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Imaginary Success?—The Contentious Ascendance of Creativity

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ABSTRACT *This paper posits that a set of “creative industries” centred around cultural practice have played a key role within a dominant “economic imaginary” in recent years. The success and stability of this role is considered, and a coherent position regarding the nature of creativity is outlined. Examination of the “evidence” gathering projects used to bulwark this position, however, reveals how the data which emerge from such projects may no longer appropriately serve to support the position the creative industries have come to occupy within the dominant imaginary. It is argued that this imaginary persists in providing a coherent framework for understanding and for action, however, regardless of the contradictions it contains. A tangible example of this “imaginary success” is briefly considered within the UK context, via an examination of developments around the staging of the European Capital of Culture programme in Liverpool, England in 2008. In this case, it is also argued that apparent contradictions are successfully concealed by dominant positions regarding culture and creativity. In conclusion, some explanations for this state of affairs are considered, and it is argued that the increased attention being paid to cultural creativity may render the continued concealment of these contradictions untenable.*

An “Economic Imaginary”

As practices in the economic sphere are currently sufficiently complex that their entirety cannot be adequately grasped, Jessop (2004) argues that “economic imaginaries” (p. 162) arise and gain traction which enable coherent and convincing accounts of economic activity to be made. Whilst inherently partial, these “imaginaries” do have some correspondence with real economic processes, but serve to privilege some activities over others. Jessop identifies, amongst others, political parties, business associations, international bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the mass media as playing an important part in maintaining a dominant “imaginary” and providing it with coherence (p. 163). Importantly, the dominant economic

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imaginary does not simply provide a frame in which economic events can be understood but, for Jessop, “they also help to construct such events and their economic contexts” (p. 164). In this sense, Jessop argues that at the outset of the twenty-first century the “Knowledge Based Economy” has become one such economic imaginary—“an increasingly dominant and hegemonic discourse that can frame broader struggles over political, intellectual and moral leadership on various scales as well as over more concrete fields of technical and economic reform” (p. 168).

The Role of Culture and Creativity

To examine the kinds of activity privileged within this dominant imaginary, it is clear that the notion of “creativity” playing a key role within a transforming economic order has become increasingly prominent. This creativity is most often conceived of as having a particularly cultural¹ dimension, be this in the “creative industries”, the “creative economy” or in forms of “culture-led regeneration”. Since the turn of the century, the apparent importance of this culturally inflected creativity has been noted, or supported, over a range of sites, such as social policy (Levitas, 2004), education (Robinson, 2001), city planning (Landry, 2000) and employment (Florida, 2004). That cultural creativity is seen to occupy a central role over such a range of disparate domains serves in part to demonstrate the strength and reach of this discourse. The drive to frame both current activity and the appropriate direction for future progression through the lens of this creativity has become ever clearer, and the apparent hegemonic status that creativity has established within policy more broadly has been noted (Schlesinger, 2007, p. 377).

The strength of the discourse around the potential value which can be extracted from this form of creative activity is perhaps most noticeable in discussions of the potential of “creative industries”. Whilst in use earlier in the decade in Australia, it is generally acknowledged that this term gained major traction after its adoption by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the UK in the late 1990s (Throsby, 2008, p. 218). Although there are myriad, and continuing, discussions and disagreements over what activities should be included under the “creative industries” heading (O’Connor, 2009), it is clear in the initial UK scoping of this sector that “creative” was again being used as a synonym for cultural and arts-related activity; as Throsby (2008, p. 220) has it, “virtually all of the 13 industries included in the DCMS classification could be seen as ‘cultural’” in this artistic sense, and this culturally inflected model of creative industries proved to be remarkably stable and globally influential in subsequent years (Potts & Cunningham, 2008, p. 233).

