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Playing to the gallery: myth, method and complexity in the creative process

Cognitive theories of creativity highlight the complexity of creative processes and suggest that artists succeed in reconciling very different, even contradictory, ways of thinking and frames of reference in their work. Yet in the presentation of creative practice, artists are often complicit in the selective misrepresentation of their own work by markets and institutions. These selective misreadings of the creative process disconnect the creative act and the creative person from the contexts which give them meaning and value, resulting in a simplified, individualised portrait of the artist's work.

The chapter begins by reconsidering Raymond Williams' concept of culture as 'structure of feeling'. In the shift from 'cultural' to 'creative' industries, we are in danger of overlooking the important interaction between individual talent and collective cultural values highlighted by Williams. This shift will be considered in relation to the political rhetoric of the 'creative industries', the commercial imperatives of branding individual artists, and the self-doubt and evasiveness of individual artists. Finally the chapter will consider how partial representations of artistic creativity influence our perceptions of innovation, and how 'myths' of creativity distort our understanding of cultural change.

The culture of creativity

Theories of creativity emphasise the complexity and multiplicity of the creative process. In particular cognitive approaches to creativity have debunked what Robert Weisberg calls 'the myth of genius' – the belief that creativity is associated with a special type of thinking or a special type of person (Weisberg 1993). Instead Weisberg argues that creative thinking draws upon several different types of thinking, including such rational elements as domain-specific expertise, memory and logic. Other commentators

have presented similar arguments on the psychology of the creative process, challenging the assumption that artistic creativity is the result of spontaneous invention or sub-conscious mental processes resulting in a flash of inspiration (Boden 1994). Rather creative thinking involves multiple thinking styles, and the creative individual's achievement reflects an ability to connect together different thinking styles (Gardner 1994), frames of reference (Koestler 1976) and contradictory ideas (Barron 1968).

Theories of creativity based on multiple thinking styles and complex processes lead to a hypothesis that creativity might be better understood as a collective, team-based process rather than as individual inspiration (Bilton 2007, 46 - 49). This appears especially probable of the so-called 'creative industries'. With the increasingly specialised nature of creative work and creative technologies, collaboration, partnership and networking provide a necessary counterpoint to individual talent. From a sociological perspective, the critique of individual genius is reflected in an attempt to map out the social and cultural context within which art is made (Wolff 1993; Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1993). Individual creativity is embedded in the social relationships of the 'art world'. This in turn leads towards a 'systems' view of creativity in which individual creativity depends upon networks of relationships with other individuals and institutions within a 'field' or 'domain' (Csikszentmihalyi 1988). Creative individuals work within technical constraints, social and cultural contexts and a collective network of relationships, assumptions and values. These networks may also provide access to the mental and material resources necessary for creative work.

It would be a mistake to assume that these theories of creativity and culture negate the possibility of individual agency. Individual creativity is shaped by these factors but not determined by them. The matter was eloquently expressed in Williams' notion of 'emergent', 'dominant' and 'residual' culture in the 1970s. Drawing on the Marxist literary criticism of Georg Lukács and Lucien Goldmann, Williams identified

culture as both the product of material forces and as the aesthetic engine which acted upon human consciousness; in Marxist terms, art was removed from the determined sphere of culture and ideology and allowed into the determining sphere of productive forces. 'Determination' was taken to mean not an exact reproduction, but the exertion of pressures and the setting of limits; the rigid distinction between base and superstructure gave way to a concept of mutual interaction between different levels of experience. These concepts converged in Williams' formulation, the 'structure of feeling'. At the core of this concept was an interaction between individual creativity and the cultural context which shapes art's meaning and value.

Initially Williams defined the 'structure of feeling' as an 'organising view' of the world arrived at by 'individuals in real and collective social relations' (Williams 1971, 12). This essentially Marxist rhetoric was given a specifically cultural inflection when Williams referred to culture as 'a central system of practices, meanings and values' which 'saturate' the way we live (Williams 1973, 8-9). Williams' materialist, Marxist theory of culture was tempered by an acknowledgement of the power of art to challenge and even transform the Marxist base of social and economic conditioning. This privileging of artistic creativity and individual talent was part of a more general debate within Marxism over the limits of autonomy and determinism; Williams and other European socialists including the historian E P Thompson emphasised the human aspects of cultural and historical change against the more rigid economic approach of orthodox, Soviet Marxism.

