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## KEY CONCEPTS FOR URBAN CREATIVE INDUSTRY IN THE UK.

### Introduction

It has become almost self-evident in recent years that there has been a convergence of urban entrepreneurial strategies for growth and regeneration, with the presence and availability of young people, (ie graduates in the fields of art, design media and related fields) who are hoping to find opportunities to make a living through freelance jobs, or in a wide assortment of creative projects. This coming together, in an urban cultural milieu, has given rise to a very large number of reports, academic studies, public debates, journalistic commentaries and political interventions. At their most voluble, radical activists (especially in Berlin but also Hamburg) have contested the rapid gentrification of rundown neighbourhoods where local people are displaced making space for the more visually appealing presence of fashionable young people who seem to contribute to urban improvement ( with the appearance of new bars, cafés, local delicatessens and *boulangeries* etc ) while also making a living in ways which boldly announce the arrival of the arts and of the creative economy into their neighbourhoods. Academics like myself have become accustomed to reading about the way in which cities and local authorities have embarked on adventurous (or aggressive) marketing campaigns which are addressed to both potential investors and tourists. Doreen Jakobs for example gives a vivid account of the development of art walks in the Wedding district of Berlin. These walks emulate the bus trips into the newly developed creative neighbourhoods in the South Bronx in NY which Jakob also analyses (Jakob 2009, 2010, see also

Zukin 2010 ). Such activities as these attempt to make overlooked, shabby or indeed dangerous areas of the city interesting to tourists while at the same time they deliver customers to the newly-established restaurants and gallery spaces, and overall the idea is to attract the interest of investors and developers who will, it is hoped, embed themselves and create new jobs, homes and regenerate the area<sup>1</sup>. This entire process has achieved international prominence as a formula for growth (at a time when governments and city authorities have less and less money to invest themselves) thanks to the writing of Richard Florida (2002). Florida's seminal text has attracted the attention of readers (including prominent politicians such as Angela Merkel) across the world. This is because, writing in an accessible manner, he moves easily between a diagnostics of post-industrial city dilemmas as to how to innovate and create growth and jobs, at the same time he develops a prescriptive approach which has the remarkable quality of seemingly being capable of implementation in almost any city across the world. Put crudely (for the sake of brevity), Florida creates series of successful city rankings which depend on the ability of the cities to attract young well-qualified people who will, by their own enthusiasm and creative endeavours produce a distinctive urban milieu which will promise renewal and regeneration. Florida's formula combines what he calls the 3 Ts, Talent, Tolerance and Technology. Tolerance refers to the need for a liberal-minded civic culture which is welcoming to gays and lesbians, technology refers to speedy and efficient access to new media and electronic communications and talent is really a euphemism for young middle-class and consumer-oriented young people. Critics of Florida are vocal. Readers might wish to refer to the most sustained (and witty) of these by the urban geographer Jamie Peck who, with a wealth of data at his disposal, disputes almost all the claims made by Florida (see Peck 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> The connections between urban growth coalitions and property developers each of who look to the glamour and 'buzz' of creative scenes to attract well-off residents to rundown areas is well established in various academic and activist reports and documents. One of the most interesting of these comes from a group of artists in Berlin who developed and protected the Skulpturenpark area (see (KUNSTrePUBLIK 2009).

So in effect those of us interested in the livelihoods of young creative people now find it hard to see their activities as anything other than harmful and complicit if we consider their job creation strategies within the over-arching terms of urban development. This is likely to be compounded when we take into account the inflated government rhetoric which in the UK dates back to the early days of the New Labour government, which from 1997 until 2007 at least, hoped that creativity would join the financial and service sectors as the post-industrial future for reviving UK competitiveness and growth. This was before the banking crisis and the change of government to a Coalition led by the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, both of which have been noticeably quieter in regard to the expectations for the new creative economy. Likewise the once prominent Department of Culture, Media and Sport has retreated back to the shadows with a reduced budget and less significant place in the David Cameron government. So we are left now with a scenario where most sociologists and urban theorists who are interested in analysing the expansion of the new creative economy find that this attention to employment is inevitably entangled with debates about the city and real estate. Overall in such a setting the question of jobs and creative labour markets gets lost sight of, not surprisingly perhaps given that in class terms the creatives and the artists are seen as middle-class interlopers (or pioneers) who make spaces ready for the profit-driven property developers who will inevitably force out of these spaces the original poor, working class, black, or other disadvantaged populations.