A Successful, Stable Imaginary

The role that cultural creativity has established within the prevailing economic imaginary can thus be seen to be a particularly successful one, reflected in the impressive stability it has shown in many respects in the 15 years since it gained political traction. On its initial emergence in the late 1990s, for instance, it was asserted by government ministers in the UK that creative practice would assist in the regeneration of cities, would aid social inclusion, and was “where the wealth and the jobs of the future are going to be generated from” (Smith, 1998, p. 31). As the second decade of the twenty-first century continues, ideas such as these concerning the potential for culturally creative industries to ameliorate

social and economic problems remain prevalent. To consider some of the differing organizational types noted by Jessop as having a role to play in helping to stabilize a dominant imaginary, at the time of writing (during 2012), bids are being prepared for funding to attain the designation of “European Creative District”, with the European Commission’s call for proposals highlighting the fact that “the creative industries represent highly innovative companies with a great economic potential”, and that “the creative industries are also important drivers of economic and social innovation” (European Commission, 2012, p. 4). Within the UK, where this discourse has received strong and long-standing support, these views continue to be endorsed by influential bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry, which maintains that the creative industries “constitute one of the fastest-growing sectors in the UK”, and that “the sector is forecast to play a bigger role in coming years” (CBI, 2012), and this reflects the position of national government, which echoes a discourse of exceptional growth and future potential (DCMS, 2012). Similarly, articles continue to be published in the mass media noting the economic potential of these creative industries (e.g. Leftly, 2012), and it is not difficult in the UK context to continue to find high-profile discussion of the specific centrality of the arts to the success of the creative industries. Recent front-page news has, for example, focussed on the importance of education in arts subjects to securing the future of these creative industries (Higgins, 2012), which, in turn, are presented as particularly economically valuable, representing “one of the few parts of the economy that is still growing” (Serota, 2012).

Creativity as Inevitability?

How, then, has this apparently hegemonic position regarding the role of the creative industries achieved such stability? Partly, it seems that this dominance relies on a discourse of *inevitability* regarding transformation in the overall economic order; a turn towards a “new economy” whose potential can be harnessed in multiple locations (Oakley, 2004, p. 70). On reviewing the situation at an international level, van Heur finds that “all policy documents on the creative industries” are structured on “the assumption that creativity *will become* increasingly important” in this emergent new economy (2010, p. 129, original emphasis). Throsby highlights how creativity has come to be seen as integral to “competitive advantage” in this context (2008, p. 147), and it is argued in some quarters that creative industries are especially dynamic and entrepreneurial (e.g. Richards, 2007), and thus neatly align with predominant changes towards greater flexibility in the economic sphere. This teleological narrative whereby creativity *will* play a central role in the twenty-first century persists throughout both policy and academic discourse (e.g. Landry and Bianchini, 1995, p. 3; Hartley, 2005, p. 1). Not only will creative industries form the basis of a new economic order, but their entrepreneurial, creative character may also show us how other industries will eventually come to operate within this new order (Leadbeater & Oakley, 1999, p. 13). As in this context, political support of creative industries is framed in terms of preparation for a future state, it is clear to see how there exists the potential Jessop identifies for dominant imaginaries not just to *reflect* a given mode of activity, but to *construct* a context for its enactment; if the creative industries are seen as being especially useful for overall economic growth, projects to assist their support may serve to create the conditions for this growth which otherwise may be less tangible.

The Role of Evidence

It is also important, however, to note how this coherent position which frames changes in economic activity as inevitable, does not only relate to a potential *future* state, but is also constructed in terms of “evidence” regarding *current* economic activity. Again, the UK has played a central role in this regard, deploying many resources to “proving” rather than merely asserting the role creative industries play within the economy as a whole. The importance given to the gathering and dissemination of statistics relating to the creative industries which emerged from DCMS over the course of the New Labour administration (1997–2010) can be seen as symptomatic of a more general turn towards “evidence based policymaking”. Oakley (2008, p. 19) identifies this practice as achieving “a high-water mark of commitment” within government in the UK during the mid-2000s, adding that from the very outset of their appearance on the national policy stage, any discussions around creative industries are “always accompanied by a stress on evidence” (2008, p. 21). This evidence base can, therefore, be seen to form a key part of the stability of this aspect of the prevailing economic imaginary.

