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Creative Industries After the First Decade of Debate

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5 It has now been over a decade since the concept of creative industries was first put into the public domain by the Blair Labour government's Creative Industries Mapping Documents in Britain. The concept has developed traction globally, but it has also been understood and developed in different ways in Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and North America, and also in international bodies such as UNCTAD and UNESCO. A review of the policy literature reveals that although questions and issues remain around definitional coherence, there is some degree of consensus emerging about the size, scope, and significance of the sectors in question in both advanced and developing economies. At the same time, debate about the concept remains highly animated in media, communication, and cultural studies, with its critics dismissing the concept outright as a harbinger of neoliberal ideology in the cultural sphere. This article couches such critiques in light of recent debates surrounding the intellectual coherence of the concept of neoliberalism, arguing that this term itself possesses problems when taken outside of the Anglo-American context in which it originated. It is argued that issues surrounding the nature of participatory media culture, the relationship between cultural production and economic innovation, and the future role of public cultural institutions can be developed from within a creative industries framework, and that writing off such arguments as a priori ideological and flawed does little to advance debates about twenty-century information and media culture.

30 **Keywords** creative industries, creativity, cultural policy, globalization, information society, innovation, media, neoliberalism, the arts

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INTRODUCTION: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES POLICIES AROUND THE WORLD

The concept of creative industries emerged in the late 1990s primarily as a policy discourse, although the subsequent decade has seen a lively set of academic as well as industry and policy-related debates about its utility and implications for research, criticism, and creative practice. Its origins can be traced to the decision of the then newly elected British Labour government of Tony Blair to establish a Creative Industries Task Force (CITF), as a central activity of its new Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The story of the CITF has been told by various sources (Hartley 2005; Pratt 2005; O'Connor 2007; Hesmondhalgh 2007) and is not recounted in detail here, except to note its four major contributions.

First, it established the creative industries as a central plank of the United Kingdom's "postindustrial" economy, observing that the sector accounted for 5 percent of total national income in 1998, employed 1.4 million people, and was growing at about double the rate of the British economy as a whole. Estimates in the United States were that the creative industries account for 7–9 percent of gross national product (Americans for the Arts 2008; Siwek 2006), while countries as diverse as Australia, Singapore, South Africa, and China were identifying figures in the range of 3–5 percent (UNCTAD 2008; Cunningham and Higgs 2008). Second, it marked out the continuation of a trend, first identifiable in cultural policy in the United Kingdom and Australia in the 1980s and early 1990s, to view cultural sectors as contributors to wealth creation and economic performance, and not simply as claimants on public revenues on the basis of nonmarket or intrinsic values. Third, by approaching the creative industries in ways that went beyond the traditional discourses of the subsidized arts, and giving a central role to creativity in the generation of economic wealth, debates about these sectors moved into larger discourses such as those of trade policy, copyright and intellectual property, urban development, and educational futures. Finally, in developing a diverse and eclectic list of industries that ranged from commercial media to publicly subsidized arts, the live-analog

and the digital-multimedia, and those with largely one-off artisanal modes of cultural production to complex and highly capitalized sites of cultural production, creative industries were explicitly linked to discourses surrounding technological convergence, the information society and the “new economy” (Flew 2005a).

The creative industries policy discourse was taken up in a number of other countries. Singapore and Hong Kong developed detailed analyses of their creative industries sectors that were strongly influenced by the UK model. The concept also gained policy purchase in Taiwan, Korea, and, in the hybrid form of “cultural creative industries,” in China (Kong, Gibson, Khoo, and Semple 2006; Keane 2007). The European Union (EU) identified the cultural sectors as experiencing employment growth that was four to five times the EU average, and noted that the cultural workforce was pioneering wider trends in European labor markets, such as higher rates of self-employment, high levels of tertiary education, and a greater proportion of the workforce in temporary or contract jobs (KEA 2006). Most European governments were hesitant to adopt the British formulation of creative industries, preferring to talk of the cultural industries or the cultural sectors, whereas some Scandinavian countries talked of the creative economy or the experience economy. Creative industries was also taken up by governments in Australia and New Zealand, although in the Australian case it was state governments, such as the Queensland government, that were the more enthusiastic proponents of creative industries policies (Craik 2007). In the United States, the comparative weakness of national cultural policies is offset by a patchwork of subnational strategies, where state and local governments undertake diverse initiatives to bolster the arts and entertainment industries, often with the purpose of rebranding their city or region as a hub of creativity (Wyszomirski 2008). On a global scale the United Nations Commission on Trade, Aid, and Development (UNCTAD) has become an enthusiastic proponent of the creative industries as a new engine of growth in developing countries (Barrowclough and Kozul-Wright 2008; UNCTAD 2008), while the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has significantly upgraded its statistical frameworks to incorporate the size, scope and significance of cultural production in the global economy (UNESCO 2007).

