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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**The English Model of Creativity: Cultural Politics of an Idea**

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## The English Model of Creativity: Cultural Politics of an Idea

**Abstract:** The paper presents a socio-political analysis of New Labour's rhetorical uses of the idea and values of creativity to shape cultural policy in England. It will examine how the current idea of creativity in policy discussions has been politically reconceptualised as a means of responding to broader socio-political and economic agendas. The paper will explore the extent to which New Labour's social-market political paradigm has contributed to shaping and reshaping the government's creativity rhetoric. It is suggested that the English model of creativity in policy discourse is politically constructed rather than being based in the available literature and research associated with creativity in the fields of psychology and sociology. Drawing on these discussions, the paper will suggest that there are five distinctive characteristics of the English model of creativity and offer a critical analysis about some underlying assumptions embedded in these rhetorical positions.

**Keywords:** *Creativity; Cultural Policy; Social-market Governance; Creative Partnerships; Cultural and Creative Learning; Politics of creativity*

### Introduction

The vision is of a Britain in ten years' time where the local economies in our biggest cities are driven by creativity, where there is a much expanded range of creative job opportunities in every region with clear routes into creative careers from local schools and colleges, and where every young person believes they have a real choice to use their talents in a creative capacity. (DCMS 2008, p. 6)

For the New Labour government in the UK, creativity has become a ubiquitous policy term not only within cultural policy formation but also in the overall spectrum of public policy including education and economy. New hybrid policy terms such as 'creative industries', 'creative education' and 'creative economy' are frequently used and widely accepted. Yet there is no unifying or consistent governmental definition of what 'creativity' means as an idea and what value is attached to 'creative'. What does it mean to be 'driven by creativity', to have 'creative job opportunities' and 'creative careers' and to use one's talents in a 'creative capacity'?

The purpose of this paper is to identify some distinctive characteristics of the fluid and evanescent English model of creativity that has evolved within a specific political and cultural context in England. We have specifically limited this model to England rather than to the UK as a whole because of its distinctive development of 'creativity' as a generic policy concept. Our purpose is to critique this model, which we argue emanates from a specific political position, rather than to propose it as an effective and coherent policy construction.

In order to do so, we will firstly examine how the government's creativity rhetoric has been politically conceptualised as a mirror of New Labour's social-market political position under the first three terms of their administration. Analyses of various cultural and other policy documents published during this period provide evidence of a growing imbalance between the pro-social and pro-market objectives of cultural and creative policy in England. The policy context of New Labour's flagship creative education programme *Creative Partnerships* will be considered. Drawing on these discussions, the paper will then move on to discuss five distinctive characteristics of the English model of creativity observed in the current policy discussions and offer some critical reflections on the underlying assumptions hidden behind these rhetorical positions.

## **New Labour's Social-market Governance and the Emergence of the 'Rhetorics of Creativity' in the Field of Cultural Policy<sup>1</sup>**

In *Create the Future: A Strategy for Cultural Policy, Arts and the Creative Economy*, the first cultural policy manifesto published by New Labour, 'creativity' was suggested as an important source of capital for modern Britain in both social and economic domains (Labour Party 1997). The document emphasised the potential benefits of creativity in the twenty-first century and proposed that the duty of government is to foster every individual's creative potential through education (ibid., p. 14). New Labour's creativity rhetoric became further materialised in *Creative Britain*, a collection of speeches by Chris Smith, the first Secretary of State for Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) under the New Labour administration. Here Smith proclaimed that New Labour's cultural policy should be constructed around the idea of creativity (Smith 1998, p. 1).

According to Smith (ibid., p. 144), 'the great thing about creativity' is that 'it lends itself to a democracy of involvement': every individual has creative potential and is entitled to enjoy creative and cultural activities. He argues that creativity is not confined within a few gifted individuals but open for everybody so that it can be nurtured for personal fulfilment, social development and economic opportunities. Smith's democratic notion of creativity combines pro-social and pro-market strands of arguments. By 'social' it relates to personal fulfilment, identity building and social cohesion whereas by 'economic' it refers to the economic benefits of cultural and creative industries. Smith asserts that the social and economic purposes are 'both important, both essential' because 'the intrinsic cultural value of creativity sits side by side with and acts in synergy with the economic opportunities that are now opening up' (ibid., p. 26).

In *Nurturing Creativity in Young People*, a policy review led by Paul Roberts and published by the Department for Culture, Museums and Sports (DCMS), the connection between the social and economic benefits of creativity is more explicitly advocated (Roberts 2006). The report argues for sustainable joined-up collaborations between cultural, education and business sectors so as to develop 'a more coherent creativity offer' for young people and nurture their creative skills from early years education to career development (ibid., p. 13).

This reconciliatory logic reflected in Smith's notion of creativity closely mirrors and tracks New Labour's Social-Market or Third Way political paradigm. As Estrin and Le Grand (1989, p. 1) note, the reconciliatory argument between 'social' and 'market' is the main tenet of the New Labour's Third Way political approach, which claims that 'social ends' can be achieved through the efficacy of 'market means'. According to Anthony Giddens (1998, pp. 99-100), the social-market position – or 'a new mixed economy' – seeks a synergy effect between public and private sectors by 'utilizing the dynamism of markets but with the public interest in mind' and involves 'a balance between the economic and non-economic in the life of the society'. The reconciliatory idea between social and market underpinning the government's creativity rhetorics is an example of a consistent theme running through New Labour's cultural, social and educational policy, which is sometimes referred to as a social inclusion agenda promoting social cohesion, community empowerment and urban regeneration (Buckingham and Jones 2001, Levitas 2004).

