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FROM CREATIVE TO CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

Not all industries are cultural, and no
industries are creative

In response to Daniel Mato's essay, this article argues against the concept of the creative industries and for a capacious understanding of culture to redefine the culture industries.

Keywords cultural industries; creative industries; culture; managing populations; urban regeneration; Daniel Mato

I propose a constructive alternative to the Great Society, which I have chosen to call 'A Creative Society' . . . to discover, enlist and mobilize the incredibly rich human resources of California [through] innumerable people of creative talent.

(Ronald Reagan 1966)

Daniel Mato's stimulating paper, ably translated by Emeshe Juhász-Mininberg, is a fascinating provocation.¹ The notion that cultural industries exist, and that they can be distinguished from other productive sectors of the economy, has been a *donnée* for decades, although it has lost both *cachet* and applicability with the hegemony of the much more powerful concept of the creative industries, which has wiped it from the policy lexicon around much of the world over the past decade and infiltrated academic speech as well. Despite that global transformation, the notion of the cultural industries still works for me. I shall engage with Daniel's arguments in order to defend the concept, then take off from this to show why it should be used in place of the creative industries.

Rather than establishing limits to 'the cultural,' Mato's paper actually wishes to expand it, for fear that sharp lines distinguishing cultural industries from others will discourage an application of work done under the sign of

cultural studies and cultural anthropology to other sectors of the socio-economic world. I am in full agreement with this, and I wholeheartedly endorse Mato's expansionary design. Why? Let's begin with the term 'culture.'

This odd word has earthy connotations. It derives from the Latin 'colare,' which implied tending and developing agriculture as part of subsistence. With the emergence of capitalism's division of labor, culture came both to *embody* instrumentalism and to *abjure* it, via the industrialization of farming, on the one hand, and the cultivation of individual taste, on the other hand. In keeping with this distinction, culture has been understood in two registers, via the social sciences and the humanities – truth versus beauty. This was a heuristic distinction in the sixteenth century, but it became substantive over time. Eighteenth-century German, French, and Spanish dictionaries bear witness to a metaphorical shift into spiritual cultivation. As the spread of literacy and printing saw customs and laws passed on, governed, and adjudicated through the written word, cultural texts supplemented and supplanted physical force as guarantors of authority. With the Industrial Revolution, populations became urban dwellers. Food was imported, textual forms were exchanged across territories, and consumer society emerged through horse racing, opera, art exhibits, masquerades, and balls. The impact of this shift was indexed in cultural labor: *poligrafi* in fifteenth-century Venice, and hacks in eighteenth-century London, wrote popular and influential conduct books about everyday life that marked the textualization of custom and the appearance of new occupational identities. Anxieties about 'cultural invasion' also date from this period, via Islamic debates over Western domination. Culture became a marker of differences and similarities in taste and status. In the humanities, it has generally been judged by criteria of quality and meaning, as practiced critically and historically. In the social sciences, the focus fell on socio-political norms, as explored psychologically or statistically. So whereas the humanities articulated population differences through *symbolic* means (for example, which class had the cultural capital to appreciate high culture, and which did not) the social sciences articulated population differences through *social* ones (for example, which people were affected by television messages, and which were not) (Williams 1983, p. 38, Benhabib 2002, p. 2, de Pedro 1999, pp. 61–62, 78 n. 1; also see de Pedro 1991, Briggs & Burke 2003, pp. 10, 38, 60, 57, Wallerstein 1989). In the contemporary moment, culture is simultaneously folkloric, industrial, and textual.

Cultural industries

Mato rightly associates the idea of the cultural industries with Adorno and Horkheimer's critique, and he is correct to point out that their concerns were as

