

M@n@gement

ISSN: 1286-4692

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Gerald RAUNIG, Gene RAY & Ulf WUGGENIG
(Eds.) 2011

Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and
Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'

M@n@gement, 15(2), 239-244.

M@n@gement est la revue officielle de l'AIMS



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Book review

Gerald RAUNIG, Gene RAY,
& Ulf WUGGENIG (2011)
*Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and
Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*.
London: Mayfly Books.

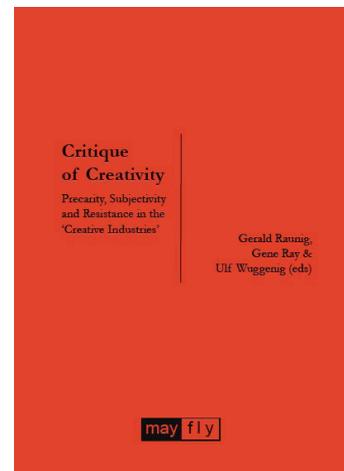
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Hardcover : 216 pages
Publisher : Mayfly Books
(Published May 1, 2011)
Language: English
ISBN13: 978-1906948139
ISBN (PDF): 978-1906948146
ISBN10: 1906948139
In print or free online from www.mayfly-books.org

Since the rise of the knowledge economy, creativity has come to take on a curious double status, both exclusive and mundane. On the exclusive side, the “creatives” have almost rhetorically displaced the entrepreneur of the 80s and 90s as the messianic hope for the economy, especially in the emergent forms of post-crash economy. The creative industries have embraced cultural entrepreneurs in this rebirth (or is it rebranding?), and artists, inventors, digital bohemians and originators of all persuasions have acquired a special and almost magical status that is remote from the somewhat perilous and short-term everyday realities of most work in those industries. At the same time, we are urged to recognize and release the creative impulse in all of us – creativity everywhere – as we all contribute to realizing the dream, or staving off its terrible alternative.

There has been far too little critical appraisal of the creative rhetoric in scholarly form, but the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (www.eipcp.net) has provided a much-needed forum to encourage such debate. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray & Ulf Wuggenig have produced in *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'* an edited volume that seeks to give some shape to the emerging critique. Organization studies scholars that enjoy some familiarity with the edges of critical theory and cultural studies may recognize the star names of Maurizio Lazzarato (from his work on immaterial labour), Angela McRobbie (from her work on gender) or the Italian philosopher of work Paolo Virno (from his work on multitudes), but most of the contributors would not be instantly recognizable to a management audience, or even a management-theory audience. The more's the pity, because some parts of this book are elegantly written and introduce core critical concepts such as precarity with engaging verve.

After a brief but punchy introduction, the book settles into four sections: Creativity, Precarization, Creative Industries, and the Culture Industry. The first section introduces the new discourse of creativity, led off by Stefan Nowotny's incisive genealogy of critique as “cre-activity”, which utilizes the work of Russian literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin to detheologize the mythically individualist quality of creativity to expose its essential sociality. Brazilian psychoanalyst and art theorist Suely Rolnik follows with a Deleuzian look at the incorporation and commodification of post-1968 resistance and creativity by cognitive capitalism



("pimping"), but also considers the more transformative movements of exodus that came out of 1968. Not all rebels transitioned from the beach beneath the pavement to the penthouse. Maurizio Lazzarato responds with a close look at the related idea of the "artistic critique" of capitalism, associated with the work of Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello on *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Lazzarato demonstrates witheringly and with unerring accuracy the flaws in the assessments of both Boltanski and Chiapello and their adversaries, offering some alternatives. Whilst Boltanski and Chiapello have themselves emerged as objects of aesthetic contemplation as much as models for political action, the even more iconic figure of the art dealer emerged around the turn of the century as a heroic mediator – despite the subsequent exposures of Duchamp and Warhol – functioning as both prophet and midwife, and preparing the ground for and ushering in modernist avant-garde art. Ulf Wuggenig demonstrates through a critique of the history of 19th-century art that this mythical figure is yet another idol to topple, but in the process, and more importantly, he adds significantly to the destabilization of much of the contemporary discourse on innovation and creativity (see also Townley & Beech, 2011).