This pro-social theme within a market led political settlement has its origins in the findings of the Commission on Social Justice, chaired by Gordon Borrie from 1992 to 1994, which established the political principles for a post-socialist or Third Way government that aimed to transform the welfare state in the UK 'from a safety net in times of trouble to a springboard for economic opportunity' (Borrie 1994, p. 1). The report insisted that 'an economic high road of growth and productivity must also be a social high road of opportunity and security' because 'economic and social policies are inextricably linked just like two sides of the same coin' (ibid., p. 97).

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'Rhetorics of Creativity' was introduced by Banaji et al. (2006) in an Arts Council England monograph focusing on discourses about creativity circulating in the public domain.

New Labour's new political settlement for tackling social injustice has been a combination of offering recognition to disadvantaged populations and providing them with economic opportunities by asserting that 'the extension of economic opportunity is not only the source of economic prosperity but also the basis of social justice' (ibid., p. 95). This marks a distinctive contrast from the traditional social-democratic strategy to redress social injustice by income redistribution through high taxation or direct state support to disadvantaged populations. New Labour's social-market governance can be regarded as a form of 'politics of recognition' in Charles Taylor's phrase (Taylor 1994), under which cultural policies have become harnessed to address both social and economic objectives; the idea being that cultural recognition and participation leads both to social inclusion and cohesion and to increased economic activity and participation.

On the one hand, cultural policies are mobilised to address the pro-social objective of offering cultural recognition to the disadvantaged and their cultural needs through limited redistribution of cultural resources so that they can feel recognised, included and empowered. On the other hand, cultural and social policies relating to social cohesion and urban regeneration are formulated to address a pro-market objective of encouraging the 'dependent' to become more self-motivated, participatory and responsible for their own economic lives. Particularly in relation to the political agenda of 'human capital investment', we believe that this dualistically constructed political strategy has significantly influenced the development of the current English model of creativity in the field of cultural policy.

### **Creative Education as an Investment in Human Capital**

The political imperative to foster a new type of creative workforce has been stressed in a number of policy documents. Amongst those, we believe that two documents are particularly crucial to understand the dynamic aspects of New Labour's creativity rhetoric. One is Kimberly Seltzer and Tom Bentley's *The Creative Age* (1999) published by DEMOS; and the other is *All Our Futures* (1999) published by National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (1999).<sup>2</sup> Both documents promote the idea of 'creativity' as the central theme for a new effective way of investing in human capital and agree that there is a crisis in education, which necessitates a creative turn. However, their rhetorical claims are different in terms of how they perceive creativity, what is wrong and what needs doing.

Seltzer and Bentley's discussions on creativity are based on their observations about rapidly changing market conditions. It is argued that 'technological progress, organisational change and intensified global competition have driven a shift from manual work to 'thinking jobs' that emphasise a whole new range of skills, from problem-solving and communication to information and risk management and self-organisation' (Seltzer and Bentley 1999, p. viii). Seltzer and Bentley describe these changing economic conditions in terms of 'weightless economy', where 'intangible resources such as information, organisational networks and human capital have become the primary sources of productivity and competitiveness' (ibid., p. 1). Coping with weightlessness is at the heart of their conception of creativity which is about 'the ability of the application of knowledge and skills in new ways to achieve a valued goal' (ibid., p.11).

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<sup>2</sup> DEMOS is an independent think tank in the U.K., seen as being close to the Labour Party and believed to have influenced the policies of New Labour government. National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) was jointly commissioned by Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) and chaired by Ken Robinson a long time arts education advocate. The main task of the committee was to propose a series of suggestions for a new education vision for both departments of culture and education.

By asserting that ‘the most common misconception about creativity is that it involves artistic sensibility’ (ibid., p. 18), they argue that in order to thrive in an economy defined by innovative application of knowledge, school curriculum should be restructured so as to enable all individuals to learn how to ‘diversify their ranges of skills and knowledge’ and ‘apply what they know in multiple work contexts’ (ibid., p. 4). In this regard, Seltzer and Bentley’s notion of creativity represents an arts-decentred and pro-market paradigm that views creativity as ‘a prerequisite for [individual] independence, self-reliance and success’ in the creative age (ibid., p. 11). This pro-market shaping of ‘creativity’ as an economic necessity and as a ‘freedom’ has echoes of the free market liberalism of eighteenth century England. Daniel Defoe, for instance, wrote that: ‘as the industry of mankind is set to work, their hopes and views are raised, and their ambition fired; the view and prospect of gain inspires the world with the keenest vigour and puts new life into their souls’ (Defoe 1749, cited in Mason 2005, p. 73).

By contrast, *All Our Futures* calls for a need to develop ‘a culturally and creatively balanced curriculum’ that can ‘actively promote synergistic interaction between science and technology on the one hand and the arts and humanities on the other’ (NACCCE 1999, p. 76). The report argues that the conventional academic curriculum is neither designed to respond to young people’s ‘social, moral, and spiritual’ needs, nor to ‘help them discover their passions and sensibilities’ (ibid., p. 23). In order to realise ‘a balanced curriculum’ in schools, creativity should be adopted at the heart of education and the current education system should be complemented with enriched ‘provision for creative and cultural education’ which can be assisted through sustainable partnerships between schools and cultural organisations (ibid., p.138).

The document embraces a democratised, universal and undifferentiated notion of creativity with the claim that everybody has potential to become creative and creative possibilities are ‘pervasive in the concerns of everyday life’ rather than confined to the artistic and cultural field (ibid., p. 28). However, their central argument lies in the re-recognition of the importance of the arts and humanities and reinstating their reduced status within the dominant education paradigm. In this regard, the NACCCE report promotes a pro-social and arts-based definition of creativity with the claim that ‘practicing and understanding the arts in all their forms are essential elements of creative and cultural education’ (ibid., p. 41).