much to do with standardized reception as industrialized production. Their critique of mass culture bought into the same anxieties as the right exhibited about the advent of public literacy – in many ways, the real concern lay in the word ‘mass’ rather than the word ‘industry.’ In part, this is to do with a longstanding issue of management – how to control populations. So the emergence of private, silent reading in the ninth century was criticized as an invitation to idleness. The extension through societies of the capacity to read had as its corollary the possibility of a public forming beyond a group of people physically gathered together. In the eighteenth century, Denis Diderot asked ‘who shall be the master? The writer or the reader?’ With mass literacy came industrial turmoil. When unionists in the Cuban cigar industry organized mass readings of news and current affairs to workers on the line, management and the state responded brutally. White slave-owners terrorized African-Americans who taught themselves and their colleagues to read along with their white collaborators: Nat Turner’s 1831 Rebellion was attributed by many to his literacy. The advent of outdoors reading and the train as sites of public culture generated anxieties about open knowledge and debate. Nineteenth-century US society saw spirited debates over whether new popular genres such as newspapers, crime stories, and novels would breed anarchic readers lacking respect for the traditionally literate classes. The media posed a threat to established élites by enabling working people to become independently minded and informed, distracting them from the one true path of servitude. A gendered side to the new openness through mass literacy became the heart of numerous campaigns against public sex and its representation, most notably the Comstock Law, which policed sex from the late nineteenth century. The Law was named for the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, a non-governmental organization (NGO) run by the noted Post-Office moralist Anthony Comstock. He was exercised by ‘EVIL READING,’ and avowed that before the Fall, reading was unknown. In the early twentieth century, opera, Shakespeare, and romance fiction were censored for their immodest impact on the young. Media regulation since that time has been colored by both governments and courts policing sexual material based on its alleged impact on young people, all the way from the uptake of Britain’s 1868 *Regina v. Hicklin* decision and its anxieties about vulnerable youth through to the US Supreme Court’s 1978 *Federal Communication Commission v. Pacifica* (Kline 1993, pp. 52–53, 55, Manguel 1996, n.p., pp. 51, 63, 71, 86, 110–111, 141, 280, 284, Stearns 2006, p. 65, Miller 1998, Heins 2002, pp. 9, 29–32, 23).

Anxieties about ‘the crowd’ in a suddenly urbanized and educated Western Europe raised the prospect of a long-feared ‘ochlocracy’ of ‘the worthless mob’ (Pufendorf 2000, p. 144) able to share popular texts. In the wake of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke was animated by the need to limit popular exuberance via ‘restraint upon . . . passions’ (1994, p. 122). Elite theorists emerged from both right and left, notably Vilfredo Pareto

(1976), Gaetano Mosca (1939), Gustave Le Bon (1899), and Robert Michels (1915), arguing that newly literate publics were vulnerable to manipulation by demagogues. The founder of the 'American Dream,' the Latin@ James Truslow Adams, saw '[t]he mob mentality of the city crowd' as 'one of the menaces to modern civilization,' and disparaged 'the prostitution of the moving-picture industry' (1941, pp. 404, 413). These critics were frightened of socialism, they were frightened of democracy; and they were frightened of popular reason (Wallas 1967, p. 137). With civil society growing restive, the wealth of radical associations was explained away by élites: Harvard took charge of the theory, Chicago the task of meeting and greeting the great unwashed, and Columbia the statistical manipulation (Staiger 2005, pp. 21–22). Of course, Adorno and Horkheimer were worried about what we might now call authoritarian populism, in the case of the US, and totalitarianism, in the case of Germany and the USSR. But they shared this very old reactionary concern about popular knowledge never quite being sufficient to deal with demagoguery. The populist, demotic side to cultural studies has always expressed discomfort with this assumption. Adorno was equally caught in an evaluistic binary of cultural industries and art, not unlike the old central European distinction between civilization (populist and ephemeral) and culture (elevating and perennial).

But there have been very different uses of the idea of the culture industries since then, by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and Third Worldists in the 1970s and local London and national French governments in the 1980s. These alternatives have focused on the value of the popular arts and ways to stimulate them for economic *and* meaningful value. The distinction between the modernist consciousness that the Frankfurters sought to foster and the bubble-gum consciousness that they sought to expunge has been compromised. One group's religious rite is another's tourism ritual; one group's progressive textual interpretation is another's targeted consumption; one group's *avant garde* is another's music video; and one group's counter-history is another's national identity.

