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CULTURAL WORK AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES¹

TOBY MILLER

In a First Wave economy, land and farm labor are the main ‘factors of production.’ In a Second Wave economy, the land remains valuable while the ‘labor’ becomes massified around machines and larger industries. In a Third Wave economy, the central resource – a single word broadly encompassing data, information, images, symbols, culture, ideology, and values – is actionable knowledge – *A Magna Carta for the Information Age*. (Dyson et al., 1994)

This chapter offers a *tour d’horizon* of macroeconomic and theoretical developments in cultural labor and the rhetoric surrounding creative industries. It indicates the ongoing importance of intermediaries in the area of culture and the media, *contra* the beguiling idea that they are *passés*, and proposes that those who argue for disintermediation through technology and creativity, such as signatories to the epigraph above, are themselves intermediaries.

Cultural work includes a wide array of occupations that generate and use the ‘actionable knowledge’ so prized in the *Magna Carta* of cybertarianism² quoted above. Some cultural jobs directly create performances and texts, while others involve intermediation. Consider this list:

- artists, comprising musicians, directors, writers and actors
- artisans, including sound engineers, editors, cinematographers, and graphic designers
- impresarios, proprietors, executives, promoters, advertisers, and curators
- regulators, censors, politicians, bureaucrats, and litigators
- lobby groups
- critics, audiences, journalists, and consumers.



The positions that undertake cultural intermediation come from the latter four groups. They operate as gatekeepers, determining who and what counts as cultural.

Cultural workers operate within institutional contexts:

- private bureaucracies – managing investment, production, and distribution across the media while relying on public agencies to aid accumulation
- public bureaucracies – offering what capitalism cannot, while comporting themselves in an ever more commercial manner
- small businesses – run by charismatic individuals
- networks – fluid associations formed to undertake specific projects
- families – shared homes, live-work spaces, pop-up galleries, bars, coffee shops, arenas, transport systems, and stadia.

A significant proportion of highly-qualified artists and intellectuals experience precarious employment, despite their generally middle-class origins. This situation is frequently in stark contrast to that of their parents, for whom schooling either solidified secure employment or provided a route to class transformation. The new precariousness is connected to the discourse of the creative industries.

That discourse began in the 1960s through somewhat improbable cultural intermediaries – Republican Party politicians. Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, and their kind railed against ‘Great Society’ liberalism. Defeat at the 1964 Presidential election, seemingly their death rattle, was soon followed by Reagan’s successful 1966 campaign for the governorship of California. He launched it with the words: ‘I propose ... “A Creative Society” ... to discover, enlist and mobilize the incredibly rich human resources of California [through] innumerable people of creative talent.’³

Reagan’s principal domestic legacy was, of course, to reverse the state’s role in democratically redistributing wealth. Subsequent disciples of inequality – the various Bushes, William Jefferson Clinton, and Barack Hussein Obama II – carried on this work. But Reagan’s proto-gubernatorial address also heralded neoliberal ideology, which was part of the Global North’s economic shift from agriculture and manufacturing to services and culture via the creative industries and their labor force, the cognitariat.

THE COGNITARIAT

In the 1970s, pundits saw that what we can now discern as the cognitariat would be vital to productivity gains (Bar with Simard, 2006). To Cold-War Yanqui futurists such as former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (1969), professional anti-Marxist Ithiel de Sola Pool (1983), and cultural conservative Daniel Bell (1977), converged communication technologies promised both the permanent removal of grubby manufacturing from the Global North to the South and continued US textual and technical power, provided that the blandishments of socialism and negativity towards global business did not create class struggle.

