appropriately recognizing commonality alongside distinction, and addressing such commonality and distinction through suitable policy instruments. Further, clarity of policies follows from clarity about policy objectives—weighing up the relative urgency of economic, social, and community objectives, and acknowledging with clarity that there is no “magic bullet.” Clarity about the relative balance of specific objectives will also go a long way in more effective policies—the balance between big international business and small local enterprise; the balance between hardware provision and software development; and the balance between plugging into global cultural currency and developing local cultural idioms, to name just three axes of tensions.

Theory and policy are not usual bedfellows. Yet, it is with conceptual and theoretical clarity that better policy can be formulated. If this paper serves as an intervention that leads eventually to both these ends, it will have been worth the words.

Notes

1. Various industry subsectors are included, such as film, television, software, electronic publishing, arts and crafts, and music (Flew and Cunningham 2010, 114) but they appear to be a diverse mix with no clear connection between them.

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