DCMS’s “Creative Economy Programme” has been the source of the majority of figures used when statements are made regarding the position of the creative industries within the UK economy, and two major claims have become dominant over time: (i) that the creative industries form a notable proportion of overall economic activity, and (ii) that the creative industries demonstrate a rate of growth in excess of other economic sectors. Whilst the actual numbers in use vary slightly, figures that have gained prominence over the period of this evidence-making project, and which persist, suggest that the creative industries account for between 6% and 8% of Gross Value Added (GVA) for the UK (cf. Montgomery, 2005; DCMS, 2006; Aitken, 2007; DCMS, BERR and DIUS, 2008; Oakley, 2009; Arts Council England, 2010; Babani & Gerrard, 2011; Orłowski, 2012), and that these industries have experienced growth at around twice the rate of other economic sectors, or at a rate well in excess of that of the economy as a whole (cf. Leadbeater & Oakley, 1999; Holden, 2007; DCMS, BERR and DIUS, 2008; Potts & Cunningham, 2008; Comunian *et al.*, 2010; Serota, 2012). Again, there is the potential for something of a “virtuous circle” here. This evidence-gathering occurs within the context of a successful imaginary in which it is accepted that culturally creative activity must be given increasing attention due to its role in economic transformation. Economic activity is, thus, construed in a certain manner, and evidence is gathered which serves to support this construal, demonstrating that the initial discourse around a sector that *will* become ever more important is supported by statistics showing that this now *is* (or is becoming) the case.

An Imaginary Success? The Turn Away from Evidence

It seems, however, at least in terms of “evidence”, that the successful imaginary demonstrated thus far regarding the creative economy is paradoxically based on an imaginary success, so to speak. As noted above, the definition of the creative industries is regularly subject to question, yet the definitions used as the basis for these evidence-gathering projects have focussed almost entirely on arts-related, expressive, cultural activity, such as work in crafts, design, film, music, and so forth, aligning with wider policy discourse which notes, for example, the key role direct engagement with the arts will play in supporting the future development of creative industries (DCMS, BERR and DIUS, 2008, p. 4).

The difficulty in leveraging the results of these evidence-gathering projects to support the case for the increasing economic importance of such cultural activity is that there is a single element which has historically been included within such evidence which can make no real claim to having any specifically *culturally* creative content—namely, that of “software”. Of the 13 different activities which have historically made up the DCMS’s definition of the creative industries,² however, it is this least cultural³ of activities that is also single-handedly responsible for the overall patterns alluded to above which indicate that the creative industries are responsible for a significant, growing proportion of economic activity, and are thus worthy of attention and intervention.

Previously, authors have noted that the category of “software” may have been expediently aligned to this more cultural practice in order to “bolster” the figures regarding the creative industries’ performance (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 179; White, 2009, p. 339), but it is important to go further than this. The data relating to software did not so much *bolster* the evidence gathered regarding the economic role of creative activity, rather it *dominated* the evidence. As Tremblay notes, “art and culture are at the heart of the ideological construct” of the creative industries, but they are *not* at the heart of the economic evidence used to support these industries, rather “it is mainly software and computer services that are the pace-setters” (2011, p. 296). This evidence has, however, now become discursively attached to a form of cultural activity which it does not closely represent. Without the inclusion of economic data reflecting the performance of software firms which are not especially related to cultural activity, and whose workers are unlikely to have grounded their professional practice in the arts-based educational opportunities presented as being central to the success of creative industries—such as Capita, Logica, Misys and Siemens (cf. Frontier Economics, 2007, p. 9)—no strong case can be made that the opening decade of the twenty-first century saw exceptional growth in the economic performance of creative industries in the UK. This is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, derived from the decade’s worth of data given in the DCMS “Creative Industries Economic Estimates” of 2010.

Figure 1 shows the general pattern of evidence which supports the dominant role creativity has come to hold, and which plays a key role in framing positions such as those discussed above which argue for the importance of supporting creative industries. Here, the creative industries consistently outperform the growth of the UK economy as a whole. If, however, software is separated out from these overall figures, for the reasons discussed above, a different picture of the performance of the creative industries emerges, as shown in Figure 2.