The second section looks at the often invisible twin of the "flexibility" that predominates in contemporary capitalist discourse on the creative new economies, taking as its theme one practical consequence of this passionate embrace of "flexibility". Where the creativity discourse sees freedom and exciting portfolio lives, critique surfaces unstable, precarious existences plagued by doubt, exploitation and inconsistency. Isabell Lorey notes the self-precarization of cultural producers, and discusses the emergence of the "dependent precariat" that gives away its own autonomy in the context of biopolitical governmentality. Although these conditions and the terminologies used to refer to them appear newly-minted, Spinoza is unveiled by Brigitta Kuster and Vassilis Tsianos as the thinker who anticipates precarity; these authors use Virno's phenomenology of fear and anxiety to analyze M. Night Shyamalan's film *The Village*. The film's plot explores different modalities of fear and anguish: the possibilities of being a political subject ruled by fear, but also that of living within such fearfulness yet having confronted that fear, able to resist by deploying the knowing and destroying grin of precarity.

Paolo Virno is clearly a formative and inspirational influence on the common conceptual background of many of the contributors to this volume. His work on the ambivalence of the multitude, the contradictions of the culture industry and the possibilities of virtuosity are precedents for his concluding contribution to this section, on "Wit and Innovation". Virno contends that wit is a circumscribed language game that exposes the tendentious circularity of all rule-based language games by demonstrating that there are always multiple ways to apply rules, thus opening them up to change. It is, as he inventively puts it, the "diagram" of innovation, establishing the grounding principle of innovation within a linguistic paradox.

The book's third section, "Creativity Industries", offers a turn to practice with detailed studies of the creative industries as they are actually developing in four different fields. Monika Mokre attempts to trace some themes from within the confusion of Austrian cultural politics in the face of the emerging new cultural-political subject, which has produced what she calls *GovernCreativity*. She investigates the exemplary failure of 'Quartier 21', which was intended to be the

flagship advertisement for the Creative Industries in Vienna. Whilst concluding that it is important to show the ways in which the hype of the creative industries is embedded in a certain (neoliberal) political and economic paradigm and assess the consequences which this hype has for the cultural field as well as for society as a whole, it is also important to find new ways of politically engaging the considerable number of people who work in and want to work in these industries. Exploring this area further, the self-organized design and multi-media sector of Zurich is the subject of Marion von Osten's analysis of a series of concrete and heterogeneous developments in cultural labor, leading to the surprising hypothesis that the much-vaunted Creative Industries are yet to come: despite the number of policy makers willing to attest to their burgeoning existence, they in fact have yet to appear and for now remain mythological.

Angela McRobbie, a gender theorist who has researched the creative industries in the UK for over a decade, offers an account of the "Los Angelesation" of London since the 1990s. She identifies three successive "short waves" that have transformed the micro-economies in which young women bring their creative work to market, painting a bleak picture of the consequences of New Labour's policies for what Blair himself once glibly tagged "Cool Britannia". Her first wave, the late post-punk/indie era of 1985-1995, was characterized by self-generated sub-cultural entrepreneurs, a burst of creative small labels that were unsustainably undercapitalized, undermanaged and subsequently folded as they were unable to manage growth in the absence of appropriate support. The second wave was more networked, a trajectory from club to company characterized by de-specialization, hybrid job designation, the expansion of network and freelance culture in the light of big institutions' outsourcing, and the growth of network sociality provoked by the new media and internet economy replacing more traditional decline in possibilities for association and collectivity. The third wave is that of the fetishized individual's fetishized project – the Hollywood effect of the one big hit; overnight stardom from a hit record, book, or book-to-film deal. For McRobbie, this somewhat depressing scenario is typically Blairite – Blair perhaps being capable of being understood as the biggest X-Factor winner of all, turning community into audience and milking it for all it was worth. On a more muted but no less sanguine note, the consequences of the Lisbon strategy for cultural policies across the European Union offer a broader platform for Raimund Minichbauer to undertake a critical analysis of the creativity discourses they embody. Reviewing a range of the official programs and positions to have arisen since its implementation, he finds a clear and accelerating economization of cultural policy. Whilst we are unlikely to be surprised by this, it remains dispiriting.