The rhetoric of these intermediaries and their neoliberal successors maintains that technology can unlock creativity, which is supposedly lurking unbidden in everyone, waiting to make us happy and productive. The hidden correlative of such transformations is that we become contingent labor, members of a precarious cognitariat. Antonio Negri (2007) redeployed the concept of the cognitariat from Reaganite futurist and digital *Magna Carta* signatory Alvin Toffler (1983). Negri defines the cognitariat as people undertaking casualized cultural work who have heady educational backgrounds yet live at the uncertain interstices of capital, qualifications, and government in a post-Fordist era of mass unemployment, limited-term work, and occupational insecurity. They are sometimes complicit with these circumstances because their identities are shrouded in autotelic modes of being. Work is pleasure and *vice versa*; labor becomes its own reward (Gorz, 2004).

These cognitarians putatively transcend the work of cultural intermediaries. The comparatively cheap and easy access to making and distributing meaning afforded by internet media and genres is thought to have eroded the one-way hold on culture that saw a small segment of the world as producers and the larger segment as consumers. New technologies supposedly allow us all to become simultaneously cultural consumers and producers (prosumers) without the say-so of media gatekeepers. The result is said to be a democratized media, higher skill levels, and powerful challenges to old patterns of expertise and institutional authority – hence the term ‘disintermediation’ (Graham, 2008; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010).

In this cybertarian world free of intermediaries, fans write zines that become screenplays. Coca-Cola hires streetwise African Americans to drive through the inner city selling soda and playing hip-hop. AT&T pays San Francisco buskers to mention the company in their songs. Urban performance poets rhyme about Nissan cars for cash, simultaneously hawking, entertaining, and researching. Subway’s sandwich commercials are marketed as made by teenagers. Cultural-studies majors become designers, and graduate students in New York and Los Angeles read scripts for producers then pronounce on whether they tap into audience interests. Precariously employed part-timers spy on fellow spectators in theaters to see how they respond to coming attractions. Opportunities to vote in the Eurovision Song Contest or a reality program determine both the success of contestants and the profile of active viewers, who can be monitored and wooed in the future. End-user licensing agreements ensure that players of corporate games online sign over their cultural moves and perspectives to the very companies whom they are paying in order to participate (Miller, 2007). This is the world of the prosumer, who breaks down the distinction separating making and receiving culture and rejects intermediaries (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). But there is another side to it

for those who can keep a job in the post-Fordist labour market, decent and meaningful work opportunities are reducing at a phenomenal pace in the sense that, for a high proportion of low- and middle-skilled workers, full-time, lifelong employment is unlikely. (Orsi, 2009: 35)

Cultural work is subject to local, national, regional, and international fetishization of each component, matching the way that the labor undertaken is largely fetishized away from the texts and performances produced. Business leeches want flexibility in the numbers they employ, the technology they use, the place where they produce, and the amount they pay – and inflexibility of ownership and control. The orthodoxies that created this economy, the neoclassical *doxa* preached by neoliberal chorines favor an economy where competition and opportunity cost are in the litany and dissent is unforgivable, as crazed as collective industrial organization. Hence the success of Mindworks Global Media, a company outside New Delhi that provides Indian-based journalists and copyeditors who work long-distance for newspapers whose reporters are supposedly in the US and Europe. There are 35–40 percent cost savings (Lakshman, 2008). Or consider Poptent, an intermediary advertising firm that undercuts big competitors who actually make commercials by exploiting prosumers' labor in the name of 'empowerment.' That empowerment takes the following form: the creators of the homemade commercials they distribute make US\$7500; Poptent receives a management fee of US\$40,000; and the buyer saves about US\$300,000 on the usual price (Chmielewski, 2012).

Is this democratization, or exploitation?

Even reactionary bodies like the US National Governors Association recognize the eventual reality: 'routine tasks that once characterized middle class work have either been eliminated by technological change or are now conducted by low-wage but highly skilled workers' (Sparks and Watts, 2011: 6).