In the pages that follow I have to admit that there is a bias of interest towards understanding the activities undertaken by the artists, fashion designers, cultural and creative workers. Drawing on many years of research in these areas, I will offer a series of summary snapshots, aimed at providing a set of concepts which can illuminate and clarify some of the questions posed by the way in which artists and creative workers are in effect pitched by governments as urban

pioneers at the forefront of producing solutions to the shrinking of work and employment in the post-industrial era.

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### **URBAN COTTAGE INDUSTRIES.**

From the early 1980s, a time of high youth unemployment and years before the New Labour government of 1997 set about to expand access for young working class people to the universities and art schools, there came into being the visible appearance of what at the time, and commenting on this phenomenon, I called ‘subcultural entrepreneurs’ (McRobbie 1989/1997). This mode of self-employment emerged from the long shadow of unemployment and comprised activities such as second-hand clothes markets, fashion design, music production, small record outlets, music events and club promotion, micro-media in the form of flyers, posters and other graphic design, magazines, ‘zines’, and what we might now call indie production associated with the do-it-yourself ethos of the punk subculture from the late 1970s on. These were all located in rundown city neighbourhoods, indeed in lanes and in out-of-use industrial sites. The sociological significance of these activities was that they showed how youth subcultures were able to generate their own home-grown labour markets, such that youth cultures were doubling up as informal and unrecognised, certainly unsubsidised, job creation schemes, albeit existing somewhere within the space of the informal economy and the more legitimate but as yet unnamed creative economy<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> see McRobbie 1989/1997.

These tiny subcultural economies quickly transmogrified into a set of more visible and institutionalised creative practices including what we might retrospectively see as the flowering of British fashion design from the mid to late 1980s onwards (McRobbie 1998). Within these few years cohorts of (mostly) young women exited the art schools as graduates in fashion design and quickly set up stalls and small outlets in London and also in other big cities. The art schools had opened their doors to more students with non-conventional qualifications and had also introduced what were called ‘access pathways’ allowing students from working class backgrounds to enter the system of higher education. This trend continued and gathered pace through the 1990s so that a more socially mixed generation of graduates began to find ways of becoming self-employed, including self-styled fashion designers. Tracking these activities through the 1990s it became clear that on the longer term these micro-economies were more or less unsustainable owing to lack of access to capital and resources to manage exports, high costs of manufacture and production, too many middlemen when retailers became involved, and high risks of collections being copied and sold at much lower prices in retail chains etc. Nevertheless their existence was a kind of portent of the future world of freelance or portfolio work in the new creative economy. To invert Ulrich Beck’s account of ‘capital without jobs’, this self-entrepreneurial activity comprised ‘jobs without capital’. These were activities carried out round the kitchen table. For three or four days a week the designers often worked themselves on design and production (with the help of a single machinist) while also doing promotion and publicity, using the remaining three days a week to sell the clothes, hence the designation of urban cottage industries. These micro-economies of culture were low capital return activities, generating barely more than a small annual income for the designers. Often in the light of the publicity they received, despite the small earnings, they found themselves vulnerable to bad and unethical practice in the more corporate fashion industry. Where my own study made some suggestions to remedy this

situation (in the form of co-operatives and shared equipment and studio spaces, also access to a shared pool of labour) such ideas fell on deaf ears by the time New Labour set about establishing a creative economy agenda<sup>3</sup>.

As a result of the seeming unviability of small-scale fashion design with bankruptcies common, the early Blair years saw the decline of specialisation in the context of the difficulties faced by designers and others (outlined above) and further intensified with the neo-liberalisation of the urban environment which saw rents escalate so that street markets and stalls, nevermind shop premises, were no longer affordable. Young creative graduates were forced to become highly mobile, individualised multi-taskers who now possessed a wider range of marketable skills. For example fashion designers (who had previously been well-known if not household names) became retail assistants, stylists, journalists and fashion forecasters. This ‘second wave’ of multi-tasking creative graduates also found themselves getting jobs through the grapevine rather than through selection procedures. The requirements of this network sociality (Wittel 2002) involved long hours socialising, and together these informal structures began to crystallise producing new forms of exclusion mirroring conventional patterns of social disadvantage, this giving rise to what we might call creative de-democratisation as legal and institutional processes were by-passed rather than dismantled<sup>4</sup>. In effect formal job selection procedures no longer mattered. The seemingly exciting work carried out in urban hubs, including bars and cafés, and the encouragement to work in this way, as a result of what Peck calls the ‘hipsterisation strategies’ of urban governance, consolidated pathways into jobs or projects which in celebrating informality at the same time make redundant or simply old-fashioned the procedures developed by leftist and social democratic

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<sup>3</sup> In an event hosted during London Fashion Week in 2004 a Minister from the DCMS said in response to my proposals, that UK designers instead of hoping for support from government had to learn how to fend for themselves and ‘sink or swim’.