When those more expressive, arts-related, cultural activities are placed together in a separate group to the single category of software, it seems, as Tremblay argues, that

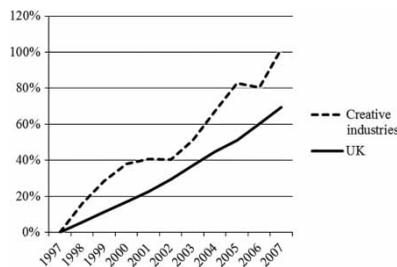


Figure 1. Creative industries vs. total UK GVA as a proportion of 1997 levels⁶.

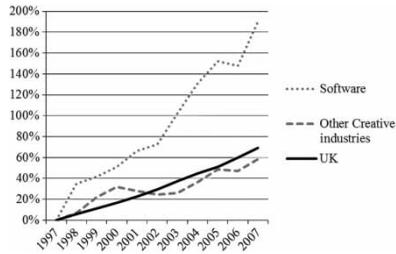


Figure 2. Software vs. the other creative industries: GVA as a proportion of 1997 levels.

these predominantly culture-based industries can make no claims to economic outperformance, and are generally performing in a similar manner to the economy as a whole; a respectable position for these culturally creative industries to find themselves in, were they not posited as the vanguard of a new high-growth economic order.

Towards a New Evidence Base?

After seemingly paying little heed to this problematic discrepancy of the performance of essentially non-cultural businesses being used as the basis to support cultural activity of many kinds for a number of years, however, the most recent “Creative Industries Economic Estimates” produced by DCMS no longer incorporate software firms within data relating to the performance of the creative sector (DCMS, 2011). This has unsurprisingly left a major dent in the shape of the overarching evidence base. In this latest document, the creative industries now account for less than 3% of UK GVA, down almost half on 2010’s figures, estimations of the levels of total employment have been reduced by around 800,000, and levels of growth in both GVA and employment are now shown to be virtually static, in stark contrast to the historic evidence shown above. There is little sign yet, however, that this extreme alteration in the evidence base has yet left a similar dent in the dominant discourse around the position and nature of the creative economy. Whilst evidence such as that in Figure 1 could be used previously to support a teleological narrative in which creativity will become progressively more important by showing how such a transformation was already underway (albeit questionably so), now that the prevailing evidence base has altered in such a way that it no longer supports this position, this seems yet to be addressed, allowing imaginary success to continue untrammelled. It currently seems as though evidence may be utilized when it supports the imaginary, and left aside when it does not. If a cultural, creative economy is seen as *inevitable*, as discussed above, then there is little room for difficulties such as these to be understood as signs that this position may require revision; rather they are more likely to be framed as temporary problems to be overcome. As Jessop argues, the dominant imaginary serves to construct the context in which findings such as these may be appropriately understood.

Imaginary Effects, Imaginary Perpetuation: A Recent Case

Jessop also argues, however, that the dominant imaginary assists in the construction both of such contexts and of events themselves. Whilst the eventual effects of changes in the

makeup of the overarching evidence base relating to creative industries remain to be seen, what is currently clear is that the economic imaginary this evidence base has partially sustained continues to assist in the construction and conception of tangible events. Again, a case from the UK context is helpful in illustrating this point.

In 2013, the first “UK City of Culture” programme will be held in Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland, and the rationale for the establishment of such a programme has been framed in terms of the perceived success of the 2008 “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) programme held in Liverpool, England. The justification for both these events aligns neatly with the discourse outlined above which sees culture as playing a central role in the promotion of economically beneficial creative practice, as does the eventual perception of success in the Liverpool case. Just as the evidence base considered above can be seen to perpetuate a dominant imaginary despite being based on problematic assumptions, however, so too are similar contradictions raised via a consideration of such real-world interventions as these.