THE STRUGGLE FOR DEFINITIONAL COHERENCE

The early list-based approach to creative industries developed in the UK context by DCMS was open to the charge of ad hoc-ery, as it was not clear what were the underlying threads linking this seemingly heterogeneous set of industry subsectors (Flew 2002). The list drew together industries that were highly capitalized and industrialized

in their modes of production and distribution (e.g., film and television), and those that were more labor-intensive and artisanal (arts and crafts, designer fashion, music, the visual and performing arts), as well as combining highly commercial sectors marked by the business cycle (e.g., advertising, architecture), with arts sectors largely driven by public subsidy. Critics of the DCMS approach, such as Nicholas Garnham (2005), argued that the inclusion of the software, computer games, and electronic publishing industries had the effect of artificially inflating the size and economic significance of the creative industries, while David Hesmondhalgh (2007) questioned the exclusion of sectors such as heritage, tourism, entertainment, and sport.

The two lines of demarcation proposed in the original DCMS definition—individual creativity that could take the form of intellectual property—did little to clarify what Andy Pratt (2005) described as the “breadth question” in differentiating the creative industries from other sectors, while Chirs Bilton and Ruth Leary (2002, 50) observed that “it is difficult to think of a product which does not exploit some intellectual component in the form of patents, design elements or other intangible, symbolic properties which make that product unique.” The focus on intellectual property also raised concerns that in the shift from cultural to creative industries, the result would be a one-sided focus upon that which was “new,” produced through digital technologies, and commercially oriented, losing sight of the complex cultural ecologies that link commercial and publicly supported form of cultural production, as well as links between digital and tangible arts and media forms. This focus upon the link between creativity and intellectual property also raised concerns about the risks of subordinating culture to the commercial market in the shift from cultural to creative industries (Hesmondhalgh 2008).

The 2000s have seen increasing consensus emerge among policymakers about working definitions of the creative industries and what sectors should or should not be included, albeit with some debates about what should be considered to be “core” creative or cultural industries. Work undertaken for UNESCO in developing its revised Framework for Cultural Statistics (UNESCO 2007) has compared the cultural statistics frameworks of fourteen constituencies (ten countries, one region, one city, the European Union, and the World Intellectual Property Organization) and has found that a consensus exists around inclusion of the following sectors in cultural statistics modeling:

1. Publishing and literature.
2. Performing arts.
3. Music.
4. Film, video, and photography.

- 5. Broadcasting (television and radio).
- 6. Visual arts and crafts.
- 7. Advertising.
- 8. Design, including fashion.
- 9. Museums, galleries, and libraries.
- 10. Interactive media (Web, games, mobile, etc.).

Sectors for which there continues to be debate about their inclusion in a cultural statistics framework include architecture, software, product and reception hardware (e.g., musical instruments, electronic goods), festivals, intangible cultural heritage, and leisure activities, including sport. Nonetheless, considerable progress has been made in developing common statistical and analytical frameworks that enable the development of empirically robust data that can be compared between countries and analyzed over time, thus allowing for more speculative claims to be subject to detailed policy-related performance metrics. This can be seen in the work of UNCTAD on creative industries and the creative economy, which has been able to develop a sectoral taxonomy of the creative industries between the arts, media, heritage, and “functional creations” (or more service-oriented sectors), around the following broad definition of the creative industries:

- The cycles of creation, production, and distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs;
- A set of knowledge-based activities, focused on but not limited to the arts, potentially generating revenues from trade and intellectual property rights;

- Tangible products and intangible intellectual or artistic services with creative content, economic value, and market objectives;
- At the cross-roads among the artisan, services, and industrial sectors; and
- Comprising a new dynamic sector in world trade. (UNCTAD 2008, 13)

Figure 1 shows how these principles link up to sectors and categories that constitute the creative industries worldwide.

The question of what relationship exists between the public and private sectors in creative industries development has also been clarified significantly. Rather than being a discourse that simply champions commercial popular culture as the obverse of traditional “market failure” rationales for arts and cultural funding, what has instead been emerging is a better understanding of the enabling role of public-sector institutions and government-funded cultural activities as drivers of innovation and socially networked markets (Cunningham et al. 2008). John Holden has observed that “as greater numbers of people are engaging with the content and spaces of publicly-funded culture . . . the working lives of greater numbers of people are taking on the characteristics and processes of cultural practitioners” (Holden 2007, 8). The public sector has typically been seen as both an enabler of commercial creative industries, assisting with the development and provision of inputs, including people with creative skills, as well as having responsibility for the empirical “mapping” of these sectors and their economic impacts (Holden 2007). Since