<sup>4</sup> See McRobbie 2002 where I argue that evening social networking events tended to exclude disadvantaged groups such as single parents.

authorities to protect against nepotism and corruption and to give equal chances for jobs to people who would otherwise be marginalised or disadvantaged.

This shift marks the emergence of a biopolitical effect (ie the management of specific sectors of the population classified in terms of age and qualification) drawing culture and labour into a close relation with each other. Events like the Cultural Entrepreneurs Club held in London<sup>5</sup>, with venture capitalists at hand for advice and mentoring, heralded a transition to a full-blown neo-liberalisation of the creative sector. This was compounded by the emphasis on stars, celebrity artists and designers, and the so-called talent-led economy. Certain terms disappeared from public debate such as co-operation, sharing, ‘unemployment’. Critique and social engagement became muted because the young creatives never could know where the next project might come from, so they had to be endlessly cheerful and upbeat. Bad practice and non-payment for work would be put down to experience. Throughout the first decade of the 21stC a prevailing ethos of ‘cool’ wrapped itself around this sector as a self-justifying discourse replete with an irony which inured the sector against the need to engage with questions such as self-exploitation, burn-out, the possibility of failure, and the downside of competition and individualisation. Cool became a mode of self-disciplining and a socially acceptable, indeed highly desirable, form of disdainful elitism. By these means the new creative industries have contributed to new forms of urban hierarchy, and to what I elsewhere refer to as the recalibration of the urban middle class (forthcoming McRobbie 2012). Where the prevailing discourse refers repeatedly to winners and losers, and where many pages of lifestyle magazines are devoted to the new crop of talent, division,

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<sup>5</sup> The Cultural Entrepreneur Club was set up during the early New Labour years (1998-) with small amounts of funding and support from the Institute for the Contemporary Arts, Channel Four TV, Smirnoff Vodka and other agencies including the Arts Council UK. My own institution Goldsmiths College also made some small contribution. The idea was to establish a forum of meetings every 3 months to bring together, on an invite only basis, about 300 young creative people who were in need of support, guidance and contacts in their activities. I myself only attended two of these events and they seemed to peter out after a three year period (see McRobbie 2002).

inequality and disadvantage within this sector are routinely ignored and rarely discussed.

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## **THE ‘TALENT-LED ECONOMY ‘ (Leadbeater) AND ‘PERMANENTLY TRANSITIONAL’ WORK (McRobbie).**

A good deal has been written about the many reports and White Papers which accompanied the public relations events such as the Cool Britannia initiative presided over by the Blair government<sup>6</sup>. Here I want to briefly summarise some of the developments which have had a profound impact across a range of social institutions. These changes occur primarily within the field of education. The idea of creativity having a role to play from as early as nursery level education is of course not new, far from it. However the ideas about creativity in this New Labour context are far removed from those endorsed in the 1960s. In those years for example the Plowden Report<sup>7</sup> advocated an ethos of creativity and constructive play especially for children coming from poor homes. Colour, imagination, and play across the daily life of the school would compensate for the drabness of the urban environment in which many of these children were growing up. But here there was also an emphasis on co-operation, collaboration and communication. Many years later the new creative ethos is connected to unlocking talent and providing opportunities for success. The vocabulary is markedly different. This is all very apparent in the manifesto-style book by Charles Leadbeater which carried a promotional blurb on the front cover by the then Prime Minister himself ie Tony Blair. Here we find an almost literal translation of the ideas about neo-liberalism found in the lectures by Foucault

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<sup>6</sup> See Department of Culture Media and Sport, Cool Britannia events, 1998 at [www. DCMS. Cool Britannia.](http://www.dcms.gov.uk/coolbritannia/)

<sup>7</sup> The Plowden Report 1964, sought to compensate for the poor and disadvantaged homes in which many pre-school and early school age children were growing up in by recommending that schools become beautiful, colourful and welcoming environments. This resulted in government funds being put into re-building primary schools across the UK. See <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/plowden/>



titled *The Birth of Biopolitics*, in particular an emphasis on enterprise, on competition, and on human capital. For Leadbeater this kind of self-enterprise should be a lifelong journey starting in the earliest years. Young people will, he suggests, have mentors and guides, as well as teachers and experts, to help them discover their inner talents.