Whilst not necessarily the case in the early years of the operation of the programme, since the 1990s, the rationale for hosting a major cultural festival such as the ECoC has often been framed not simply in terms of the potential benefits for cultural practice within a given location, but rather in terms of the potential such a programme has to act as a lever of economic change, often with a focus on the specific ability to draw in the beneficial impact of increased levels of activity within the creative industries within a host city (Evans, 2004; Campbell, 2011a). In this, such programmes clearly align with a conception which firstly sees creative industries as being particularly beneficial, and which secondly sees specifically cultural activity at the heart of their operations, as outlined above. In their retrospective study of multiple ECoCs, for example, PalmerRae Associates find “an expansion of creative industries and jobs” (2004, p. 103) to be one of the goals which ECoC cities expressed most often. To continue to focus on the UK context, Griffiths (2006, p. 427) finds this pattern of special attention being paid to the potential for economic regeneration via the promotion of creative industries reflected in the documentation produced by those UK cities which bid for the country’s 2008 ECoC nomination. In documents produced by the “Liverpool Culture Company”, the bidding and delivery organization for the eventual UK ECoC nominee city of Liverpool, multiple references are made to creating an attractive environment for creative businesses via the ECoC award, the role such an award would play for increasing the level of employment in creative activity in the city, and the regenerative outcome this would achieve (Campbell, 2011a, p. 511). Again, we can arguably see the role that dominant discourse has here in framing appropriate interventions: a cultural programme will have a beneficial effect on the economic position of a city due to the linkages such a programme has with creative practice. The spend by the local city administration on this programme can thus, in part, be justified as an “investment” in a form of economic activity which is experiencing exceptional growth and thus may be of particular benefit if leveraged in the local context; a notion informed by the kind of evidence-gathering projects and the overarching context considered above.

A Privileged Sense of Reality

As also noted above, however, the centrality of such arts-related activity to any levels of growth within the creative industries grouping is questionable. Whilst the dominant discourse may prove useful in providing the context to make a convincing rationale to

stage a programme such as the ECoC, we may, therefore, expect the actual *outcomes* of such a programme to be of lesser use in perpetuating the dominant imaginary which has helped to account for its inception. At least when considering the evidence from the UK, however, this seems not to be the case. The imaginary not only helps in constructing a convincing account of what events should take place, but it also helps to construct a convincing account of the effects these events had. It thus seems that in the wake of 2008, the Liverpool programme and the political assessment of its outcomes have served to extend and support a continued entrenchment of the dominant imaginary. Echoing the “virtuous circles” discussed above, a position whereby a cultural programme such as the ECoC *will* have a beneficial economic effect due to its impact on cultural, creative industries has in some quarters become a position wherein such an effect *did* take place: Liverpool’s ECoC is framed as a successful “investment” in the cultural, creative activity which is the key to future success. At the European level, for example, we can identify statements such as this:

Cultural and creative industries also contribute to the competitiveness and social cohesion of our cities and regions. European Capitals of Culture such as Lille, Liverpool and others show that investing in this sector creates jobs and helps transform the image of cities. (European Commission, 2010)

Similarly, within the UK, ministers from the major political parties have emphasized the link between Liverpool’s ECoC and growth in the creative sector (Burnham, 2009; Hodge, 2010) with current Prime Minister David Cameron (2010) making a very clear linkage by noting that “jobs in the creative industries increased by half” as a result of the ECoC award. As noted above, this apparent success of the Liverpool case resulted in the instigation of a “UK City of Culture” award, the bidding process for which required potential host cities to discuss the role such a programme would have in the local creative economy,⁴ perpetuating the idea of cultural activity and economic growth being closely linked.