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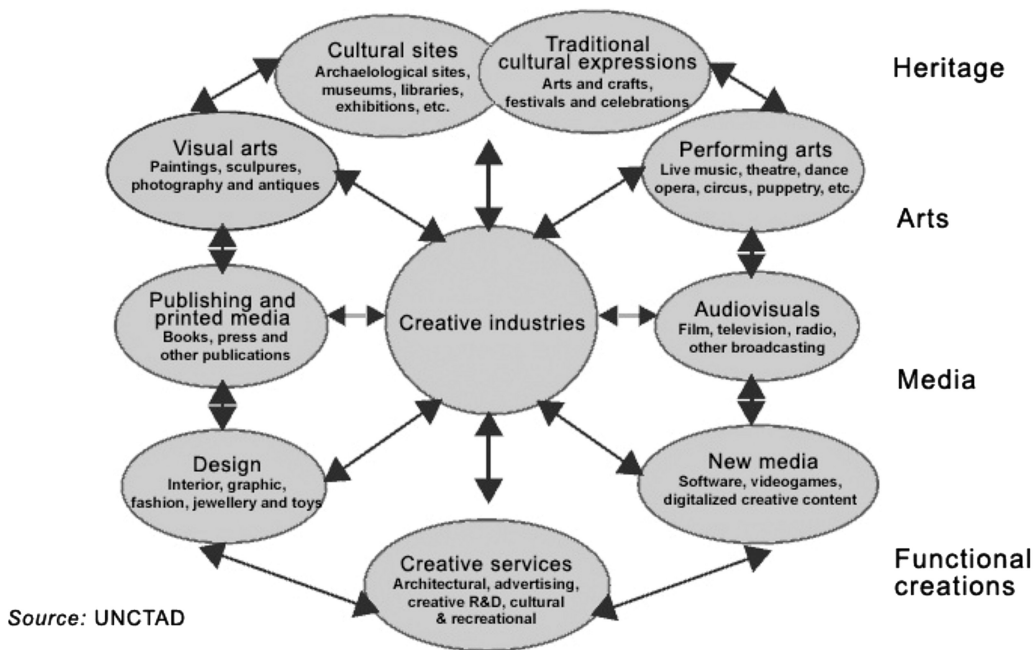


FIG. 1. UNCTAD model of the creative industries. Source: UNCTAD (2008, 14).

the global financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent economic downturn, public-sector organizations are increasingly being looked to for taking the lead on innovation in the creative industries sectors (Pratt 2009).

CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: INFORMATION SOCIETY REDUX?

Cultural economist David Throsby (2008) has observed that the distinctions made between cultural and creative industries arise from a mix of inherent definitional difficulties in delineating “culture” and “creativity”; distinctive national traditions in understanding these categories; and the politics of cultural policy and the impact of government priorities at the time on how the relevant sectors are defined and their roles conceptualized. Such questions arise, for Throsby, in a context where “the very status of cultural policy has been changing in a number of countries as a result of the emergence of the cultural industries as an object of interest to economic policy-makers”; a growing interest in culture as a source of economic value-adding is seeing “cultural policy . . . rescued from its primordial past and catapulted to the forefront of the modern forward-looking policy agenda, an essential component in any respectable economic policy-maker’s development strategy” (Throsby 2008, 229).

Cultural economists often use the terms *cultural* and *creative industries* interchangeably, as their primary focus is upon the mix of product qualities and consumer needs that renders a particular commodity, activity, or service to be deemed cultural (Towse 2003). In other accounts, most notably the work of Throsby (2001, 2008), arts and cultural industries are the respective core subsets of the creative industries in what is known as the “concentric circles” approach, where industries are distinguished by the “core” role given to creativity in the input stage of production (e.g., the visual arts would be seen as a “core,” but advertising would be seen as more “peripheral” as it combines creative inputs with other inputs). From the economic perspective, industry classifications are loose taxonomies that have to fit upon the shifting nexus of supply-demand relationships between individuals and firms; the classification of commodities and markets is analytically prior to that of industries.

In the critical humanities, by contrast, the political and ideological weight given to these different signifiers of an industry is substantially greater. The term “cultural industry” has its origins in neo-Marxist philosophy, where the rise of industrialized cultural production in the early twentieth century was seen—and is still seen by many critical theorists—as promoting “class rule,” a “capitalist lifestyle” and an “administered society” (terms taken from Edgar 2008). There has, however, been a turn away from a monolithic and pessimistic model of “culture industry”

since the 1970s, marked not only by a conceptual shift to a more empirically based understanding of how production, distribution, and circulation actually worked in these quite varied industries, but also by a greater interest in the policy settings that could enable these sectors to grow while furthering social-democratic agendas to democratize access to and participation in the cultural sphere. In his highly influential work for the left-wing Greater London Council in the early 1980s, political economist Nicholas Garnham argued against what he termed the “idealist” tradition in cultural policy that rejected markets as incompatible with culture, pointing out that “most people’s cultural needs and aspirations are being, for better or worse, supplied by the market as goods and services” (Garnham 1987, 25). Garnham instead argued for approaches that would better understand how the cultural industries worked as “institutions . . . which employ the characteristic modes of production and organization of industrial corporations to produce and disseminate symbols in the form of cultural goods and services generally, although not exclusively, as commodities” (ibid.). The intention was to enable cultural policymakers to better identify the scope to intervene in cultural markets in order to further access and participation agendas, rather than reject cultural industries and the commodity form *tout court*.