This pro-social shaping of the concept of creativity has more in common with Chris Smith’s rhetoric and the influence of regeneration, inclusion and social re-invention discourses from contemporaneous documents like Matarasso’s *Use or Ornament?: The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (1997) and Landry and Bianchini’s *The Creative City* (1995) both of which stress the need for social forms of creativity geared to imagining and realising new ways of living together particularly in the declining cities:

[G]enuine creativity involves thinking a problem afresh and from first principles; experimentation; originality; the capacity to rewrite rules; to be unconventional; to discover common threads amid the seemingly disparate; to look at situations laterally and with flexibility. These ways of thinking encourage innovation and generate new possibilities. In this sense, creativity is a ‘modernist’ concept because it emphasises the new, progress and continual change. (Landry and Bianchini 1995, p. 18)

We believe that New Labour’s creativity discourse has been directly and indirectly influenced by both pro-market and pro-social positions. But there is an apparent inconsistency between *All Our Futures* and *The Creative Age*; the former stresses the centrality of the arts and the need for a more humanising curriculum in order to nurture creativity; and the latter refuses the traditional association between creativity and the arts and insists on a curriculum that is geared towards the market needs for a more flexible, adaptive and self-directed workforce.

For those who have faith in the social-market paradigm, this inconsistency may represent the positive and dialogic dynamics of a social-market political paradigm. But for those who do not, it may appear to expose inherent contradictions of this political position. However we argue that

whilst both arguments may seem contradictory, the government's creativity discourses represent 'a tension' of the reconciliatory political logic between pro-social and pro-market claims underpinning the social-market governance. This tension is reflected in New Labour's flagship creative education programme *Creative Partnerships* which we will discuss in the following section.

### **Creative Partnerships: Tensions between Pro-social and Pro-market Constructions of Creativity**

Creative Partnerships (CP, hereafter) is a creative education initiative funded both by DCMS and DfES and managed through the Arts Council of England.<sup>3</sup> In response to the NACCCE report *All Our Futures*, CP was initially launched as a pilot project in 2002 in 16 of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in England (CP 2005a, DCMS 2001). CP has ever since operated as an intermediary agency working in partnership with approximately 25 schools and locally based artists and cultural organisations in each area. Although CP was not designed to be a permanent project at the inception stage, CP has received the unprecedented scale of public support for an arts education type policy scheme totalling £150 million from 2002 to 2009.<sup>4</sup>

The establishment of CP addressed the interrelated social and economic objectives of New Labour. CP began as an arts education resource aimed at addressing a social inclusion agenda by redistributing cultural resources to young people with disadvantaged backgrounds on the one hand and developing their creativity leading to the country's economic success in the knowledge economy on the other hand (DCMS 2001, p. 5). In this regard, the inception of CP represents a paradigmatic example of New Labour's social-market attempt to simultaneously pursue both social and market agendas.

However, CP has modified their model of creativity over the last seven years. There has been a growing ambivalence about the claim that CP is about the arts, particularly about arts education. As clearly stated in the green paper *Culture and Creativity: Next Ten Years*, CP was conceived as a cultural policy scheme to enable young people to develop their 'creative or artistic skills' in various forms of arts genres and enhance their 'critical appreciation' of the arts through regular experiences of culture in all its forms' (DCMS 2001, p. 18).<sup>5</sup>

But, if we look at their more recent policy rhetoric, the central argument has shifted towards promoting 'creative learning' and initiating 'school improvement' (CP 2005a, p. 10). CP now differentiates its own approach from other arts education programmes by claiming that 'it moves beyond the arts education model of the past by putting creativity at the heart of learning' (CP 2006). For CP, 'creativity is not simply about 'doing the arts'' or developing artistic skills; it is instead about 'questioning, making connections, inventing and reinventing, and flexing imaginative muscles' (CP 2007, p. 1).

CP's shifting rhetorical focus reflects a recent tendency to disassociate the arts from creativity and move towards a pro-market position of creativity in Seltzer and Bentley's terms that emphasise a 'weightless' definition of creativity as a set of generally desirable virtues like creative thinking skills, flexible adaptability and good team-working demanded by new economic

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<sup>3</sup> DfES (previously DfEE) stands for Department of Education and Skills. It became later split into DCSF (Department of Children, Schools and Families) and DIUS (Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills) in 2007.

<sup>4</sup> The operation areas have accordingly expanded from 16 to 25 in 2004, then further to 36 in 2005. As of April 2009, CP becomes independent from Arts Council of England and transformed into a new governmental intermediary organisation Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) that will further expand CP's education endeavours.

<sup>5</sup> In this green paper (DCMS 2001, p. 18), 'creative skills' refers to genre-based artistic skills as following: 'to dance, sing, and learn a musical instrument, act, paint, sculpt, make crafts, design, create television, radio internet content, write scripts, stage manage, choreograph, direct and produce; put on performance; exhibit their own work'.



conditions. This tendency is best exemplified in CP's emphasis on the economic contribution of 'creative learning':

Creativity is widely regarded as a critical factor in the future economic success of the country. [...] one of CP's key aims is to encourage and generate creative thinkers who are capable of independent thinking and questioning, innovation, risk-taking and other entrepreneurial and enterprising behaviours. By encouraging these creative skills, we believe we are preparing the next generation for a work life that features continual change and requires flexibility for success. (CP 2005b, p. 1)

CP's growing rhetorical focus on developing market-oriented creative skills closely corresponds to New Labour's political objective of encouraging 'self-actualisation' responsibilities for the disadvantaged individual and community so as to enable them to overcome dependency on state support. The whole rhetorical construction of self-actualisation and the independence of personal agency resonates with Charles Leadbeater's influential theory of 'personalisation' in which the combination of cultural and economic participation is suggested as the foundation of a new public realm (Leadbeater 2004). Government's interventions such as CP are designed to provide the creative skills demanded by the Knowledge economy, which can offer them new economic opportunities to prosper and eventually redress socio-economic injustice. In this regard, the CP's creativity rhetorics remain within the remit of the Social-market political paradigm.