The final section, on the "Culture Industry", focuses on the celebrated and hugely influential critical arguments of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, at which point jazz fans may wish to stop reading. But they will find little to which to object, given the way in which the subversive creativities of post-bop and modern jazz have been commodified as the essential ingredient of "improvisation" in recent exhortations of management as "jazz". Many of the contributors to this book note with some harmony that the revalorizations of the "creative industries" enact a neutralizing recoding of Horkheimer and Adorno's critical category. Here, Gene Ray innovatively but quite appropriately, to my mind, re-reads Adorno's culture-industry arguments against the alarming background of the national security-surveillance state and the planetary "war

on terror". Trenchantly arguing that theories of subjectivation must give due weight to objective tendencies of a global capitalist process, he proposes that the Lacanian notion of "enjoyment" mobilized by the culture industry entails the category of "enforcement" epitomized by state terror. The implied abandonment of *jouissance* is not welcome here, where the echoes of kitsch laughter ring hollow in the shadows. The addictive aspect of enjoyment deadens us to the corruption of enforcement. In an exploration that ultimately strikes a similar note, Esther Leslie tracks the twists and turns of the current recoding of the venerable term "culture industry", seeing it reflected in the "segue" from cultural populism to the new rhetoric of choice within the field of cultural studies. In the new cultural policies, she finds a contemporary (perhaps diluted?) form of the "aestheticization of politics" that Walter Benjamin identified as a strategy of fascism. X-Factor viewers who did not take the hint from the discussion of Blair above cannot say that they were not warned.

In conclusion, Gerald Raunig analyzes four elements of Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of the culture industry. Given that Adorno has been labeled a proto-postmodernist by Douglas Kellner, bringing poststructuralist theory to bear on the problems of precarity and subjectivation is not an unacceptable leap, and in an era in which dreamachines and smile factories are now virtual, Horkheimer and Adorno's caveats seem more prescient than negative. The first of these is that, as it totalizes its audience, "the culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers of what it endlessly promises" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 111; 2003: 148). The second point is that, like the consumers, the producers are the passive marionettes of a mass totality, the sort of ideology that has produced reality TV, a realization that came to Nathaniel West in *Day of the Locust*. Third is the sense that the producers themselves, creatives of whatever stripe, are prisoners of a giant post-ironic system, the multimedia corporation that now extends its reach over entertainment, news, internet, games, music and whatever comes next. In the end, this self-mockery of man reproduces everyone, even the resistor and the rebel, as an employee – a realization with which Michael Moore still struggles. The fourth element is the weakest, in that Horkheimer and Adorno see the culture industry as late in catching up to Fordism, and here Raunig is at his most inventive. His eight-part structure having reached part IV, he then works backwards from IV to I, drawing on post-Fordism, post-operatism and poststructuralism to deconstruct his first four parts. In conclusion, he suggests that if we were ever truly there, we have now moved from a cultural system of mass deception to a system of mass self-deception. Who could I possibly be to disagree?

This book is nowhere near as solemn as its title might suggest. It is itself creative and full of ideas, and despite the diversity of contributors and the need for translation, it is entertainingly written. It is published on a creative commons license by one of the most laudable publishing initiatives to emerge in recent years, which deserves support for making critical work of this quality freely available. But most of all, it stands emphatically on its own merits, raising a voice which we desperately need to hear.

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