A Problematic Sense of Reality

Whilst positions such as these align with the dominant imaginary considered thus far, and serve to perpetuate it, once again research suggests that there is little basis to support these positions. The comprehensive PalmerRae report, for example, notes that, whilst development of creative industries is often cited as a main goal, there is little tangible investment made to support creative industries by ECoC cities, and that when details on the nature of the relationship between ECoC programmes and industrial development was sought out, “very few cities submitted evidence of following through in any meaningful way on genuine economic targets” (2004, p. 103). Similarly, the largest piece of research into the specific experience of Liverpool’s ECoC finds no evidence to suggest overall growth within the creative sector in the city (Impacts 08, 2010). Despite this, findings from the Impacts 08 programme have been referred to by government ministers considering the place of creative industries (Hodge, 2010) as the basis for “huge optimis[m] about what UK City of Culture can do for strengthening the profile of cities and encouraging the creative sector”. As Campbell (2011a) argues, however, this optimism seems to be based on a misreading of the available evidence, which does not logically support such a reaction. Rather, just as in the case of the more general evidence base, what seems again to be important in this case is the overarching context which privileges certain positions regarding the

relationship between cultural, creative activity and a set of “known” economic outcomes. Where strong evidence for such a relationship is not forthcoming, it can confidently be asserted, and where evidence is not strong enough to fully support this relationship, its weaknesses can be overlooked.

It should also be noted that this dominant frame wherein cultural activity drives economic success also overlooks other important research regarding the operation of certain culturally creative businesses. Much research attests to the fact that most culturally creative workers make little profit (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 73; Selwood, 2001), often due to a greater emphasis being placed on the value of self-realization through creative work (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 199), and more generally on value being sought through the practice of work rather than its eventual financial rewards, via what Caves refers to as the “art for art’s sake” principle (2000, p. 137). Even an enthusiastically proselytizing document regarding the potential for entrepreneurship within the creative industries from the early stages of this discourse finds that most entrepreneurs were earning far less than the average wage level, and were not averse to this situation (Leadbeater & Oakley 1999, p. 23). The question is thus raised as to whether many creative workers preclude themselves from occupying what the dominant imaginary may consider to be their “correct” economic role by placing cultural value above economic value. Also, whilst noting that entrepreneurial processes are a “key driver” in the overall growth of the creative sector (DCMS, 2006, p. 9), UK policy documents produced during the height of the evidence-gathering process referred to above also noted that “the UK has no problem starting creative businesses, but it struggles to grow them”, with “many UK creative businesses lack[ing] the necessary skills and awareness for sustained growth” (NESTA, 2007, p. 1). This problem, it is argued, must be rectified by measures such as better education regarding appropriate ways to increase the size and turnover of creative businesses, which will thus help these businesses to achieve their appropriate position within an increasingly creative economy. Once again, here we can see how the context in which these events are understood serves to privilege certain understandings and not others. Whilst this potential lack of ability to supply economic growth constitutes a “failure” from the perspective of the dominant imaginary, for instance, whether this lack of economic growth is considered a failure for those who have actually established businesses within the creative sector—especially within the more culturally expressive areas of the creative industries—may well be another matter.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has argued that “economic imaginaries” serve to provide coherent models by which the operation of the economy can be understood, and that cultural creativity has gained a prominent place within the currently dominant imaginary. As such, the role cultural creativity plays is conceived of in certain forms, and tangible interventions are made which are based on this dominant conception. These activities serve to perpetuate the prominent role cultural creativity has gained, but a deeper examination of this role reveals how it is open to question both conceptually and practically. Despite this, the idea that creativity is central to future progress seems to persist.

In part, this persistence can perhaps be attributed to the notion of *inevitability* considered above—if creativity *must* play a central role at some point in the future, then this discourse can only feasibly travel in one direction; any difficulties are bumps in the

road which should prompt us to redouble our efforts rather than abandon the journey. The seductive coherence provided by an economic imaginary thus privileges certain trains of thought over others; “evidence” is useful to this coherence, but not essential. More important is the logic of the narrative: if the sources of economic growth are becoming more intangible/knowledge-based, thus relying on more intangible forms of work, so it coherently follows that forms of “creativity” may be the basis of this kind of work, with the cultural representing a particularly acute and important source of this creative practice. In the context of the specific locations of Liverpool and Derry considered above (but also for similar cities), this coherent picture may be especially seductive from an economic perspective. In sites of persistent patterns of socioeconomic deprivation, programmes which promise to attract the cutting edge of a new economy via the promotion of cultural activity may seem especially worthy of attention. As Peck lucidly points out, “investments in the ‘soft infrastructure’ of the arts and culture are easy to make, and need not be especially costly, so the creativity script easily translates into certain forms of municipal action” (2005, p. 749). Indeed, the relatively inexpensive nature of interventions within this area has long been noted (e.g. Zukin, 1982, p. 265). As Peck continues, however, “whether or not this [action] will stimulate creative economic growth, however, is quite another matter” (2005, p. 749).