All industries are cultural

The crux of Mato's point is that we should focus on consumption as the most telling characteristic of industries. He argues 'that all industries are cultural because they all produce products that beside having functional applications are also socio-symbolically significant.' This is the case both at the point of encoding and decoding; it is part of merchandizing and reception. All uses seem to be to do with basic needs, whether they are the necessity to be warm and dry or happy and entertained. It is wrong, he asserts, to assume that industries such as the automobile sector produce meaning only incidentally

rather than as a constitutive component of their being. Mato emphasizes the importance of consumer culture and the exercise of choice in coloring industries – not as per the notion of supply and demand, where objects are decided by manufacturers meeting customers' desires, but in their after-sales lives, their ongoing existences on a commodity chain that extends beyond manufacture and distribution and into use.

In other words, they have a symbolic use-value in their uptake and disposal by the public. Mato is not alone in this position. We can even find the very words 'all industries are cultural' in several notable works of cultural studies. John Fiske considers the claim in *Reading the Popular* (1989, p. 4), Keith Negus in *Music Genres and Cultural Policy* (1999, p. 23), David Hesmondhalgh in *The Cultural Industries* (2002, p. 11), Jane Pollard in *Cultural Industries and the Production of Culture* (2004, p. 170), and Susan Galloway and Stewart Dunlop in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (2007). But are all industries *primarily* cultural in their use? Richard A. Peterson's classic essay 'The Production of Culture' set in train a paradigm of research 30 years ago that continues unabated. He argued that the symbolic component of cultural goods is of greater significance to their creation, marketing, and reception than is the case with other objects (1976; for an account of the paradigm's uptake, see Peterson & Anand 2004). Are some industries more or less cultural than others?

It seems to me that this is partially an empirical question, and not only one to be answered with reference to the post-purchase life of the commodity sign. It also relates to the division of labor, and how capitalism determines the difference between, in Hollywood terms, above-the-line and below-the-line labor; how it decides the relative pay scales of car engineers versus predators; how it regulates industries for the safety of their products, and so on. In some ways, there are similarities – anxiety is expressed over how nine year-olds will interpret screen violence and how they will use firearms, for example. In other ways, there are differences – crucially, the extraordinary pollution caused by the culture industries is hidden behind their post-smokestacks rhetoric, whereas with fossil fuels such concerns are abiding.

Now Mato's examples are from the toy, fashion, automotive, and culinary sectors, where of course considerable valuable work has been done in a culture-industries tradition [consider as just a few examples, Kline 1993, Berry 2000, Peiss 1998, Crane 1997, Hay & Packer 2004, Carey 1989, Gorman & Cardenas 2007, Ferguson 1998, Miller 2007]. He makes cogent points about the utility of addressing these economic sectors as cultural; but this is hardly new, and most people would allocate these products, as opposed to band-aids or tissues, just such a designation.

My primary concern with the point Mato makes is that it enters that troubling domain of the decontextualized vocabulary, where words mean everything and hence nothing. As slogans ('everything is political'), all-

inclusive *portmanteaux* are handy; as guides to analysis and action, I am not so sure about their durability or sophistication. In the glossary of industries, I am wedded to the idea that descriptors should refer to products, not just practices, because I am mightily wary and weary of the idea of creative industries, which is so close semantically to cultural industries, and conceptually close to Mato's preference. The remainder of this rejoinder in fact engages that issue, both because I deem it so important and because this reflection was stimulated by Daniel's provocation. He talks about inputs and reception rather than outcomes in the same way that the creationists do, and I want to take issue with what that has generated.

