

## The Responsibilities of the “Creative Class”

Closing remarks, Creative Clusters Conference, London 2007

### SHEFFIELD

Some of you may know that I’m from Sheffield, the city of the Full Monty.

The film is set in the 1980s, when Sheffield was in crisis, we’d lost over 100,000 jobs, and we were one of the poorest parts of the UK.

It’s about a group of unemployed steel workers who form a strip group to earn some money.

I was also unemployed. Now, the career choice I made wasn’t the same as the guys in the film.

But in its way it was equally outlandish, because I decided to set up an alternative arts company, to promote comedy, world music, contemporary opera, non-animal circus, festivals, and I rented a workspace in a disused garage by the station.

Imagine my surprise when a man from the council turned up and said: it’s great you’re here, because this area has been designated as a cultural industries quarter.

Next door there was a couple putting out punk records on vinyl, there was a guy mending computers, and another one publishing an eco-magazine. Down the road there were some artists squatting in another building. Outside: nothing but abandoned factories.

But with amazing optimism, the man from the Council wheeled us all out as examples of the new generation of cultural entrepreneurs that would be changing the face of Sheffield.

### THE WORKSTATION

And, as it turns out, some foresight, because twenty years later I’m in the same building, rebuilt and reinvented as a workspace for cultural industries.

There are firms making documentaries, selling ring tones, an actors agency, a theatre company, a four screen cinema, web designers, film-makers, a dance company, advertising agencies. And the office of my third business there, Creative Clusters.

The building next door is now a photography gallery and training space, next door to that is a recording and film studio, a building with 70 artists studios, a training space for DJs, more.

Altogether there are some thousands of people in hundreds of enterprises – making money, making art, teaching, learning, and everything in between. The whole area is a cluster of creative industries.

### A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

And as we have heard over the last three days this kind of thing is happening all over the world.

We've heard about the arts leading the development of new cities – here in the Thames Gateway, and spectacularly at Saadiyat in Abu Dhabi.

We've heard UK government ministers and their advisors putting creative industries at the centre of the UK economy.

We've heard how young people all over the world are choosing creative careers, and how in places like Singapore the government is making moves to help them.

We've heard how anyone, anywhere, can be a player: London, Berlin and Milan, sure, but we've also heard inspiring stories from new centres of creativity like Lagos and Sao Paulo.

We have heard how changes in technology and demography are calling into being a new kinds of business and new kinds of culture: like Last.fm, a radio station that plays different, personalised music for each one of its listeners.

All this from creative businesses: enterprises whose core activity, whose value is based on a traditional arts skill: singing, dancing, acting, telling stories, making images – art, empowered and organised by technology and management.

## **THE INDUSTRIALISATION OF CULTURE**

We are witnessing the industrialisation of culture on a global scale.

This is not the beginning any more, we are now entering what we should see as the middle period of this industrialisation, the time when it really gets going.

Film and television have been with us for a long time, the printed book even longer, but those forms are changing dramatically, and it will not be long before they are all seen as precursor craft versions of.. whatever media format it is that we will invent next.

It's as if we are coming out of the steam age – of the cassette tape, the CD, analogue television – into... of course I don't know what exactly, but I do know that we are entering a time when those creative arts skills will be right at the centre of wealth creation, and thus of business, and thus of governance.

## **INDUSTRIALISATION OF CULTURE**

This phrase the 'industrialisation of culture' sounds truly awful to my ears.

But, I think, for all the wrong reasons.

I began my career in the theatre, and I didn't own a television until I was thirty. But now I experience virtually all my culture through film, television, books, CDs, the internet, newspapers, all mechanically reproduced cultural products. And I bet you do too. Think how much culture you would have left if all these products of the 'industrialisation of culture' were to disappear.

The fact is that even when mass-produced and commodified, songs and stories and pictures do not lose the power of art. On the contrary, as we learn how to use these media they get better and more powerful.

## **CULTURAL POLICY**

I think that this rise of the creative economy means that those of us engaged with policy for culture need to make some deep changes to some of our thinking.

### **Art Vs business and technology**

Most of cultural institutions were built in what we must see now as another age – anything more than ten years ago is back beyond a critical threshold, when the interests of culture and the interests of economic and technological development were diametrically opposed.

Institutions somehow carry in their DNA the values and assumptions of the time in which they were born.