### **The Five Characteristics of the English Model of Creativity**

In the previous sections, we have considered, in general terms, the dynamic correlation between the development of the government's creativity discourse and New Labour's social market political paradigm and discussed how this correlation has been reflected in the case of CP. This section will suggest that there are five distinctive and particular characteristics in the English policy discourses on creativity and offer critical reflections on the underlying assumptions embedded in these rhetorical positions.

#### ***(1) Paradigmatic Creativity: a social-market construction***

The most distinctive characteristic of the English model of creativity is that it is paradigmatic of New Labour's Social-market political position. The dominant rhetorical uses of creativity in the field of cultural and other policies reflect the government's dual and interdependent concerns: not only to invest in and give cultural recognition to disadvantaged populations through a limited re-distribution of cultural resources; but also to focus on tackling what Tessa Jowell, a Blairite Secretary of State, has called the 'poverty of aspiration' that breeds dependency on state support by encouraging individuals and communities to become more self-actualising and participatory in both cultural and economic spheres (Jowell 2004). This hybrid cultural agenda of offering recognition and encouraging self-directed economic participation goes some way to explaining the 'tensions' between cultural and economic perspectives in the current English model of creativity.

As Banaji *et al.* (2006, p. 5) point out, the contemporary rhetorics of creativity in the English model are organised and reorganised 'to persuade and even intervene in specific contexts of practice'. The rhetorics of creativity shape cultural, social and economic policy by 'naturalising' a particular political and fluid construction of both the idea and the value of creativity, which is quite distinctive from the recognised or defined sets of practices or stable concepts in the normative discourses and literature associated with the fields of psychology and sociology for instance. In this regard, the English model of creativity is entirely *rhetorical* and is associated with the values and aspirations of the social-market political position. In the established literature of 'creativity' in psychology, the English model belongs to the pragmatic approach to defining creativity, that is

‘concerned primarily with developing creativity, secondarily with understanding it, but almost not at all with testing the validity of their ideas about it’ (Sternberg and Lubart 1999, p. 5).

Beyond the English model of creativity there is general agreement amongst both psychologists and sociologists that creativity, rather than being a ubiquitous and universal concept, manifests itself when it is recognised and valued within specific cultural contexts, and used to refer to those dispositions, practices and outcomes which are publicly valued in that context (Bourdieu 1993, Csíkszentmihályi 1999, Gardner 1984, Willis 1990).<sup>6</sup> Creativity is not a natural phenomenon like a sunset or osmosis. It is a culturally specific construction which is defined so as to serve the interests of particular positions in the field of cultural production. Because it is a cultural concept rather than a natural phenomenon, it can mean whatever it is given to mean. Which of these given meanings comes to be accepted as the authoritative and dominant definition is a matter of contest between different positions respectively seeking to shape cultural, educational and social policy.

One cannot be creative in a natural and universal sense; one can only be described as creative within a specific cultural context and milieu, which values certain dispositions, practices and outcomes as being creative. In the normative discourses of creativity the ‘badge’ is awarded by gatekeepers in the field; creativity is a means of recognising outstanding contributions to a field by the field. In the English model of creativity, the ‘badging’ of creativity is awarded within the field of power to policies, practices, values and dispositions that correspond to a particular political position rather than to a recognised field of cultural or creative practice.

## ***(2) Universal Creativity: everybody is equally creative, but some are more equal than others***

The second characteristic of the social-market construction of creativity is based on the claim that ‘everybody is creative’ (DCMS 2001, Smith 1998). Banaji *et al.* (2006) also identify a common belief across a range of policy discourses that creativity is a universally available faculty which is unrestricted either by culture or levels of education. This claim is often made in opposition to the historical idea that the term ‘creative’, particularly when it relates to artistic achievement, has been restricted and awarded to those who are recognised as being exceptionally talented and gifted. This tendency is particularly obvious in the rhetoric of ‘Creative Genius’ identified by Banaji *et al.*, which is associated with the Romantic tradition that views creativity as a special and rare quality of a few individuals, who are ‘either highly educated and disciplined, or inspired in some way or both’ (*ibid.*, p. 55).

The English model of creativity avoids making a connection between creativity and giftedness, preferring in the official texts at least to stress that creativity is an undifferentiated human faculty unrelated to levels of achievement except in a very general sense. Rather than an exceptional talent in any specific domain, creativity is now emphasised as a generalised set of personal traits or attributes such as ‘independent thinking’, ‘posing unusual questions’, ‘making unexpected connections’ or ‘enhanced level of self-confidence’ (CP 2005c, p. 1). Hence, it is assumed that everybody can potentially become creative in equal measure.

In his meta-analysis of research into creativity and creative achievement, Hans Eysenck (1996, p. 202) identifies a distinction between ‘creativity as a trait’, of the kind valued in the English model, and ‘creativity by achievement’ and argues that the former does not correlate highly

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<sup>6</sup> There is consensus around this point in a number of different fields. In sociology, see Pierre Bourdieu ‘The Field of Cultural Production’ (1993) and Paul Willis ‘Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Culture of the Young’ (1990). In the field of psychology, see Howard Gardner ‘Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences’ (1984) and Mihály Csíkszentmihályi ‘Implications of a System’s Perspective for the Study of Creativity’ (1999).

with the latter (*ibid.*, p. 209).<sup>7</sup> Although there are a number of variables affecting an individual's chances of being creative and accessing creative professions, Eysenck points out that socio-economic variables remain the most influential determinant of creative achievement.<sup>8</sup> Put simply, children of certain socio-economic groups are more likely to be recognised as being 'creative' than others.

Indeed, a recent survey of the elite dance and drama schools shows that students from the most affluent social groups who are white with no disabilities are overrepresented and those from low income families, BME (British Minority Ethnic) groups and disabled populations are significantly underrepresented (Neelands *et al.* 2006b). Over 50% of top journalists and media executives are privately educated (Sutton Trust 2006).<sup>9</sup> In other words, despite the unprecedented level of spending on widening participation to a diverse range of creative and cultural learning, access to creative and economic achievement is still largely determined by birth and education.