It is worth noting, then, that Garnham subsequently came to be one of the more trenchant critics of creative industries theory and policy discourse, claiming that it inappropriately smuggles in arguments and assumptions associated with the information society. Garnham (2005, 20) argues that the shift from cultural to creative industries is opportunistic, “an attempt by the cultural sector and the cultural policy community to share in its relations with the government... the unquestioned prestige that now attach to the information society and to any policy that supposedly favors its development.” Moreover, in the British context of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown’s “New Labour,” creative industries was perceived as a policy Trojan horse to promote “the shift to and reinforcement of ‘economic’ and ‘managerial’ language and patterns of thought within cultural and media policy” (ibid., 16). This critique of creative industries as a form of ideological mystification has also been made by David Hesmondhalgh (2008, 567), who proposed that it is based upon “arguments which all too often come close to endorsing inequality and exploitation associated with contemporary neo-liberalisms,” and by Andrew Ross, who suspected the new policy rubric of being “‘old wine in new bottles’—a glib production of spin-happy new Labourites, hot for naked marketization but mindful of the need for socially acceptable dress” (Ross 2007, 18).

The creative industries concept shares with information society theories an interest in the long-term shift in employment and national income from agriculture and

345 manufacturing to services in advanced capitalist
 economies; the limitations of “industrial era” statistical
 modeling in capturing the economic dynamics of services
 and information-based sectors; and the growing role of
 knowledge capital as a primary driver of growth in these
 350 economies (David and Foray 2002). In terms of the five
 sets of arguments that Garnham associates with informa-
 tion society thinking (for another accounts of the infor-
 mation society, see Hassan 2008), theories of the service
 economy and post-Fordist flexible production models have
 been most influential, with transaction cost-based theories
 355 of the firm helping to shape some economic accounts of
 creative industries (e.g., Caves 2000), and Schumpeter-
 rian models of innovation and entrepreneurship influenc-
 ing thinking about the significance of small-to-medium
 firms as incubators of innovation and new business mod-
 360 els in the arts, media, and cultural sectors (Cunningham
 et al. 2008).

Notions of the Internet and digital media as “technolo-
 gies of freedom” have had more influence on the growing
 literature on the significance of networks and collaborative
 365 social production (e.g., Benkler 2006) than on creative in-
 dustries theories. Daniel Bell’s original thinking about the
 information society has had only limited influence, with
 most accounts of the creative industries being consider-
 ably more circumspect about proclaiming a postindus-
 370 trial utopia for the creative workforce, and there has been
 considerable recognition of the question of precarious la-
 bor that often underpins contract employment and flexible
 working arrangements (Deuze 2006; Cunningham 2008).
 Indeed, creative industries theorists have often pointed to
 375 the limitations of information society models, arguing that
 a focus on human creativity—often derided among criti-
 cal theorists as a residue of bourgeois individualism and a
 romanticisation of the artist (Miller 2002; Donald 2004)—
 is an important corrective to policies overly focused upon
 380 infrastructure and technological hardware to the detriment
 of human factors and social software (Mitchell et al. 2003;
 Hartley 2005; Cunningham 2009b).

Garnham’s (2005, 16) claim that creative industries dis-
 course “assumes that we already know, and thus can take
 385 for granted, what the creative industries are, why they are
 important and thus merit supporting policy initiatives” is
 also open to question, particularly if we shift our focus
 outside of its origins in Great Britain under Tony Blair’s
 New Labour. Cunningham’s (2007; 2009b) evaluation of
 390 1200 creative industries policy documents developed out-
 side of the United Kingdom from 1998 to 2006 found a
 high degree of incrementalism, policy variance, and atten-
 tion to local contextual factors, rather than an unreflexive
 blanket imposition of neoliberal rational–comprehensive
 395 orthodoxies about the proper culture–economy relation-
 ship. In very general terms, a global scan of this policy
 literature finds four main variants:

- A United States model, where there is a substan-
 tive divide in thinking and calculation toward arts
 and culture on the one hand and the entertain- 400
 ment/copyright industries on the other, and where
 the bulk of policy initiatives are highly localized
 and subnational in their focus, as seen with the rise
 of the “creative cities” movement (Wyszomirski
 2008). 405
- A European model that emphasizes the cultural
 mission of these industries and strategies for so-
 cial inclusion for common cultural benefit and
 where the term “cultural industries” is generally
 preferred to that of creative industries. 410
- A diverse range of Asian approaches, which
 strongly emphasize the role of national sociocul-
 tural and political circumstances, but still iden-
 tify opportunities for export growth and success-
 ful branding of global city-region in the highly
 competitive Asia-Pacific region, while at the same
 time challenging long-held orthodoxies about in-
 strumentalist education and the dominance of the
 ICT sectors in driving economic growth (cf. Kong
 et al. 2006). 420
- Developing country models in South America,
 South Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere, where
 questions of cultural heritage maintenance,
 poverty alleviation, and provision of basic infras-
 425 tructure have precluded overly technocratic con-
 ceptions of creative industries being promoted un-
 critically as the inevitable fruits of the information
 society (UNCTAD 2008).

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND CULTURAL POLICY

What has been traced in this article thus far is the man- 430
 ner in which the rise of creative industries as both theory
 and policy discourse has intersected with changing under-
 standings of the relationship of the arts, the media and ap-
 plied creativity to new media technologies, globalization
 and the twenty-first century knowledge-based economy. 435
 Over the period from the initial development of creative
 industries in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s to the
 present, there has been a refining of definitions, models,
 agreements of what industries are included or excluded,
 and measurement techniques. This has reached the point 440
 where recent work undertaken through bodies such as UN-
 ESCO (2007) and UNCTAD (2008) is generating more
 statistically robust data on the size, scope, and signifi-
 cance of the creative industries on a global scale, which
 445 rests upon stronger empirical foundation than the more
 ad hoc or speculative accounts that prevailed in the late
 1990s. At the same time, there are significant variations
 in national and regional adaptations of the creative indus-
 tries template from the form in which it first emerged in

450 the United Kingdom, in contrast to claims that it is simply the reflection of a singular “master discourse,” such as the information society, exported from Tony Blair’s “Cool Britannia.” A distinction that could be further explored is the difference in applications of the concept between Europe and Asia. Europe has tended toward what has been referred to as the “concentric circles” model, where arts-related activities are seen as being in the “core” creative industries, whereas fields such as advertising, architecture, and design as well as media industries are seen as only being partially creative (Throsby 2001; KEA 2006; Work Foundation 2007). By contrast, Asian definitions of the creative industries have tended to be more eclectic and inclusive. Indeed, it has been argued in the Chinese case that it may be used in too inclusive a manner, with what Keane (2007) refers to as the “super-sign” of creativity being applied to areas as diverse as hairdressing, theme parks, and furniture manufacture in order to bolster claims that creative industries are central to a “new China” that can move beyond being the global center of low-cost manufacturing.

475 Although policy discourses are tending to settle around creative industries, if not necessarily converging, the gulf between creative industries theory and policy discourse and the positions of critical theorists remains wide, and has almost certainly widened over the 2000s. Various arguments have been made that creative industries subtly endorse neoliberal marketisation (Hesmondhalgh 2008), have been inappropriately used as consultancy-speak (Miller 2009), give a positive spin to the activities and products of global media corporations (Kellner 2009), and ignore the plight of precarious labor (Rossiter 2006). At one level, such critiques can be understood as an extension of debates in the 1990s about cultural policy studies, and whether there is a need to incorporate policy considerations into the study of culture as a field shaped by governmental practices and discourses (Bennett 1998). A lot of the critical debate about creative industries can be seen as a variant of earlier debates about whether a focus upon the pragmatic, ad hoc, ameliorative and “ideas-thick” realm of public policymaking appears inadequate and compromised in the eyes of those who champion the transformative, heroic, programmatic and “ideas-rich” realms of cultural critique and the critical humanities (Cunningham 1992).

495 However, the stakes have been upped in creative industries debates from the cultural policy debate of the 1990s. One major reason is that larger claims are being made about the broader socioeconomic significance of culture and creativity arising from transformations in the technological and economic substructure of twenty-first-century global capitalism. As a result, creative industries discourse seeks to engage not only with the public sector and regulated cultural industries, but also with a wider range of

knowledge and service industries, professions, and practices. This means that the focus has shifted toward whether creative industries are loci of innovation and employment growth in increasingly knowledge-based economies; cultural policy is moving from arts subsidy and advocacy to the center stage of economic growth policies in postindustrial economies, at the level of cities, regions, or nations.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND THE GREAT NEOLIBERALISM DEBATE

At the core of the critical theorists’ dissent with creative industries is the claim that it promotes neoliberalism as a political ideology, and that this furthers the hegemony of multinational corporate capital over the cultural sphere. Miller finds that “neoliberal creative industries discourse” has been promoted by “carpet-bagging consultants” pushing a “cybertarian mythology,” while “the cultural industries remain under the control of media conglomerates” (Miller 2009, 188, 190, 194). Des Friedman views the rise of creative industries discourse in the United Kingdom as part of a larger project of “the neo-liberalization of media policy,” which “is designed to transform the existing balance of power . . . to assist the expansion of private accumulation and to undermine the legitimacy and existence of non-profit and public service media provision” (Freedman 2008, 224).