CREATIVE SEDUCTION

As per Reagan's doctrine, many US municipal, regional, state, and national funding agencies (also intermediaries) have dropped venerable administrative categories like arts and crafts, replacing them with the discourse of the creative industries. The US President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities welcomes the 'Creative Economy' and

focuses its leadership, with other agencies and the private sector, on the power of the arts and humanities as an economic driver, sustaining critical cultural resources and fostering civic investment in cultural assets and infrastructure. These efforts help speed innovation and expand markets and consumers, directly benefiting local economies. (www.pcah.gov/creative-economy – accessed December 2013)

Similar things have happened across the globe. In 2006, Rwanda convened a global conference on the 'Creative Economy' to take the social healing engendered by culture and commodify/govern it. Brazil houses the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Development Program's International Forum for Creative Industries, which decrees that '[c]reativity, more

than labor and capital, or even traditional technologies, is deeply embedded in every country's cultural context' (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2004: 3). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity (2002) heralds creative industries as a *portmanteau* term that covers the cultural sector and goes further, beyond output and into the favored neoliberal *canard* of process. Even India's venerable last gasp of Nehruvianism, its Planning Commission, has a committee for creative industries (Ramanathan, 2006). China has moved 'from an older, state-dominated focus on cultural industries ... towards a more market-oriented pattern of creative industries' (Keane, 2006) and Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea follow similar strategies (Peichi, 2008; Cunningham, 2009c).

True believers argue for an efflorescence of creativity, cultural difference, import substitution, and national and regional pride and influence thanks to new technologies and innovative firms (Cunningham, 2009a). In the words of lapsed-leftist cultural theorist and inaugural President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Jacques Attali, a new 'mercantile order forms wherever a creative class masters a key innovation from navigation to accounting or, in our own time, where services are most efficiently mass produced, thus generating enormous wealth' (2008: 31). This allegedly gives rise to an 'aristocracy of talent' (Kotkin, 2001: 22) where mercurial meritocrats luxuriate in ever changing techniques, technologies, and networks. Labor is acknowledged by its intermediaries in this brave newness, provided that it is abstracted from physical, dirty work (Mattelart, 2002), as per Toffler, Bell, de Sola Pool, and Brzezinski's prescriptions.

The high priest of creative-industries intermediation, business professor Richard Florida (2002), speaks of a 'creative class®' that is revitalizing post-industrial towns in the Global North devastated by the relocation of manufacturing to places with cheaper labor pools. He argues that the revival of such cities is driven by a magic elixir of tolerance, technology, and talent, as measured by same-sex households, broadband connections, and higher degrees respectively. Florida has even trademarked the concept: his claim to own the 'creative class®' is asserted with the US Patent and Trademark Office via registration number 3298801 <http://tess2.uspto.gov>.⁴

Creative-industries discourse has become a grand passion of the age for intermediaries of many stripes. Urbanists, geographers, economists, planners, public intellectuals, think-tank inmates, and policy wonks have all been central to its development and dispersal via a blend of research, innovation, and inclusiveness (Brint et al., 2009). These intermediaries articulate research, the arts, public policy, and everyday life to capital. In order to transcend the intellectual's traditional status as 'the little match seller, nose pressed to the window, looking in on the grand life within' (Cunningham, 2006), many have shifted their discourse to focus on comparative advantage and competition rather than heritage and aesthetics, as neoliberal emphases on unlocking creativity succeed old-school protections of cultural patrimony. The alleged capacity of the market to govern everything opens up new life worlds. Pragmatic leftists no longer even speak of mixing socialist ideals with

reformism. Former historian and poet Stuart Cunningham, for instance, favors an instrumental ‘matching of curriculum to career’ via ‘practical business challenges’ such that ‘non-market disciplines’ compete with colleagues in forging ‘an alliance with the business sector’ (2009b, 2007b, 2007a).

These newly powerful intermediaries, who were once free-floating but socially ineffectual humanities critics, are in thrall to the idea that culture is an endlessly growing resource capable of dynamizing society.

Peak bodies parrot their prayers. The Australian Academy of the Humanities calls for ‘research in the humanities and creative arts’ to be tax-exempt based on its contribution to research and development, and subject to the same surveys of ‘employer demand’ as the professions and sciences (Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2012; also see Cunningham, 2007a). The Australian Research Council’s Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation has solemnly announced an ‘industryfacing [*sic*] spin-off from the centre’s mapping work, Creative Business Benchmark’ (Cunningham, 2011b).