The Blair government also embarked on a programme which would increase the numbers of young people getting into university and various mechanisms were put in place to see this through to fruition. But equally pertinent to my argument here is an emphasis on and development of new forms of creative pedagogy across the education sector. Failing schools in poor areas for example were often replaced by schools specialising in media and performing arts. “Creative Partnership” programmes brought musicians, dancers and artists into schools. “Cultural Leadership” initiatives provided intense mentoring in arts and media business and administration on a competitive basis for socially disadvantaged people who showed promise to be future leaders in the field<sup>8</sup>.

University academics have also found themselves immersed in this ‘creativity-machine’. Here tensions arise between a pedagogy based on social and cultural theory and critical analysis (often drawing on Foucault, and other post-Marxist traditions), and one sitting alongside it which provides practical skills in business and entrepreneurial modelling.

Such conflicts cannot be ignored, but so far the role of the universities in delivering creative entrepreneurial programmes has not been fully engaged with<sup>9</sup>. There is a danger of bad faith, recruiting for courses while academically and pedagogically contesting or at least challenging the values which might underpin such programmes. Or alternately we (I am aware of my own role here) somehow separate these two activities as though they are merely different sides

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<sup>8</sup> There is as yet no report or evidence indicating the outcomes of such schemes as these.

<sup>9</sup> See however Readings 1997

of the same coin. Such a situation cannot carry on without greater analysis of the rise of the ‘entrepreneurial university’. Academics teaching students in the arts and humanities who may be destined to work as freelance or self-employed people have been until recently relatively removed from this interface with the world of business and enterprise. There are exceptions however and many tutors and course leaders in art schools have had the job of arranging placements and work experience with, for example, fashion companies, with graphic design studios, or with galleries and arts organisations. This has gone on for many years, indeed it is a selling point for most courses within the art and design sector. But it has not been subjected to sociological scrutiny, instead it is simply part of the pedagogy for academic courses which carry a strong practice component. It is only recently that sociologists and cultural theorists have turned their attention to this field perhaps because it has come much closer to their own doorsteps, as government funding comes to be tied to ideas of employability and the provision of business studies across arts and humanities subjects.

Projected changes to the university system (including the art school provision inside it) will further intensify claims that neo-liberal values are eroding the very foundations of learning and educational provision and the traditional autonomy of academics whose training is reliant on widely agreed professional norms and independent research<sup>10</sup>.

But overall for a wider picture and critical analysis of these processes we must look to combining debates about the current economic crisis and the shrinking of the public sector with the rise of the knowledge economy, ‘cognitive capitalism’, and the role played by the creative industries. When, in the UK, the new regime of loans for high cost academic provision is instigated, there will be uncertainty about whether the same volume of students will indeed flock to degree courses which are associated with the creative economy? If these numbers – for courses in fashion and textiles, or in jewellery-making, or

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<sup>10</sup> see David Willets Minister for Education and the Universities in the London Review of Books, May 2010.

ceramics – remain stable, how will the economic environment for small-scale enterprises, and for freelance work, look in a climate of falling retail sales and closures of many consumer outlets?<sup>11</sup>

My contention is that we will see a situation which brings the UK closer to Italy and Germany where for the last two decades there has been high levels of graduate under-employment and with this a re-calibration of the middle-class milieu of everyday life and family and kinship relations. This under-employment is managed by various instruments of government in the form of programmes such as low cost job-creation schemes, as well as work experience and internships which acclimatise young (and not so young people) to a lifetime of project-work and what elsewhere I have referred to as ‘permanently transitional’ work (McRobbie 2004).

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### **THE ‘MASS INTELLECT’ (Hardt and Negri)**

Next I want to consider some concepts that have been helpful in analysing these changes. The Italian *Operaismo* school of post-Marxists offer a less pessimistic analysis. From within the interstices of an otherwise all-powerful capitalist machine, they see possibilities for re-collectivising and for new forms of autonomous organisation. They build their case on the fact that immaterial labour and cognitive capitalism rely on higher levels of brain power on the part of the workforce. What was once the proletariat has, through the generations, evolved into the new creative ‘precariat’ or cognitive /knowledge workers whose own input and competences are more needed than they would have been in the past (this is given the name ‘mass intellect’ drawing from Marx’s

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<sup>11</sup> see Rowles 2011

*Grundrisse*). Their teams and sociable ways of working encourage new forms of solidarity. They can develop forms and services which outwit the market, and can even be given away. The upping of education levels means higher levels of thinking and analysis and thus potential for extensive communication and contestation. Capitalism has therefore, according to Hardt and Negri, had to make concessions to these new workers, it has had to make work more interesting in the light of the 'refusal of work'. It has been forced to accept many demands on the part of this newly empowered workforce.