We accept that we may all be potentially creative and capable of being more so, but we also argue that being creative in an exceptional sense and being cultured in terms of possessing a socially valued artistic sensibility or education still remain class differentiated marks of social and economic distinction. To a certain extent New Labour has begun to acknowledge this reality.

Too often, a fledgling creative career depends on who you know, how far from home you are prepared to travel, or how little you are prepared to work for. (DCMS 2008, p. 4)

Nevertheless, the universal claim for creativity still maintains a strong hold in the English model of creativity. Whilst being eminently egalitarian and democratic, the government's undifferentiated creativity rhetoric, coupled with the universal claim of creativity, may actually work against the interests of highly intelligent young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by reinforcing the idea that the socially acquired 'gifts' associated with exceptional creativity are in fact 'natural' gifts. By stressing that we all have equal access to creativity in equal measure, we ignore the significant socio-cultural variables that determine access to high levels of training and achievement not just in the cultural and creative spheres but in all walks of life where personal creativity becomes a badge of distinction. Bourdieu (1991, p. 54) has identified this tendency as the 'ideology of charisma'; by treating all pupils as if they were equally 'creative', we reinforce rather than diminish social injustices.

### ***(3) Weightless Creativity – generic rather than context specific skills***

The rhetorical re-working of creativity as a domain-free and ubiquitously applicable concept has brought into question what is sometimes seen in the English model as an 'old fashioned' tendency to treat the arts as synonymous with creativity in much the same way as we now understand that culture means more than the arts (Cox 2005, DCMS 2007, 2008). Instead, creativity has become synonymous with 'effective' and 'successful' in policy discourses. 'Creative skills' are also increasingly becoming synonymous with generally 'desirable virtues' of both learners in schools and workers under the new economic conditions. Within this rhetorical position, creativity tends to

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<sup>7</sup> In Eysenck's (1999, p. 202) terms, 'creativity as a trait' refers to 'a dispositional variable, the characteristics of a person leading him to produce acts, items and instances of private novelty' whereas 'creativity by achievement' means 'actually producing works that are novel in the public sense'.

<sup>8</sup> Eysenck (1999, p. 209) suggests the variables affecting an individual's chances of being creative as follows: cognitive variables such as intelligence, knowledge, technical skills and special talents; environmental variables such as politico-religious, cultural, socio-economic and educational factors; personality variables such as internal motivation, confidence, non-conformity and trait creativity.

<sup>9</sup> This claim is supported by various recent research projects funded by the Sutton Trust which is a charitable foundation committed to widening access to the highest levels of education and training.

refer to generic rather than context specific skills such as adaptability, taking risks, possibility thinking and problem-solving skills that are applicable to all domains of life (Sefton-Green 2008).

To a certain extent this position chimes with Anna Craft's notion of little 'c' creativity that refers to 'the ordinary but life-wide attitude toward life' driven by possibility thinking that can be manifested 'in the everyday rather than extraordinary' circumstances (Craft 2005, p. 19). However, there is a difference between the domain-free characteristic stressed in the English model and Craft's little 'c' creativity. For Craft (*ibid.*, p. 87), creativity is 'a culturally-saturated concept' that cannot be treated as a 'universally applicable notion' without considering any specific cultural and social mediation, or a generalised set of 'cross-curricular thinking skills' that is untied to any pre-existing domain of knowledge.

The NACCCE report provided one of the most concise, well-wrought and influential contemporary policy definitions of creativity: 'an imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes which are original and of value' (NACCCE 1999, p. 29). Following this formulation, the report identified four key characteristics of creativity – imaginative activity, purpose, originality and value. Although this formulation has been subject to extensive critique on a number of points (Buckingham and Jones 2001), it has become the foundation of subsequent policy frameworks deployed by CP, DCMS, DfES and Ofsted.<sup>10</sup>

We argue that 'fashioned' is perhaps the most important word in the definition and it is often overlooked. Turning imaginative activity into outcomes of originality and value requires, as Williams (1961) argues, the knowledge and skill to 'fashion' ideas into a communicable or material form. The creative agent must inevitably act within a structure, which must be known and mapped in order for the act to be transformative – 'original and of value'. Because creativity, whether in the arts or in other fields of human endeavours, pre-supposes an existing field of conceptual knowledge and practice (Boden 1992, 1994, Gardner 1984).<sup>11</sup>

In their recent report on CP, Ofsted state that their inspection was guided by two definitions, one by NACCCE given above and the NESTA definition which is: 'seeing what no-one else has seen, thinking what no-one else has thought and doing what no-one else has dared' (cited in Ofsted 2006, p. 5).<sup>12</sup> Clearly it is difficult to ascribe any kind of meaning to this definition unless it is limited by a particular conceptual landscape, which might be a field of activity, an art form, a subject discipline or an area of expertise and enterprise. It cannot make sense if it is applied nebulously to the totality of human thought, vision and action.

But there is a further implication, which is that you cannot see what no-one else has seen unless you know what everyone else has already seen: you cannot think what no-one else has thought unless you know what has been already thought. Without prior knowledge, without the skills base and without some measure of craft, the outcomes of creativity are unlikely to be awarded the badge of 'creative'. Mihályi Csíkszentmihályi (1999, p. 314) argues that originality, freshness of perceptions and divergent-thinking abilities may all be desirable personal traits but they do not by themselves constitute creativity without there being some form of public recognition because creativity is 'a phenomenon that is constructed through an interaction between producer and audience'.

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<sup>10</sup> The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is a non-ministerial governmental department that inspects and regulates education and care for children and learners in England.