The British Academy seeks to understand and further the ‘creative and cultural industries’ (2004: viii). In partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the UK’s National Endowment for Science, Technology & the Arts says ‘[t]he arts and humanities have a particularly strong affiliation with the creative industries’ and provide research that ‘helps to fuel’ them, in turn boosting innovation more broadly (Bakhshi et al., 2008: 1). In Canada, the Presidents of the Universities of Toronto and British Columbia advise that:

[I]ndependent-minded university and college graduates from diverse backgrounds are critical to building creative societies with innovative foundations.

[A] culture of innovation and entrepreneurship should be promoted in all sectors of the economy, not least social agencies, non-profit enterprises, public administration, and postsecondary and health-care institutions. (Naylor and Toope, 2010)

Academic cultural intermediaries delivering the glad tidings descend on welcoming burghers eager to be made over by branded celebrities whose books appear on airport news stands rather than cloistered scholarly shelves (Gibson and Klocker, 2004). Prone to cybertarianism, these dutiful chorines of digital capitalism and the technological sublime pile out of business class and onto the jet way in three major groups. Richard Floridians hop a limousine from the airport then ride around town on bicycles to spy on ballet-loving, gay-friendly, multicultural computer geeks who have relocated to de-industrialized, freezing rustbelts. True-believer Australian creationists criticize cultural studies as residually socialistic and textual. And Brussels bureaucrats offer blueprints to cities eager for affluence and ready for reinvention via culture and tolerance. The promise on offer is a makeover ‘from the rusty coinage of “cultural industries” to newly minted “creative industries”’ (Ross, 2006–07: 1). For a date with Florida, visit <http://creativeclass.com> (accessed December 2013); if you’d prefer Attali, who also knows how to make use of public money, the Global

Speakers Bureau is your destination (<http://speakers.co.uk/csaWeb/speaker.JAQATT> (accessed December 2013); Stevenson, 1993). It's PowerPoint intellection and it's coming to a town near you.

The working assumption of these intermediaries is that the culture industries' intermediation between art and the public has been overrun by individual creativity. In this Marxist/Godardian fantasy, media technologies obliterate geography, sovereignty, ownership, and hierarchy, alchemizing truth and beauty. People fish, film, fornicate, and finance from morning to midnight, frolicking in a deregulated, individuated world that makes consumers into producers, frees the disabled from confinement, encourages new subjectivities, rewards intellect and competitiveness, links people across cultures, and allows billions of flowers to bloom in a post-political cornucopia. Consumption is privileged, production is discounted, and labor redefined (Dahlström and Hermelin, 2007). It becomes both a pleasure and a responsibility to invest in human capital – signs of a robust civil society and private self.

THE MORNING AFTER

But after all that free-floating fornication and professorial promotion, one must awaken and ask 'Who *is* that person next to me?' Consider the artists who are invoked by creative-industry consultants in city regeneration proposals as attractions for accountants and lawyers to shift location. The artists blink, pay newly inflated rents, or move on.

And there are definitional and hence statistical problems with the very concept of creative industries. The assumption that what is made in a sector of the economy does not *characterize* it, that 'creativity' is not an input but an industry's defining quality, is misleading. A bizarre shift in adjectival meaning catalogues anything profitable under 'creative.' More precise efforts at definition have significantly diminished the claims made for the sector's economic contributions, unmasking the boosterist sleight of hand that places culture at the center of economic innovation by pretending that it encompasses corporate and governmental information technology (Miller, 2009; Garnham, 2005; Cunningham, 2011a). True believers have generated a revealing figure of speech designed to counter this critique. The metaphor of a 'creative trident' covers

the total of creative occupations within the core creative industries (specialists), plus the creative occupations employed in other industries (embedded) plus the business and support occupations employed in creative industries who are often responsible for managing and technically supporting creative activity (support). (Cunningham, 2011b)

This concept adequately covers the occupations listed earlier, but fails to specify their place in culture or the economy or the transformations they embody.