So the question now is how do these processes of struggle for domination and control play out? Does capitalism succeed by outwitting the new, better-educated workforce simply by inventing and imposing new forms of precarious work on short term contracts with little or no protection?

My answer to this is yes. The terms and conditions of what it means to work and earn a living are gradually being transformed. Perhaps the Opera writers are correct in seeing new glimmers of possibility for re-politicising work, but my argument would be that we should not underestimate the subtle ways in which companies and corporations develop strategies for 'flexible work'. My own research shows generational cleavages, permanently transitional work, high rates of burn out, and a swing from passionate work to privatised insecurity and anxiety. As Zygmunt Bauman (2001) shows in the talent-led economy where so much rests on self promotion, failure is always personalised, and a 'must try harder' ethos prevails. We need then to rescue this process of downward spirals and address the question of the downside of flexible labour.

The leading sociologist Richard Sennett who has written extensively on both cities and work is useful here. He introduces another vocabulary which includes a historical perspective which in the age of speeded up sociological theorising often gets lost sight of. He talks about history, age, narrative, ordinary work, craft of course, repetition, and failure. Most important is the way he downgrades

the idea of creativity to the point that it barely exists and how he replaces this with “craft”, with a ‘good job well done’, with learning about materials and objects. Implicitly he sees the inflation of creativity as a tool for the “new capitalism”, and he advocates, as a counter to this, slowness, concentration, the refusal to be speeded up. He sees team work and endless projects as producing shallowness and weak social bonds. He praises the value of patience and steadfastness.

Inevitably the question is how useful is this for those who have few options but to work in the speeded-up project world? Can Sennet’s ideas be implemented as a counter to capitalist norms in operation in the new creative economy? If so how would these young people make ends meet? Sennett is extremely vague about this kind of questions. It is as though his address is to people who are already established within a creative career pathway, so that the emphasis is on how they work, not on how they find the wherewithal to work (eg classical musicians, cooks and chefs). I am in agreement with him that the new shallow and seemingly sociable norms are detrimental to creativity. I have stressed, for example, the quiet time needed to be in the library, or just going for a long walk.

But can Sennett’s ideas be accommodated when high volumes of students in art and design and in other areas of study are being taught how to market themselves and how to have their CV at hand at all times? And how they have to be ‘ready for work’? Is it too late to turn the clock back, and given the imperative to make a living, do we want to totally turn it back? Do we want to train fewer creative young people and thus introduce limits to access into these fields?

I think not. Indeed a marked feature of this demographic boom in student numbers is the result of more young women across the boundaries of social class and ethnicity, pursuing education and employment opportunities that were not open to an older generation of women

including many of their mothers. What kind of artist-economy would prevail in a Sennett-inspired creative world? What Sennett does is to bring art-working into line with other more normal ways of making a living so that it is not so exceptional. This indeed is a useful proposition and a counter to the requirement for artists and creative people to think and act and market themselves according to the banal logic of celebrity culture. It may also be a better psychological model for survival and mental as well as emotional well-being.

### **LONDON AS 'URBAN GLAMOUR ZONE' (Sassen).**

Let us return to the set of debates in urban studies which intersect with, and are often woven into, the analysis of creative labour. (While Sennett is also an exemplary urban sociologist, he does not himself engage with the dilemmas posed by the arrival of young creative types who are then blamed for the appearance of the property developers, running just a few steps behind them). I will offer for consideration a series of reflections drawn from research which is as yet incomplete. There is a whole literature in urban cultural geography on agglomeration and bunching, on clustering and hubs, and of course on the Florida effect, ie the hoped-for regeneration via his famous 3 Ts: 'talent, technology and tolerance'.

We are now well aware of the dangers of hype and of short termism in this inflated rhetoric. In a few brief pages I want to offer some impressions and a sketch for further analysis based on three cities, London, Berlin and Glasgow. As many commentators have argued, London, as a global capital city, is lifted out, disembedded from the country as a whole, it takes the lion's share, very much because it offers a 'transaction rich network' (AJ Scott) which means that it becomes more difficult to pursue certain forms of creative work in the UK