Creative industries

What eventually became the creative industries as a discourse began in the 1960s with Ronald Reagan's neo-liberal opposition to welfare and European attempts to create a new, practical humanities, in response to charges of irrelevancy, conservatism, and light-headedness. The West recognized 40 years ago that its economic future lay in post-industrial activities – not food or manufactures, but finance and ideology. Today, the Global South similarly seeks secure streams of revenue from intellectual property rather than minerals or masses. Between 1980 and 1998, annual world exchange of print, film, radio, photography, art, and music grew from US\$95 billion to US\$388 billion (McChesney & Schiller 2002). Harnessing the skills of the population is meant to replace lost agricultural and manufacturing employment with creative or cultural sector jobs in music, theatre, animation, recording, radio, television, architecture, software design, toys, books, heritage, tourism, advertising, fashion, crafts, photography, and cinema (Towse 2002, UNESCO 2002). Changes underway to the media and associated knowledge technologies are akin to a new Industrial Revolution or the Civil and Cold Wars, stimuli that birthed and developed the US research university in the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Ways of analyzing them require a tectonic shift similar to the ones associated with those changes. In economic terms, the media have become the leading edge of many export industries. In political terms, they are central to democratic communication and the parliamentary process. In cultural terms, they both incarnate and encourage social trends. The British Academy, the peak national body of the elect in the UK human sciences, notes that '[w]hereas the dominant global industries of the past focused on manufacturing industry, the key corporations today are increasingly active in the fields of communications, information, entertainment, leisure.' The Academy identifies cultural studies as a key site for related academic work, particularly in electronic games, radio, and television (British Academy 2004, pp. 14–16, 18–19).

US economic production in particular is adjusting away from a farming and manufacturing base to a cultural one, especially in foreign trade. It now sells feelings, ideas, money, health, and laws – niche forms of identity, culture – and mostly via the media, whose technology, content, and personnel frequently emerge from universities. The Intellectual Property Association estimates that intellectual property is worth US\$360 billion a year in the US, putting it ahead of aerospace, automobiles, and agriculture in monetary value; and the creative sector comprises 12 percent of the workforce, up from five percent a century ago (McChesney & Schiller 2002). The National Governors' Association argues that 'innovative commercial businesses, non-profit institutions and independent artists all have become necessary ingredients in a successful region's "habitat"' (quoted in Tepper 2002).

This has offered humanities intellectuals already interested in cultural policy – often for reasons of cultural nationalism – the opportunity to go still closer to the heart of power, shifting their discourse to a comprehensively copyright-inflected one that focuses on the language of comparative advantage and competition. The neo-liberal bequest of creativity has succeeded the old-school patrimony of culture, because economic transformations have comprehensively challenged the idea of the humanities as removed from industry. Rather than working with the progressive goals of social democracy that uses the state in a leftist march of the institutions, this new development favors neo-liberalism. Consider (Richard) Floridians, riding around on their bicycles to spy on ballet-loving, gay-friendly, multicultural computer geeks who have moved to de-industrialized, freezing rust/rusting freeze belts; true-believer creationists in Australia who find even cultural-policy studies too residually socialistic and textual for their taste; and endlessly sprouting Brussels bureaucrats offering blueprints to cities eager to be made over by culture and tolerance in search of affluence. *They* think many industries are cultural, and the way they mobilize that insight is through the neo-classical shibboleth of unlocking creativity through individual human capital.

The British Academy (2004) invokes cultural studies in the search to understand and further the 'creative and cultural industries' and calls for an 'increasingly fluid' boundary between knowledges across 'the whole range and interconnectedness of knowledge rather than the privileging of a few academic disciplines' (British Academy 2004, p. viii, Runciman 2004). Right across the US, municipal, regional, and state funding agencies are dropping their old categories, such as art and craft, and replacing them with the discourse of the creative industries. The Australian Research Council first supported a major cultural-policy initiative by the Gramscian-turned-Foucauldian Tony Bennett and latterly moved on to fund a Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, run by a lapsed-poet and Girardian (Stuart Cunningham) and a hitherto semiotic romantic (John Hartley). True believers in a technological liberation from corporate domination argue that the concept of the cultural

industries is outmoded not because all industries are cultural but because post-industrialized societies have seen an efflorescence of the creative sector via small businesses (Cunningham 2001). It is obvious that big firms rarely innovate. This is not news. But it is inaccurate as a description of a shift in the center of gravity. Who owns last.fm and youtube again? Which web sites are most-read for news?

But where this supposed insight is especially complex – and most problematic – is in its truly innovative claim: that what is made in a sector of the economy does not characterize that sector, but rather, what goes into it. So ‘creativity’ refers to an input, not an output. This bizarre shift in adjectival meaning makes it possible for anything that makes money to be creative, just as Mato’s assertion that all industries have cultural components makes it possible for anything that makes money to be cultural. Both lack any precision, and specifically do not work for statisticians and others who must ‘create’ workable categories (Galloway & Dunlop 2007, Alanen 2007). What such moves achieve at a tactical level, however, is a sleight of hand that places the humanities at the center of economic innovation by pretending that it encompasses information technology (which is where the real money is made and the power exercised – and not, sorry, by small business or entrepreneurs) (Garnham 2005).