<sup>11</sup> Howard Gardner and Margaret Boden, both maintain that creativity cannot be considered outside a system or a structure. Gardner (1984), for instance, frames creativity within a theory of multiple and distinctive intelligences each of which has its own characteristics and valuational structures. Boden (1992, 1994) similarly suggests that all forms of creativity require a pre-existing 'generative system' and that originality within this system requires the creative agent to know the limits of the conceptual space' associated with the system.

<sup>12</sup> NESTA stands for The National Endowment of Science, Technology and the Arts. It was established under the 1998 National Lottery Act to support and promote talent, innovation and creativity in the fields of science, technology and the arts in the U.K.

Ironically however, whilst denying the importance of public recognition with its rhetorical emphasis on domain-free creativity untethered from any particular context of human activity or thought, the English model stresses that creativity is vital to the production of economically valuable products and outcomes with market recognition. More importantly, domain-free creative skills are expected to have constant updates and further modifications under the rapidly changing economic conditions. Following this rhetorical position emphasising the ‘weightlessness’ of creativity in Seltzer and Bentley’s terms, being creative is not an option to choose but an imperative that every individual must adopt because ‘the only answer is to be more enterprising and more creative’ to survive in the weightless economy (Cox 2005, p. 48). In this regard the English model of creativity uncritically validates the market demand for a ‘weightless creativity’ that needs constant modifications to float in a world that becomes increasingly ‘liquid’ in Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) terms.

In *The Culture of New Capitalism*, Richard Sennett (2006) describes a society in which workers become rootless, shifting from task to task, place to place without any sense of a sustained life narrative, measured by their potential rather than their actual achievements; a society in which craftsmanship and experience become negative obstacles to progress; a society which has no hold on the past and a consuming appetite for an evanescent future. Sennett (ibid., p. 5) argues that ‘the cultural ideal required in the new institutions’ of the creative age ‘damages many of the people who inhabit them’. Indeed, these grim pictures are the conditions of ‘liquid modernity’ of our epoch that not only demands the transient and ephemeral private and social relationships but also facilitates the collapse of personal, cultural and social identities (Bauman 2000).

But the English model of creativity is insensitive to the critical warnings of Bauman and Sennett about any foreseeable destructive human cost caused by the weightlessness of social and economic conditions. By ascribing the always positive value of ‘creative’ to the development of the ‘adaptive skills’ required by the market, it treats weightless creativity as a socially, morally and ethically as well as economically desirable virtue. The value of universally available ‘adaptive skills’ in a domain free concept of creativity further devalues the ideas of tradition, craftsmanship and experience associated with the normative discourses of creativity. In a liquid world there is no time or place for craft and experience, only for adaption and learning new skills to survive whatever the market requires. The uncritical acceptance in cultural and creative policy of the human effects of late capitalism mirrors what Pierre Bourdieu (1998, p. 125) terms ‘economic fatalism’ that naturalises the progress of the market underpinned by ‘the law of the strongest’.

#### ***(4) Privatised Creativity - individual resource rather than social process***

There is a growing tendency in the English model of creativity toward de-coupling the social and economic strands associated with the creativity rhetoric and an increasing emphasis on the ‘privatised’ value of creativity and cultural activity rather than on its social value as a means of encouraging social inclusion, cohesion and urban regeneration (DCMS 2008, Jowell 2004, McMaster 2008). The de-coupling includes the increasing emphasis on entrepreneurial rather than social creativity and the distancing of creativity from a traditional association with the ‘creative’ arts that we have earlier discussed.

But more importantly, we believe that this decoupling reflects a recent shift in New Labour’s cultural policy thinking that moves away from the idea that culture can play an important role in realising a social justice agenda to the idea that culture is a private and autonomous resource for personal social capital (Neelands *et al.* 2006a, pp. 97-98). The increasing drift between pro-social and pro-market objectives for creativity and culture marks a distinction from New Labour’s earlier avowed pursuit of realising both social and economic goals.

In *Government and the Value of Culture*, Tessa Jowell (2004, p. 8) called for a change of direction within the political debates about culture and argued that ‘by accepting culture is an important investment in personal social capital we begin to justify that investment on culture’s own terms’ (ibid., p. 16). Her suggestion of valuing culture on its own terms became further reinforced in the recent policy document *Supporting Excellence in the Arts* (McMaster 2008). Here, McMaster (ibid.) argues for reinstating ‘excellence’ in cultural policy discussions, which indicates that cultural policy formations will move away from the ideas of realising social transformation through the arts towards using cultural policy to ‘share’ the private and rarefied rewards of artistic engagement more widely and the autonomous artistic field will become freed from social targets and objectives (Purnell 2008). Ironically, McMaster (ibid., p.10) argued that ‘risk taking’ should be a criterion for assessing and funding the arts just as the rewards for ‘risk-taking’ in the financial sector were beginning to be seen as the problem of the social-market settlement rather than the cure.

The government’s new policy emphasis on cultural learning as being distinctive from creative learning, which is enshrined in the new education schemes of *Find Your Talent* and *Shine*, closely resonate with McMaster’s ‘excellence’ arguments (McMaster 2008).<sup>13</sup> In his report, McMaster (2008) does not address any pro-social concerns of the arts in terms of identity building, social cohesion and community development. McMaster’s vision of education appears to represent, as Cochrane *et al.* (2008, p. 31) point out, a more ‘contained position’ that is limited to ‘outreach and audience development’ of the life-changing excellence in the arts and ‘young people’s ‘experiencing’ culture rather than making it’.