outside of London (notably fashion design). It is over-capitalised, a space of unambiguously neo-liberal values embedded in land values and brand culture. These transform the high street and impact on the possibilities for earning a living. This is the archetypal speeded-up city, artists and others flow through, they are multiple job-holders, often with little or no time to get to their studio spaces. London is characterised by the high cost of renting, the ethos of success and the talent led economy, post 1997. The recent past which in the arts and culture was associated with various blends of radicalism and social democratic politics, is frequently wiped out of current debate. For example the days of 'black cultural production' has given way to focus entirely on now world famous black artists such as Isaac Julien and Chris Ofili. Likewise the kinds of connections with earlier generations of feminist art practice which can be seen in the career and work of Tracey Emin, get short shrift especially when she herself makes negative comments about feminism. It has become commonplace within the neo-liberal culture of the popular media to disavow feminism, and artists and fashion designers like Tracey Emin and Vivienne Westwood regularly repeat this mantra. Instead the 'urban glamour zone', (Sassen 2002) symbolised in the White Cube gallery in Hoxton Square, promotes London as a place where fortunes can be made, and where successful people from across the world want to congregate. The London press, especially *The Evening Standard* ( a right-wing daily paper), rarely covers stories which might be critical of gentrification, or the ethos of glamour and wealth. Even the once radical *Time Out* carries fewer features which might interrupt to official narrative of the creative economy than its counterparts elsewhere (especially Berlin).

Overall it could be argued that the key characteristics associated by Foucault with the neo-liberal ethos are all deeply embedded indeed naturalised in London's creative scene with barely a murmur of discontent: Enterprise, competitiveness and human capital have all been core values in the recent prominence of the art and creative worlds in London in the last two decades.

These principles are also at the heart of the business of the small-scale creative industries in London. They come to be internalised as familiar and recognisable subjectivities which are played out across the urban creative milieu.

### **BERLIN: NOT FOR SALE**

Berlin offers a sharply different non-commercial set of creative scenes. The city retains its history (rather than carelessly casting it off) piling layers of radical activities and collective experimentation (feminist, gay and lesbian, art-related, squatting movements, etc) on top of each other, so that there is a sustained and highly-charged debate on the impact of the new creative economy. The most cursory analysis indicates various factors which are significant. These are *first* : the historical exceptionality of available urban space and a residue of rent control. This does not stop gentrification at a rapid pace. Indeed at the current moment (August 2011) it can be seen progressing on a weekly basis in neighbourhoods like Neukölln. The listing magazines and the Berlin newspapers regularly report in terms of ‘where next?’. This is however a deeply contentious topic giving rise to radical activism across the city. *Second* there is the fact of graduate under-employment and (as mentioned above) a long-established institutionalisation of project-working. Several generations now are used to the processes of grant application in an attempt to ensure the existence of small organisations often in the ‘not for profit’ sector. Such grants frequently have to be renewed on an annual or bi-annual basis, so a degree of uncertainty and precariousness is familiar across age groups indeed including people now approaching retirement. Across a wide range of jobs, not just in the creative economy, this is a defining feature of professional life. A *third* factor is the high degree of self-reflexivity in regard to prevailing debates about insecure work and precarious labour. There is also, unlike in London, some familiarity with the critique of Florida and of the impact of neo-liberal policies on urban life. One



would rarely find this kind of discussion being conducted in the UK media including the ‘quality broadsheets’ where in Berlin and indeed in Germany it is commonplace (Bude 2002). *Fourth* there are what some might see as inventive forms of workfare designed for this sector of the population, these include so-called mini jobs and also 1 Euro a day jobs. *Fifth* as a result of the population of highly qualified people (young and old) often with PhDs but for whom no academic job is available there is also an exceptionally high number of social science consultancies, policy-based think-tanks and research institutes in the city. This makes Berlin quite exceptional as a centre for intellectual debate, events, conferences, journal publication, and a more radical knowledge economy than exists elsewhere. *Sixth* there are at any point in time, large numbers of guest or visiting or ‘foreign’ artists and creative people who appear to have the finances to support themselves including the rent of both home and studio. This too gives rise to animated debate conducted at a public level.<sup>12</sup> *Seventh* and finally there is a strong, long-term and deep rooted subcultural lifestyle, revolving round clubs, bars and music. Small shops open and shut across the city on a weekly basis, sometimes whole streets become full of little fashion shops set up by the latest crop of design graduates from the Berlin fashion colleges, six months later they are all gone. Often artists set up a bar in a rundown neighbourhood almost just for friends to drop by, meanwhile there is an exhibition space in the back room. Not surprisingly this availability of space is deeply attractive indeed seductive to young art graduates from across Europe and also from the US.