Conclusion

In 2006, Rwanda convened a global conference on the Creative Economy to accompany festivities. The declared intent was to take the social healing engendered by the experience of culture and commodify it in the interest of growth, drawing on non-Western ideas of creativity and development. Brazil is a centre for discussion of the creative industries, and houses the United Nations Council on Trade and Development and the United Nations Development Program’s International Forum for Creative Industries. India’s venerable last gasp of Nehruvianism, its Planning Commission, has a new committee for creative industries. The audit up to now from critics in the Global South, other than those who participate in these adventures, is to query whether this amounts to ‘recycling audio-visual cultural material created by the grassroots genius, exploiting their intellectual property and generating a standardized business sector that excludes, and even distorts, its very source of business,’ to quote *The Hindu* (Ramanathan 2006).

In 2008, Liverpool became an official City of Culture, having allocated millions in public funds on an arts program, a museum, galleries, a convention center, a retail outlet, renewed transportation, rebuilt waterfront, and every good thing. This was premised on regeneration through culture, but skeptics asked ‘is that a foundation strong enough to sustain a lasting economy? Or is it

the equivalent of pyramid selling – a fragile structure . . . concealing a hollow emptiness at its heart?’ The European Commission’s evaluation of 29 Cities of Culture disclosed that their principal goal – economic growth stimulated by the public subvention of culture to renew failed cities – had itself failed. Glasgow, for instance, was initially hailed as a success; but many years after the rhetoric, there has been no sustained growth, while an endless pool of bureaucrats and consultants sought ever-more desperate claims in order to distinguish their candidates for the title, such as Bristol laying claim to Cary Grant as a native son (Linklater 2006, Hoggart 2004, p. 168). And there is minimal proof for the existence of a creative class in Britain or for the assertion that ‘creative cities’ outperform their drab brethren economically. Companies seek skills when deciding where to locate their businesses, but skill also seeks out work. City centers only attract workers while they are young and prior to breeding. The centrality of gay culture in the Floridian calculus derives from assuming that all same-sex households are queer (pardon – university dorms and sorority/fraternity houses are not quite there, at least not necessarily). The idea of urbanism incipient in US demographic statistics includes the suburbs (which now hold more US residents than do cities) so that, too, is a suspect figure in terms of the importance of downtown lofts to economies. And there is no evidence of an overlap of tastes, values, living arrangements, and locations between artists on the one hand and accountants on the other hand, despite their being bundled together in the creative concept; nor is it sensible to assume other countries replicate the massive internal mobility of the US population. Finally, other surveys pour scorn on the claim that quality of life is central to selecting business campuses next to low costs, good communications technology, proximity to markets, and adequate transportation systems (Nathan 2005).

It makes sense to track the clever work that the propagandists of the creative industries undertake as part of their desire for power. It makes sense to see how intellectual property operates. It makes sense to acknowledge the cultural components of consumption and hence of many economic sectors. But to believe the rhetoric? The last country to do that was the US when it bought into Reagan’s ‘creative society,’ starting four decades ago and peaking in the years since 1980. What has been the outcome of a fully-evolved fantasy about small business and everyday creativity as the motors of economic growth? Come on down and take your pick of crumbling bridges, dangerous freeways, deinstitutionalized street people, inadequate schooling, and 50 million folks without healthcare. And politics run by pharmaceutical firms, health insurers, tort lawyers, finance capitalists, arms manufacturers, and gun owners – all of whom make many creative inputs, I have no doubt. As for the cultural industries, they remain under the control of media conglomerates and communications firms.

We need to analyze all these economic sectors, and recognize that each has cultural elements. But because culture involves all the questions of managing populations and coping with a life after manufacturing, its specificities need to be reasserted and maintained.

Note

- 1 This response is offered at the invitation of the author of the original essay and the co-editor of the journal, Larry Grossberg.

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