In light of the above discussion, this assessment must be supported. It seems that there are real problems to contend with in the logic of the dominant narrative regarding the creative industries and the appropriate way to leverage their activities to generate profit. Notwithstanding the important issue of which parts of the creative industries, if any, are actually experiencing noteworthy levels of growth, if supportive interventions continue to focus mainly on cultural activity itself, it may be useful to consider Henwood’s take on the division of income within related industries: “the illusion-spinners are not the prime reward-getters—senior managers and stockholders are” (2005, p. 165). These senior managers and stockholders may, however, often reap these rewards in locations quite different to those in which the original illusions are spun. Clearly, this raises certain difficulties for policies which place emphasis on cultural creativity at the individual level and posit individual entrepreneurship as a particularly valuable activity (e.g. DCMS, BERR and DIUS, 2008, p. 13). Whilst cultural activity may well result in some form of economic benefit, these two things need not necessarily both occur in the same location.

A brief example from earlier cultural policy within the city of Liverpool may usefully demonstrate the long-standing nature of this state of affairs. As an early adopter in many respects of the creative industries agenda, the potential role for cultural activity in economic regeneration was raised by Liverpool’s city council over 20 years before the 2008 ECoC (Parkinson & Bianchini, 1993, p. 162). To take one pertinent case, of the then prominent local popular music group Frankie Goes To Hollywood—who for the purposes of this aspect of discussion notably recorded a successful album entitled “Liverpool”—an early “Arts and Cultural Industries Strategy” for the city notes that, “for example, none of the £250m earnings from Frankie Goes To Hollywood’s first album benefited the local music industry in Liverpool” (Liverpool City Council, 1987, p. 7). There is scant evidence, however, that current cultural policy actually seeks to intervene with regard to establishing a more complete value chain to extract economic value from the creative activity it purports to promote. In programmes such as the ECoC, policy generally intervenes on the justification of boosting the cultural aura around a particular geographic location, and this is seemingly expected in and of itself to create a number of positive

externalities, yet there is little indication given of how these may come about, other than an assumed coalescence of all things “creative”. Such a coalescence may make some sense within the dominant framework outlined above, but as has been argued, this framework rests on problematic assumptions.

For instance, it seems in many creative sectors that wealth continues to be generated in a small number of locations, in a small number of companies (Christopherson, 2008, p. 13), and that cultural value generated in one location may easily be translated into economic value in a different location. London’s dominance of the creative industries within the UK, for example, is well-known.⁵ For economic success in the bulk of culturally creative industries, density matters, audience matters, and so size matters. What is possible in world cities such as London is unlikely to be feasible in a city such as Liverpool with fewer than half a million inhabitants, or in a number of similar cities hoping to leverage in the power of culture to improve their economic circumstances. This is particularly problematic, given the “winner-takes-all” characteristic of some creative businesses (Caves, 2000, p. 364). Also, as Zukin notes in her seminal study on the role of culture in urban economies, it is not just supply of cultural products that must be well developed in such environments, but also demand (1982, p. 264).