I would go as far as to argue that the defining feature of the Berlin creative economy is a seemingly non-commercial and under-capitalised scenario of ‘bars, clubs, shops and the art of making do’. Then you might ask, can this be

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<sup>12</sup> See the many discussions which accompanied the recent Based In Berlin exhibition which took place across three sites, featured over 100 artists who were selected on a competitive basis. This was a costly programme which overall received poor reviews. See [www.based-in-berlin](http://www.based-in-berlin). Thanks also to Ulrich Peltzer for an animated debate about the visible presence of ‘foreign’ young people and students taking up residence in so-called hip neighbourhoods.

understood as capitalist or anti-capitalist (Schwanhäußer 2011) This is a novel form of neo-liberalism which comes almost with apologies. As though the guys behind the bar are saying ‘we don’t like to have to think or act in a commercial way, We are not in this for the money, we are doing it because we find it enjoyable. Also this work allows other projects which are completely non-commercial to be supported’. Overall there are great tensions and ambivalences about cultural entrepreneurialism in the city. There is anger and resentment that the city seems to find itself exploited for precisely the reason that it promises a seeming escape from the hard urban capitalism of cities like London and that it is as a result of its seeming non capitalist culture that it finds itself rapidly capitalised by the flows of young people from all over Europe and from the US who can, for a while, afford to enjoy the party atmosphere, and who also provide a steady flow of customers for the informal and seemingly impromptu bars and clubs which spring up in rundown neighbourhoods. This gives rise to a unique ‘brand’ of urban subcultural tourism which is then offset by the more formal processes of eventification overseen by the Senat and by the various departments responsible for culture, tourism, and for local neighbourhood management. The Mayor finds he has no option but to aggressively market the city abroad on the basis of its ‘subcultural capital’ (Thornton 1996), itself an ironic destination for activities which typically originate in an assortment of leftist or counter-cultural underground scenes. No wonder there is a high degree of critical self-reflexivity on the part of the scene people, who find themselves having to sell the city on the basis of its anti-commercial ethos, and its ‘not for sale’ attitude.

## **GLASGOW : WORKING CLASS CITY**

My comments here are brief and much more tentative because the research is still underway. Actually I am referring to Glasgow here more to highlight the different styles of public debate and the kinds of discussions among academics, policy makers and artists themselves about the new creative economy, which stand as a counterpoint to what we have discussed so far. Here we see a frequently angry and oppositional stance which berates the celebrity culture which the international art world now finds itself embedded within. This hostility is most often expressed in terms of class politics<sup>13</sup>. Here the field of arts is a battleground. The recent generations of young Glasgow-based artists display high levels of hostility to the very existence, never mind the presence in the Glasgow scene, of the commercial values of the marketplace. Their position is defined as a counter to the embracing of the market by the London-based Young British Artists (or YBAs as they came to be known). These artists are so plugged into the history and working class tradition of labour politics in Scotland that it is possible to see in the work also these direct lines of attachment, continuity and commitment. That said, to audiences or critics or indeed sociologists who do not live in Glasgow, there is a paradox here. If the artists do not actively want to see the work promoted or sold, and if they are ambivalent about the idea of an audience, then does this not mean that the works will tend to remain only available for a kind of in-house or self-selected audience? (Often it seems the Glasgow artists are showing their work to each other (see Lowndes 2003/2010) ). Can the artists ensure that the right kind of people ie those for whom the work will have social and political value, will be those who want to see it and who do see it? What is done to try to make this happen? Is there not a danger here that the art scene becomes internally validating?

Certainly in many articles written by the artists as well as by Glasgow-based commentators there are condemnations of fellow artists who have ‘sold

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<sup>13</sup> This can be seen across a large number of articles, journals, newsletters and online publications, for example...

out' by either moving out of the city (often to Berlin) or by moving into a more commercial art market, sometimes both. If in Berlin disgruntlement and complaint is frequently expressed on the part of the young creative people in regard to the crude marketing of the city, as if the artists were somehow part of the décor, in Glasgow there is a macho and sarcastic tone running through the critical writing on these topics, which begrudges success and is suspicious of ventures. It is as though one has to prove perfect political credentials before starting out.

This all but denies the possibility, without recrimination, of, for example, opening a small independent gallery, or setting up as an arts advisor or mentor etc. I have not so far come across angry diatribes about creative people who might open their own bar or café in a bid to cross- subsidise their own work, but one might assume that this too would be frowned upon. Yet it seems at key points in time there has been a good deal of this kind of activity (Lowndes 2003, 2011). So what the reader then infers is that there is a kind of sectarianism, and possibly a set of cliques and opposing camps which together comprise the Glasgow creative economy sector. (The commercial art world and fellow artists who sell out are not the only targets for angry polemic, equally condemned indeed even more ferociously attacked are the Scottish Arts Council, now renamed Creative Scotland, and other governmental funding bodies). If in London there is the tyranny of cool as a weapon of ironic detachment and de-politicisation, in Glasgow is there a tyranny of suspicion of being too ambitious and self-promoting? How does the Glasgow art scene then manage the prominence, and global recognition of a number of world class artists? Must this inevitably give rise to division and hierarchy, or are there other models for being an artist, designer or creative person in Glasgow? (eg writers like James Kelman, and Alistair Gray?)