The claim of complicity with neoliberalism is a more serious charge directed at creative industries arguments than those concerning what industries are included or excluded, or whether it is helpful to differentiate creativity and culture in understanding sectoral dynamics and their policy implications. Neoliberalism as a concept emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s as an omnibus term used by activists to critique and protest institutions and forums associated with globalization, such as the World Trade Organization and its inaugural meeting in Seattle in 1999, and summits of world leaders such as the Group of Eight (G8) Summit in Genoa in 2001 and the Group of Twenty (G20) Summit in London in 2009. As the critique of neoliberalism developed in international economics in the 1990s, it also referred to what has also been termed the “Washington Consensus,” where the application of a common set of policies based around fiscal austerity, privatization of publicly owned assets, and market liberalization was the common recommendation of U.S.-based international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for developing countries facing economic difficulties (Stiglitz 2002).

Critics would see neoliberalism and globalization as being connected. Scholte (2005, 1) refers to neoliberal globalization as “an economically driven process that should proceed on first principles of private property and uninhibited market forces,” and where “other economic rules

and institutions are ‘political interferences’ that undermine market efficiency and should therefore be reduced to a minimum.” Neo-Marxists such as David Harvey (2005) identified neoliberalism as a global strategy to reassert the class power of business and economic elites that has its origins in the ideas and policies that shaped the Thatcher and Major governments in Britain from 1979 to 1997 and the Reagan administration in the United States in the 1980s. Harvey (*ibid.*, 2) defined neoliberalism as “[a] theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” Harvey’s neo-Marxist critique sits alongside neo-Foucauldian accounts such as those of the British political theorist Nikolas Rose, who identifies neoliberalism with the association (found on the libertarian left as well as among many conservatives) of “notions of freedom, and the associated celebration of the powers of the individual . . . whether as discerning customer, enterprising individual, subject of right or autonomous fellow human” (Rose 1999, 64). While this may sound like a somewhat academic debate in some circles, the range of anti-corporate and anti-globalization protests over the 2000s has kept the term on the agenda, while the global financial crisis that began in October 2008 saw such apparently establishment figures as the Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd (2009), attributing the severity of the crisis to the impact of neoliberal policies and “extreme capitalism.”

Debates about neoliberalism and creative industries are connected through three factors. The first is the “New Labour” administrations that governed Britain under Blair and Gordon Brown. As the Blair Labour government provided much of the early thought leadership about creative industries being in the vanguard of a postindustrial “Cool Britannia,” creative industries has tended to be seen as prototypical of that government’s “Third Way” ideology. The second factor was the focus upon markets, entrepreneurship, and intellectual property found in the creative industries literature, which, it was argued, did not adequately consider the ways in which capitalist markets could produce inequalities of access or shape cultural forms in ways that may be deemed at odds with wider notions of the public or social good (Hesmondhalgh 2007). Finally, the focus upon new industries, emergent markets, and the small-to-medium enterprise (SME) sector cut across traditional policy divides, with neoliberals focusing on the economic case for greater competition and on the opportunities presented by new technologies and reduced public-sector intervention, and the left focusing on the social case for public ownership, regulation, and public subsidy of the arts (Flew 2005b, 2006). Since creative industries did not speak the language of the traditional left—a mix of cul-

tural Marxism, suspicion of markets and commercial enterprise, and enthusiasm for the regulatory state—it was easy to see it as a feint toward the political dark side among those associating their own positions with those of with the traditional left, wondering whether “neo-liberal emphases on creativity have succeeded old-school cultural patrimony” (Miller 2009, 187).

ADDRESSING THE CRITIQUE OF CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AS NEOLIBERALISM

A wider critique of neoliberalism as an explanatory concept is beyond the scope of this article, but points that have been raised in relation to creative industries can be addressed. The association of the creative industries concept with “New Labour” governments in Britain has enabled critics to tie the concept to a wider meta-narrative about neoliberalism as a political-ideological project of dominant economic elites, with terms such as the “new economy” and “creative industries” as ideological obfuscations designed to disguise the extent to which they had essentially accepted the policies of their conservative predecessors. Both Hesmondhalgh (2007) and Freedman (2008) structure their analysis of media policy since 1980 in precisely these terms, and it is the dominant approach taken by political economists more generally (see, e.g., Curran 2006; McChesney 2008).