There is also an issue with these intermediaries' Schumpeterian faith in small businesses and their role in cultural work. Giant corporations rarely innovate. But that does not represent a shift in the center of gravity. The culture industries are still largely controlled by media and communications conglomerates. They gobble up smaller companies that invent products and services, '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). The beneficiaries of innovations by 'talented amateurs' are corporations (Ross, 2006–07; Marcus, 2005). In other words, the cognitariat creates 'cool stuff' that others exploit.

There is minimal proof that a creative class® exists or 'creative cities' outperform their drab brethren economically. There is no evidence that the tastes, values, lifestyles, and locations of artists and accountants match, despite their being bundled together in the creative concept. The centrality of gay culture in the Floridian calculus derives from assuming same-sex households are queer (but university dorms and sorority/fraternity houses are not quite there). Even if this were accurate, many wealthy cities in the US roll with reaction (consider Orlando and Phoenix) (Nathan, 2005; Hoggart, 2004: 168; Linklater, 2006; Ross, 2011).

The idea of urbanism incipient in US demographic statistics includes the suburbs (which now hold more residents than do cities) so that, too, is suspect in terms of the importance of downtown lofts to economies; nor is it sensible to assume other countries replicate the massive internal mobility of the US population. Numerous surveys pour scorn on the claim that quality of life is central to selecting business campuses as opposed to low cost, good communications technology, proximity to markets, and adequate transport. Companies seek skills when deciding where to locate their businesses – but skills also seek work. City centers largely attract the young who are not yet breeding. And a European Commission evaluation of 29 Cities of Culture disclosed that their principal goal – economic growth stimulated by the public subvention of culture to renew failed cities – has failed. Glasgow, for instance, was initially hailed as a success of the program; but many years down the line, it has not seen sustained growth (Oakley, 2004, 2006, and 2010; Bell, 2007; Freeman, 2007; Huijgh, 2007; Peck, 2007; Ross, 2006–07).

And today's discourse of the creative industries ignores some critical issues. For instance, the Australian Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences' submission to its national Productivity Commission refers to a 'post-smokestack era' (CHASS, 2006) – a utopia for workers, consumers, and residents with residues of code rather than carbon. Yet the Political Economy Research Institute's 2004 *Misfortune 100: Top Corporate Air Polluters in the United States* placed media owners at numbers 1, 3, 16, 22, and 39. Media production relies on the exorbitant water-use of computer technology, while making semi-conductors requires hazardous chemicals, including carcinogens. Waste from discarded electronics is one of the biggest sources of heavy metals and toxic pollutants in the world's trash piles. The accumulation of electronic hardware causes grave environmental and health harm as noxious chemicals, gases, and metals

seep into landfills and water sources from the Global North to Malaysia, Brazil, South Korea, China, Mexico, Viet Nam, Nigeria, and India. Pre-teen girls pick away without protection at discarded televisions and computers, looking for precious metals to sell. The remains are burned or left in landfills (Maxwell and Miller, 2012).

CONCLUSION

At best, creative-industries discourse offers ‘an industry training program’ (Turner, 2012). At worst, it stratifies cultural labor markets and generates unsafe environmental detritus. And the intermediation it announces as outmoded continues to matter, arching all the way from Cold War futurism to creative-industry divination, via academia, bureaucracy, and journalism. Cybertarian fantasies birth new cognitarian and ecological inequalities. Intermediation continues its work.

NOTES

- 1 Segments of this chapter draw on work I have done over three decades, some of which has appeared in various forms elsewhere, but not as assembled, added to, and subtracted from here.
- 2 Cybertarianism is a fantasy mixture of libertarianism and faith in new technology. It assumes that individualism is the core of innovation.
- 3 Reagan was not original. In 1848, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that a ‘creative economy is the fuel of magnificence’ (1909).
- 4 Thanks to Bill Grantham for directing me to the Office’s Trademark Electronic Search System.