Sennett may provide, again, an answer here by proposing a way of working which spurns the seductions of both market and celebrity culture. For

Sennett the image of the artist or writer as craftsman, (someone who works with patience and who spurns the urban glamour zones) could well be applied to older Scottish writers such as those named above. But the problem again with Sennett is that he does not discuss the practicalities of earning a living or of supporting a family. Also his craftsman persona is perhaps too saintly a figure. It takes huge forces of ‘character’ to resist the seductions of success and the pleasures of the ‘urban glamour zone’. My final comment on the Glasgow arts scene is that it seems to be not particularly friendly to women, and it does not address questions such as those which I have posed consistently across my own writing on the creative economy. These refer to a feminist-inspired desire to find ways of working which are inherently rewarding. The idea of ‘passionate work’ emerged very much from the ways in which the young women I interviewed who were aspiring fashion designers described their chosen careers. I have come across some rather dismal or barbed comments about the small-scale art enterprises set up by a handful of women in Glasgow (eg the Mary Mary Gallery or the Sorcha Dallas space).

Thus it would seem that an avowedly anti-enterprise ethos prevails across significant players in the arts scenes in Glasgow. Where this carries strong political impact in that it establishes a kind of common currency, it is questionable as to how it functions in reality, since in the absence of opportunities to create micro-enterprises as in Berlin, and with less of a ‘hip’ tourist flow into the city, the day to day logistics of earning a living as an artist or as a creative worker remains unclear. Is it the case that so many young people rely on benefits, or on a series of low-paid call centre type jobs, (a very demoralising prospect) and if this is the true, is there not a case to be made for a more dynamic form of job creation, as found in Berlin, for this now highly qualified cohort of young people?

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## CREATIVE ECONOMY OR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE ?

My conclusion in regard to the debates I have outlined above is that we do see the future of work in many of these intermittent, ‘permanently transitional’ scenarios. The question will be how can these sustain a life and possibly a family over the years? What will it mean when so many younger people have to accommodate to the idea of a livelihood of projects? On the one hand there is a normalisation of creative labour, as the universities and art schools educate these large numbers of enthusiastic young people. For them there is an expectation that their training will provide some kind of pathway for work. No longer do artists do what they once did in the past, that is try to make it for a few years with exhibitions and shows and then if this does not bear fruit, re-train, or look round for some other job while internalising the disappointment. These high numbers may well decline a little with the changes to higher education but we cannot be sure, it is possible they will be sustained since the paying back of loans will only apply to those with relatively well-paid jobs. Still, it does seem as though the bubble of the creative industry boom has subsided, the Florida effect has been too roundly criticised to maintain the promotional rhetoric of city marketing while the so-called hipster ethos also finds itself the subject of more politicised critique from a number of different corners. What we might hope for is a more developed discussion emerging out of what in art-school parlance is referred to as ‘socially engaged practice’. One of the most famous and highly regarded programmes in the Glasgow School of Art is the Environmental Art course. While the overtly political and vocal graduates in Glasgow will decry their use by the local authorities as pseudo-social workers, nevertheless the possibility of transforming creative industry activity into diverse forms of social enterprise is not unthinkable, despite the grab at this phrase by the Cameron government in the UK. There needs to be a more theoretically informed debate

about what social enterprise could be in the current economic climate, and lessons may be learnt from the past and from the times of co-operatives and collectives and workshops within the realm of not-for-profit organisations. There is also a new place for the universities whose spaces and expertise could be made more available for this kind of activity. For example I would like to see the universities providing spaces for showing work and screening films which fail to get exhibitions and distribution on the commercial circuits. In the last year of teaching at Goldsmiths I have shown two films, one from the early 1980s and one from the present day, which because they are art-house films are missed by large numbers of eager viewers unless they happen to have caught them in their single night of screening or perhaps week long run. One is Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (a poetic meditation on inter-racial same sex desire and on the life and times of Langston Hughes) and the other a film by Berlin filmmaker Tatjana Turanskyj titled *Eine Flexible Frau*, which chronicles the scenes of precarious work in contemporary and rapidly gentrifying Berlin through the eyes of an out-of-work young woman architect who takes to drink as an antidote to her despair in the world of the talent-led economy.

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