The notion that we have been in an era of “neoliberal globalization” or “neoliberal capitalism” since the 1980s has become something of an intellectual truism, established as a given intellectual proposition by virtue of frequent enunciation. Andrew Kipnis (2007) has observed that the number of articles in leading anthropological journals using the term “neoliberal” increased from less than 10 percent in the decade prior to 2002 to 35 percent of articles published between 2002 and 2005. Nonini (2008, 149) notes that:

The term “neoliberal” has recently appeared so frequently, and been applied with such abandon, that it risks being used to refer to almost any political, economic, social or cultural process associated with contemporary capitalism. . . . A term with so many meanings obviously has great utility, because most progressive scholars can agree that whatever neoliberalism is, they don’t like it, and the ambiguity of the term allows discursive coalitions of the like-minded to form without the troublesome bother of having to clarify exactly what it is they oppose or are critical of.

The limits of neoliberalism as a general explanatory framework for global capitalism since the 1980s are evident in the case of China. Contrary to Harvey’s (2005) account of Chinese developments since 1980 as “neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics,” Nonini (2008) argues that the depth of official commitment to private property rights, free markets, and free trade—to take three

baseline commitments of neoliberalism—is limited, contingent, and reversible, particularly if enhancement of any of these were to challenge the power of the Chinese Communist party-state. Moreover, he argues that popular support for a neoliberal policy program in China is virtually nonexistent, reflecting the historically weak position of liberalism as a political philosophy in Chinese society, and that while there may be some support for a “weak” variant of neoliberalism based around support for markets, entrepreneurship, and consumerist values, “the strong version of neoliberalism does not exist in China as a hegemonic project” (ibid., 168). China may be an exceptional case, given its size, its rapid growth rates since 1978, and its significance in the global economy. Moreover, insofar as the Chinese case has parallels, it is in the generally strong support found for the “developmental state” in Asian capitalist systems (Weiss 2003).

Rather than debating the Chinese case at length, the point in raising it is to draw attention to the extent to which universalizing claims about neoliberalism may in fact rest upon a kind of Marxist functionalism, whereby an all-encompassing dominant ideology is developed to “serve” capital in its latest phase, which is deemed to be global and flexible. Nonini (2008, 151) proposes downsizing our claims about neoliberalism and giving them historical, geographical, and cultural specificity. Otherwise, the real risk exists of “assuming that flexible capitalism brings about the very political conditions within nation-states of deregulation and privatisation etc., which it needs for maximum capital accumulation, and . . . that flexible ‘capital’ has a universal global capacity to do so, and that to do so is somehow ‘neo-liberal’ governance, restructuring, domination etc., wherever it occurs in the world.” We can note here Will Hutton’s argument that China requires an “Enlightenment infrastructure” in order to properly develop capitalism, and that “China will only be able to truly compete with the West if it becomes more like us.” The response of economist Meghnad Desai to the claim that there is one “true” capitalism based on individualism, liberty, and pluralism that China needs to adopt, is that “Capitalism... has accommodated a variety of institutional arrangements and only in the most recent phase of globalization have we thought that an Anglo-Saxon style liberal democracy is its *sine qua non*” (Hutton and Desai 2007). In light of the wide range of work that has sought to critically evaluate different national capitalisms and their responses to globalization (see, e.g., Perraton and Clift 2004), we would share Kipnis’s (2007, 387) observation that “to naïvely draw upon all types of analyses of neo-liberalism without noting their contradictions leads to a hodgepodge sort of analysis in which the world as a whole and everything in it appears to belong to a single theoretical category.”¹

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES BEYOND CARICATURES

If we move beyond the crude claim that invoking Tony Blair or “New Labour” proves in itself the neoliberal provenance of creative industries, consideration needs to be given to how evidence of neoliberal strategies manifest themselves in various policies and forms of policy discourse. There is certainly considerable talk about markets, entrepreneurship, competition, and innovation in creative industries policies, but it has been noted that this was not a new thing: Cultural policy since the 1970s had been moving from a supply-side, artist-centered approach to one that gave stronger consideration to consumer demand and cultural markets. One distinctive feature of creative industries as a policy discourse—if not necessarily policies as actually applied in the arts and media sectors—has been increased attention given to the nature of small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) in the creative industries. Although arts policy has often been oriented toward flagship cultural institutions and major events, and political economists have focused upon the largest commercial and public sector media conglomerates—what Nick Couldry refers to as “the myth of the mediated centre” (Couldry 2006)—the creative industries have come to evolve what has been termed an “hourglass” structure, with a small number of major players in each sector sitting alongside a myriad of individual enterprises, small companies, and networks of creative talent (Deuze 2006). As these individuals and small groups are relatively new and not highly concentrated, and as “portfolio careers” characterized by multiple jobs across different sectors are often the norm for these segments of the creative workforce, they lack the political power and lobbying clout of big corporations, established trade unions, and traditional arts organizations. Yet there is growing evidence that such loosely configured creative networks are a core source of innovation in the arts, media, and culture, and the challenge has been raised of how policy frameworks can best support such networks that differs from the traditional large-scale institutional domains of media and cultural policies and politics.