So its hard, for us that work with these structures, to shake off the idea that art is essentially different from technology.

But this is quite a recent idea. What would the engineer and weapons designer Leonardo da Vinci make of it?

Or the idea that business is the enemy of art. What would the entrepreneur and property developer William Shakespeare make of that?

Now, when business can give us the iPod, the Sopranos, the Buena Vista Social Club, the Gherkin, these ideas need a thorough revision.

### **Culture is a Source of Wealth and Power**

Cultural policy still assumes that culture is a cost to government, a drain on its resources, an essentially unproductive activity that has to be paid for from economic activity that has nothing to do with culture.

But in the creative economy culture appears to be a *source* of wealth. Not a consequence of economic success, but a pre-condition for it.

We mustn't be scared of this. It doesn't have to mean they'll take our grants away. But what does it mean? We have yet to work this out – but it is us, people in culture, that should do it.

### **Individual Creativity**

At the moment in the UK we put the individual artist at the centre of cultural policy, and I think this is easily misunderstood.

It is a myth that you need to be special or gifted to be creative, or intuitive. Making things is a very ordinary human activity, we are all fundamentally good at it. It can be very hard work, and many people will prefer to do something else, but none of it is magic. Creativity can be taught and learnt.

The twenty-first century will require a high level of 'ordinary creativity' in everyday management and staff, for it is the collective creativity of all these people together that drives the creative economy.

### **Class divide in culture**

Everyone can be creative – but not everyone is.

In the creative economy, the source of wealth is in people's minds, and it is unlocked by education – the kind of education that in the past we have only given

to artists. Companies like Google and Pixar understand this, who allow their people to spend 20% of their time on their own projects.

But how many people have access to this kind of work and education?

A gulf is opening up between those who are articulate, speak English, understand the internet, are confident with the shorthand of global branding and celebrity, live in cities, have access to continuing education – the creative class – and... we haven't got a proper name for those without creativity yet – is this what chavs are?, or NEETs? – the emerging uncreative underclass.

I'm for meritocracy, of course, but the creative economy will disproportionately reward the clever, the trendy, the networked, the fluid.

As a large number of people realise that they are being excluded in a new way, so there will be a new backlash.

### **An era of mass extinctions**

I think that for everyone in this room, the creative economy represents a fabulous opportunity.

But for many others around the world it is truly a catastrophe.

In Varanasi, in India, the mass suicides of hand-loom weavers, put out of business by manufactured imports, is so common it is not reported in the papers any more.

We have heard that 300 languages are spoken every day in London. Around the world, every 5 years, 300 languages die out completely, never to be spoken again.

It is estimated that within a century, 90% the world's languages will be lost. Gone forever.

And what's killing them is English, all our good books and movies, that internet.

The Herald Tribune reports that 80% of all data on hard disks around the world is stored in English.

For most hand-made forms of culture, the creative economy is an era of mass-extinctions.

This lost culture will never come back. We have a few short years to preserve and protect what we can of it.

We are rightly proud of our cultural diversity in Britain but we need to think about our impact on a much bigger canvas.

### **The inner frontier**

And as we have just heard from Susan Greenfield, it now looks like our clever art is changing the very nature of who we are. The frontier of this age of creativity is not only out there in distant lands, but right in here, in the middle of our heads.

### **GLOBAL CULTURE**

Don't get me wrong. I'm not being a prophet of doom.

The paradox that we face is that this is also a great time for the arts. We are witnessing the blossoming of a truly global culture.

And the very same products of cultural industrialisation that are causing these problems can be deployed, if we choose, to solve them: digital film, audio archiving, the internet.

### **The Responsibility of the Creative Class**

Culture is being empowered in the most unexpected way. I look now out of my office in Sheffield over what once were abandoned rooves. Who could have imagined the transformation, and that the transformation would lead us to this?

Cultural players are being asked to engage in the world in a way that is not what we wanted or expected, and it is bringing huge challenges to us.

So I echo the calls made by others throughout this conference: we, the newly empowered creative class, must take responsibility for what have made, even if it is not quite what we thought we were doing.

Here at Creative Clusters we will continue to raise issues, and provide a time and a place for people who are fundamentally committed to culture to come together and work out what we should do next.

I hope you've had a good conference. Thanks to everyone who helped us. Thank you for coming.

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