In the current continuation of the dominant role for creativity within a prevailing economic imaginary, then, we can perhaps identify the persistence of the difficulties Oakley identified in 2004:

If the notion of the creative industries is problematic, even more so perhaps is the sense that these are sectors that can be replicated and developed pretty much anywhere, without regard for the specifics of place. (p. 72)

Whilst a range of conceptual problems have thus seemingly been skirted with some success for a number of years, what must be questioned is whether, as further scrutiny is applied to their operations, the apparent contradictions in the creativity narrative will eventually cause the creative industries to lose their privileged status. Although an intervention like the ECoC can apparently be successfully framed in terms of its ability to promote creative activity, closer scrutiny reveals many ways in which this framing does not correspond with reality, and whilst economic imaginaries may serve to privilege some activities over others, for their continued success, they must have some correspondence with real economic activity. It would perhaps be reasonable to assume that the increased prevalence of projects to promote such creativity in peripheral locations such as Liverpool, and the continuing study of the outcomes of such projects, may well serve to draw increased attention to many of the paradoxes outlined above.

These paradoxes must then, therefore, either be resisted or assimilated. What is perhaps most important to bear in mind when considering which direction this discourse will take is the increasingly large body of research suggesting that culturally creative work is very often characterized by factors such as difficult working conditions (Belfiore, 2002, p. 95), long hours (Gill & Pratt, 2007, p. 17), and a need to take on multiple jobs (Feist, 2001, p. 195), and so may often be associated with a poor quality of life (Hesmondhalgh & Banks, 2009, p. 420), with many workers understood by some to be involved in processes of “self-exploitation” (McRobbie, 2002, p. 101). Even if we were able to set aside the multiple problems regarding what constitutes cultural work, and what value this can be expected to bring to smaller cities, even if this work *were* to be successfully promoted,

we would still be faced with fact that the reality of creative practice for many is one that is problematic. For a myriad of reasons, therefore, it is important to pay continued attention to projects seeking to promote creative work, to resist the coherent narrative outlined above, attractive as it may be, to scrutinize the aims and achievements of tangible interventions, and if such scrutiny reveals further contradictions such as those considered above, to ask whether it is time to break with well-established positions, and to think more creatively about the role and nature of creativity.

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Notes

1. "Cultural" in the sense relating to expressive, arts-related activity (cf. Campbell, 2011b, p. 20).
2. These were: advertising; architecture; arts and antiques; crafts; design; designer fashion; video, film and photography; music; the visual and performing arts; publishing; software, computer games and electronic publishing; radio and tv.
3. Historically, data regarding the "software, computer games & electronic publishing" segment of the creative industries grouping was gathered using Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes relating to the "reproduction from master copies of software and data on discs and tapes", "development, production, supply and documentation of ready-made (non-customised) software", and "analysis, design and programming of systems ready to use" (HMSO, 2002). Refinement from later SIC codes shows that the majority of employment relating to this segment of the creative industries falls under the heading "information technology consultancy activities" (ONS, 2009). The predominance of this activity is reflected by a DCMS commissioned report which shows that activity in this segment does not generally reflect companies whose main activities are bound up in expressive value or arts-related cultural forms, but rather that "some of the biggest players in the industry are Cap Gemini, Computacenter, Electronic Data Systems, Dimension Data, Misys, Logica CMG, Atos Origin, Capita Business Services, Siemens Business Services and IT solutions, Microsoft UK" (Frontier Economics, 2007, p.9). As a counterpoint, similar "example firms" named in the same report relating to other segments of the creative industries include Stella McCartney, Working Title Films, The Royal National Theatre and the BBC, whose remit is much more clearly related to the kind of expressive, cultural activity noted in the text.
4. The 2009 DCMS guidelines for outline proposals from bidding cities suggest a ten-page document, one page of which should focus on "economic objectives", including an answer to the question, "What is the current strength of the creative economy/sector in your area and how will the UK City of Culture help boost this?" (DCMS, 2009, p. 7).
5. A recent London Development Agency report states that, "when its surrounding regions are included London can be seen to provide nearly 60% of UK creative employment" (2008, p. 30).
6. 1997 is used as the origin point for these figures as the year in which the "New Labour" party came to power, and, thus, the point at which the creative industries concept came to prominence within UK policy. It should also be noted that the 2010 data set this figure is derived from contains the following disclaimer: "Total [figures for creative industries GVA] excludes Crafts and Design as GVA figures are not available for these sectors".

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