Indeed, whereas cultural activity in the early years of the New Labour administration was seen as being a powerful catalyst for broader socio-cultural changes in terms of cultural recognition, social inclusion and urban regeneration, more recent rhetoric distances culture as the arts from culture in its widest ethnographic sense. In a recent DEMOS discussion paper titled *Culture and Learning*, for instance, John Holden proposes that:

However, in this Paper, culture is used not in a wide ethnographic sense, encompassing the creation of meaning through all of society’s practices and symbols; instead it is used in a more focused sense of culture as a pursuit through the arts. Here ‘the arts’ are broadly conceived to include historic and contemporary arts, ‘high art’ and popular art, performing arts, literature and heritage, and arts within and beyond such institutions as museums and galleries. (Holden 2008, pp. 10-11)

In this perspective the arts become a pursuit with personal rewards that are transcendent of and autonomous from the complexities both of culture in its widest sense and of the possibility of social transformation through social rather than individual acts of imagination.

Similarly, the idea of creative learning, now being separated from cultural learning in the arts, has become aligned with the pro-market position represented by Seltzer and Bentley’s arguments that place a greater emphasis on cultivating ‘personal’ creativity for successful and self-actualising economic participation in the knowledge economy. This call has been more recently echoed in *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy*, which brings together a range of government ministries, intermediaries and agencies all committed to the goal of nurturing individual creativity for economic ends ‘from the grassroots to the global marketplace’ (DCMS 2008, p. 7).

In this document, creativity is rarely discussed in terms of a pro-social and collective resource for social cohesion and urban regeneration. At the heart of the document is the ‘creative hub’ of a diagrammatic representation borrowed from an earlier Work Foundation report to DCMS

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<sup>13</sup> Find Your Talent is a new arts education programme currently operated in 10 areas in England. In 2008, it began as a five year pilot project that aims to provide a comprehensive cultural learning offer of at least five hours a week for every child (Find Your Talent 2008a, 2008b). Shine is a national youth talent festival that is held for a week every year. The programme has started running in England since 2008 and it aims to provide local showcasing opportunities for young people’s talents in the arts (Shine 2009).

*Staying Ahead* (DCMS 2007). And at the heart of this diagram is building individual rather than social creativity with the stress on the economic rather than the social ‘prizes’ of culture and creativity.

In the English model, creativity, now assumed as a form of personal capital, is believed to ‘give individuals a pathway to shape their own destiny’ (DCMS 2008, p. 21) and the government’s job is to provide ‘an environment that allows the most talented to sustain themselves in the industry’ (ibid., p. 30). ‘Talent’ and ‘talented’ have always been used in New Labour’s discourse to refer to exceptional gifts and giftedness in the arts, whereas ‘giftedness’ has been used to refer to exceptional academic achievement (White *et al.* 2003, p. 2). The conjoining of ‘talents’ and ‘economy’ in the title suggests that creativity is now at the service of the economy rather than the pro-social counterbalance to the market suggested by the Social-market political position.

##### ***(5) Positive and Promethean Creativity: our mantra of hope against the future we have created***

The fifth characteristic is that creativity is always assumed as being possible and positive, which is probably the most pervasive and persuasive value across its different policy usages. The English model of creativity reflects an unconditional faith in human agency; a belief in each individual’s capacity to steal fire from the gods by acting in and on the world in ways that are original and significant. It represents Chris Smith’s (1998, p. 144) aspiration to create ‘a democracy of involvement’. Promoting each individual’s freedom to act in and on his own private, social and economic worlds is the common link of the current English model of creativity. It is what is referred to in statements like ‘thinking outside the box’, ‘breaking the mould’, ‘taking risks’, ‘making unusual connections’ and ‘imagining the world differently’ (CP 2005a, 2005c, 2007, Craft 2005). These common phrases all refer to taking responsibility for not accepting the world as it is; either socially or economically. The shaping structures of school, family, legal or even market systems are not passive institutions but fields of human action, which can be recreated through action and participation.

As Williams (1961) reminds us, at the heart of a pro-social and agency-centred model of creativity, there is a vibrant tension between structure (constraints) and agency (freedom to act). Being creative in this sense means acting to shape the structures that shape us; controlling and shaping nature as well as cultural institutions. Prometheus stole fire from the gods artfully by containing it within a fennel stalk. With that fire man created warmth, shelter, technology and culture. This belief in promethean creativity affirms New Labour’s reconciliatory political logic that we are individually and collectively able to remake ourselves, advance technologies, and create cultures and a common life.

But increasingly, during the New Labour project, the creative freedom to act has been restricted to banks and other financial institutions in the hope that the tax revenues raised by the creative growth of wealth in the increasingly de-regulated and ‘creative’ financial markets could resource a pro-social agenda for better schools and hospitals for instance. However, the freedom of the culturally and economically excluded to act in order to gain cultural recognition leading to full economic participation has not had a significant impact on levels of economic inequality. The 2008 Institute for Fiscal Studies report shows that income inequality is at its highest since records began in 1961 and that: ‘[t]aking the period 1996–97 to 2006–07 as a whole, incomes have grown fastest at the very top of the income distribution, as they did in the period of Conservative government that preceded it’ (Brewer *et al.* 2008, p. 1). By this measure the social-market political settlement has neither ‘utilized the dynamism of the markets with the public interest in mind’ as Giddens (1998, p. 100) promised, or provided for the culturally and economically excluded the ‘springboard for economic opportunity’ that Borrie (1994, p. 1) claimed. Ironically, in the 2009 budget, faced with the meltdown of the economy, a New Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer returned to the politics

of redistribution by increasing the top rate of tax to 50%.