Another distinctive issue has been how the Internet and digital media production and distribution models are changing the producer-consumer dichotomy that has long characterized mass communication models and critical theories of the mass media. While cultural studies theorists and critical political economists have long debated the capacity for autonomous agency among media consumers using the products distributed by mass media corporations, the rise of what Yochai Benkler (2006) terms *social production* models based around collaborative networks and peer production are generating new sources of competition, conflict, and contradiction at the heart of industries connected to information, knowledge, communication,

770 culture, and creativity, which are themselves moving to the
 center of twenty-first-century economies. Benkler (ibid.,
 122) observes that “social production in general and peer
 production in particular present new sources of competi- 825
 tion to incumbents that produce information goods for
 which there are now socially produced substitutes.” This
 775 requires a different approach to the politics of media re-
 form, focused not only on the regulation of media corpo-
 rations and provision of support for public service media,
 but also on new flashpoint issues such as the future of
 copyright and intellectual property law, open-source ver-
 780 sus proprietary software, user-generated media content,
 and questions of open access to repositories of creative
 content. As Henry Jenkins observes, in what he refers to
 as *convergence culture*, “the potentials of a more partici- 835
 patory media culture are worth fighting for . . . [as] conver-
 785 gence culture is throwing media into flux, expanding the
 opportunities for grassroots groups to speak back to the
 mass media” (Jenkins 2006, 248). While such concerns
 have been caricatured as claims that creativity and tech-
 nology will in and of themselves trump corporate power
 790 structures (e.g., Miller 2009), there seem to be very im-
 portant and current political questions arising out of such
 power shifts between users and distributors of digital cul-
 tural content.

795 Finally, there is the role of public-sector cultural in-
 stitutions in the creative economy. The implications of
 creative industries theories and policy discourses are not
 necessarily neoliberal ones that “cement the victory of
 private over public interests” or “limit the scope of public
 service broadcasting and reduce it to a ghettoized cor-
 800 ner of the broadcast market where private operators have
 no desire (and no compulsion) to go” (Freedman 2008,
 224). By pointing to a positive correlation between the
 development of culture and the creative industries and
 economic growth and innovation, rather than seeing cul-
 805 tural provision as a rent extracted from the “real” or “pro-
 ductive” economy on the basis of social or cultural value
 rationales alone, we can begin to think about such cul-
 tural institutions as *public-sector social innovation* incu-
 bators (Cunningham 2009a). Governments can use their
 810 more direct leverage over these institutions to establish
 them as leading-edge sites for innovations around user-
 generated content, open access, and a more participatory
 media culture, and they can operate as a fulcrum for wider
 changes in the cultural sphere. This is not to say that
 815 the influence of governments will invariably be a benign
 one—the long and debilitating “culture wars” in coun-
 tries such as the United States and Australia indicate the
 extent to which such cultural institutions can be hobbled
 for perceived political gain—or that such initiative will
 820 not be resisted from within the organizational culture of
 such large, well-established cultural institutions. But it
 is to say that creative industries theories and policy dis-

courses are not defined by an ideological preference for
 large commercial institutions over those of the public sec-
 tor. Rather, they can act as an advocate for the contri- 825
 bution of SMEs, and for the formative role of public-
 sector cultural institutions as cultural questions move to
 the fore of globalized knowledge-based economies and
 societies.

NOTE

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1. Such a problem pervades Freedman’s (2008, 223) account of
 the politics of media policy in Britain the Blair government and the
 United States during the Bush administration. Despite the author’s
 concerns about “the tendency to treat neo-liberalism as an undifferen- 835
 tiated ‘bogyman’ of contemporary capitalism,” it can be argued that
 his account of a diverse range of media policies in the two countries as
 variants of neoliberalism becomes precisely this. This is most marked
 in his analysis of public broadcasting, where the overt politicization
 and defunding of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) by the Bush
 administration in the United States is seen as being essentially similar 840
 to the Blair government’s promotion of new market opportunities for
 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). In this and other cases
 in the book, such as content regulation and censorship, quite different
 policies are approached as evidence of “the emergence of varieties of
 neo-liberalism . . . [where] states are experimenting with and internal- 845
 izing different aspects of the neo-liberal agenda, contributing to the
 emergence of ‘diversity within convergence.’” In other words, even
 when policies would appear to be quite different, they are in fact quite
 the same, all explicable under the rubric of variants of neoliberalism!
 For a critical review of Freedman, see Flew (2009). 850

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