Even in the cultural domain, the initial social-market emphasis on agency and participation as a means of social inclusion leading to meaningful cultural and economic activity for all has been replaced by providing access to the passive ‘experience’ of ‘complex culture’ (Jowell 2004). The aesthetic tastes and preferences of the economically and culturally powerful have been reinstated and naturalised as aspirational for those not fortunate enough to have been born or educated into the rarefied pleasures of the ‘sacred arts’ (Bourdieu 1984). The return to the idea of ‘excellence’ in the arts in particular is a traditional device for distinguishing between so-called ‘instrumental’ and ‘autonomous’ uses of the arts and reinforces the idea that only the ‘excellent’ few can perform to standards of excellence.<sup>14</sup>

Williams (1961, p. 19) suggested that ‘no word in English carries a more consistently positive reference than ‘creative’’ and that ‘we should be glad of this when we think of the values it seeks to express and the activities it offers to describe’. The current creativity discourse appears to share an infallible belief in the goodness of creativity and the universal purity of creative intentions. By reinforcing the belief in the positive and transformative impacts inspired by the Social-market politics of the English model of creativity on a wide range of social, environmental and economic problems, ‘creativity’ in policy discussions represents ‘a mantra of hope’ affirmatively endorsed in ministerial statements such as ‘the more creative we are the better it will be’ (DCMS 2007). This overriding positive assumption of the English model of creativity, in our view, is closely related to the belief in rather than the realisation of the power of human agency to transform institutionalised inequality.

### **Critical Reflections on the English Model of Creativity**

The trajectory of the English model of creativity demonstrates that its policy value lies in its very fluidity and evanescence. Its meanings are not fixed, stable or consistent. Its meanings, in policy terms, have shifted and evolved to reflect changes in the priorities of the New Labour administration. Because creativity is always positive it has allowed government to use it to associate positive value with a wide and disparate range of policy initiatives and ideological positions. As we have shown, these have ranged from describing the need for an adaptive workforce to celebrating deregulation of the financial sector and to school improvement projects. In particular we have noted a shift in its usages away from culture, criticality, pro-social inclusion and recognition agendas needed for a knowledge economy towards privatising cultural experience, the formation of ‘creative industries’ and legitimating the excessive risk taking of the ‘wealth-creators’.

The English model of creativity, therefore, masks a struggle to naturalise definitions of creativity and creative practices that are specifically cultural and serve New Labour’s political and ideological interests. The ‘naturalising’ aspect of the current English model of creativity, that assumes progress, originality, individualism, non-conformity and unfettered human agency are virtues, may also exclude, disempower and marginalise those individuals and groups who do not already belong to the culture of the culturally and economically powerful and who do not have equal access to the resources of cultural and creative opportunity.

In our view the current English model of creativity places too much emphasis on an unconditional and egalitarian faith in human agency, which has become increasingly distanced from a pro-social creative consciousness, shaped by critical, ethical and moral reflections on the social,

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<sup>14</sup> As long ago as 1958, Williams (1983[1958]) recognised in his critique of R. H. Tawney’s concept of ‘equality’ that there is an inherent contradiction in the idea that cultural growth can be combined with existing standards of excellence. In William’s (*ibid.*, p. 226) view, cultural growth implies a social and cultural re-definition, or democratisation of standards of ‘excellence’ hitherto associated with the tastes, preferences and level of education of already dominant social and economic groups.



cultural and economic limits of human capacity. The growing rhetorical tendency of disassociating the arts from creativity and the increasing drift between the pro-social and pro-market agendas suggest that there is a need for an investment in a culturally sensitive ethical concept of creativity, in which the limits of human invention, innovation and creation are mediated by the touchstones of fairness, tolerance and common humanity that are, as John Gray (1996, p. 32) has argued, vital to counteracting the excesses of an unfettered market.

John Hope Mason (2005, pp. 233-235) also warns that it is ‘a false assumption’ to uncritically endorse ‘creative’ with ‘overwhelmingly positive associations’, particularly when it is applied to economic action, because it neglects ‘the destructive aspects of our economies that tend to exacerbate inequalities and undermine social cohesion’. The current English model of creativity is particularly insensitive to this claim by emphasising that creativity is always positive and desirable as if our era could be saved or permanently advanced through creativity under new economic conditions (Cox 2005, DCMS 2007, 2008, Seltzer and Bentley 1999).

We argue that there is a need for the English model of creativity to reflect Williams’ critical warning about our ‘unthinking repetitive’ tendency to treat creativity as being universally and intrinsically positive (Williams 1961). Human invention can, as Nietzsche (1993) argued, serve both moral and immoral purposes and this distinction is of course culturally made.<sup>15</sup> We assume that it is only a specific form of humanistic creative education, which focuses on an informed and empathetic awareness of ethical choices that can make the difference – the difference between young men, educated in English maintained schools, creating new and original weapons of mass destruction from simple household chemicals choosing to use or not use them; between a society that sanctions torture of its ‘enemies’ and a society that does not; between an ethically responsible and socially accountable market and an unfettered and ‘creative’ market that leads to unprecedented levels of private greed and the near collapse of the global economic system.

In his discussion of politics in the social-market creative age, John Gray (1996, p. 13) underlined the necessity for a critically reflexive form of creativity in order to address the task of the age [which] is ‘that of reconciling the human need for security with the permanent revolution of the market’. In this sense the logic of the social-market position can only make sense if there is an ethically determined and humane balance between pro-social and pro-market tensions in the contemporary rhetorics of creativity.

We argue that the dominant pro-market construction of creativity must be counter-balanced with a culturally sensitive ethical and arts-centred creativity that offers critical and reflexive interrogations about our creativity-preoccupied age through a social, cultural and ethical critique. Above all we need to return to the importance of engendering opportunities for critical social creativity as a means of re-imagining and transforming the institutions and shibboleths of governance in order to redress the balance between the social and the economic. If the balance, as Giddens (1998, p. 100) describes, ‘between the economic and non-economic in the life of society’ is not maintained, the key plank of the reconciliatory belief between pro-social and pro-market governance underpinned by New Labour’s social-market paradigm would be, or has already been, undermined.

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<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche’s radical redefinition of creativity as an amoral and irrational phenomenon combining both life affirming and life denying energies and possibilities is outlined in *The Birth of Tragedy: from the Spirit of Music* (Nietzsche 1993).

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