Williams went on to argue that every culture consists of 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' cultural elements, incorporated into a complex, interlocking whole (Williams 1977, 121-127). According to this argument, one of the properties of great art is to draw out the emergent cultural elements, by revealing 'the maximum possible consciousness of the social group' (Williams 1971, 12). Williams' structure of feeling thus encompassed

both a Marxist theory of cultural determinism with limited autonomy, and an idealist theory of transcendent art and individual agency. Individual acts of genius were still 'embedded' in 'real social relations' (Williams 1977, 201-204) but were also capable of transforming that reality by revealing new ideas at the fringes of our collective experience. Artistic creativity thus becomes, according to Williams, both the barometer by which incipient cultural change can be felt and the lever by which change can be effected.

Williams' 'structure of feeling' laid the basis for contemporary cultural studies and also resonates with cognitive theories of creativity. Visual artists working within a visual culture, defined by intersecting lines of tradition, technique, technology and social circumstances, are not themselves wholly defined by these constraints. As Williams indicated, the tension between individual agency and collective culture provides us with a set of theories for understanding both cultural change and the trajectory of the individual artistic career. Cultural constraints are both a starting point and, eventually, the objective outcome of individual artistic creativity.

From the perspective of creativity theory, Margaret Boden has described individual creativity working within a 'bounded conceptual space' (Boden 1994, 75 -76). To be too far removed from the assumptions and traditions of the shared culture is to become disconnected from the conditions and questions which give the art work meaning and value. Boden argues that it is only by working within these constraints that the artist can eventually transform them. Creativity in this instance is associated not with 'thinking outside the box' but with thinking up to the edges of the box, at the limits of what is possible. Here the limits on individual agency are cognitive rather than cultural, but Boden also emphasised that novelty and value, the essential components of any definition of creativity, are relative judgements. The difference between and individual

creative act and a historically significant creative breakthrough is ultimately dependent on the cultural context in which that creative act takes place.

Taking as my starting point Raymond Williams' argument about the relationship between individual creativity and collective culture, in this chapter I will argue that the complex interaction between creativity and culture has been selectively oversimplified by policy-makers, institutions and by artists themselves. This in turn has warped our perspective on cultural change, both in relation to individual creative careers and collective cultural development.

Creativity and the creative industries

More recently the relationship between individual creativity and collective culture has been challenged on several fronts. Individual creativity has been celebrated as an end in itself, disconnected from the questions of value and meaning directed by Williams' notion of 'culture' and Boden's 'bounded conceptual space'. The new emphasis can be attributed to several sources, but became a notable feature of cultural policy towards the creative industries emerging in the late 1990s (Bilton 2000; Blythe 2001; Jeffcutt and Pratt 2002).

The UK government placed 'individual creativity, skill and talent' at the core of its concept of the creative industries (DCMS 1988). The rebranding of what were previously known as 'cultural industries' highlighted a tendency to conceive of creativity as something autonomous and individual, independent of cultural content or context. Despite widespread criticism, the UK government's definition of the creative industries, with a few minor variations, was adopted or imitated by many other countries.

One obvious implication of the shift from 'cultural' to 'creative' industries is a tendency to treat creativity as a pure commodity, accountable firstly to the market not to social and cultural value systems (Mcguigan 2005; Garnham 2005); it is notable that the

French government and UNESCO, both of which have argued that culture is a public good not a private commodity, resisted this logic by using the older definition of 'cultural industries'. In contrast, the idea of creativity as an individual trait and a transferable commodity lends itself to the idea of a creative economy (Howkins 2001). Such an economy, with its promise of limitless supply and demand, is immensely attractive to politicians seeking a viable alternative to declining manufacturing industries (Heartfield, 2001).

The emphasis on individual creativity also fits with an approach to cultural policy based on cultural production. Historically, one of the rationales for cultural policy interventions has been to correct the market against the 'cost disease' of traditional art forms. This phrase was coined by the economists Baumol and Bowen to describe the inability of performing arts organisations to increase their revenues in line with increasing costs; theatre companies cannot achieve economies of scale because the variable costs of production continue to escalate for each performance, whilst rehearsal times and audience capacities remain fixed (Baumol and Bowen 1966). Consequently cultural policy makers have come to assume that cultural production is prone to market failure and needs to be subsidised. Yet for the creative industries, the economic arguments are reversed; whilst initial (prototype) production in many cases continues to be very expensive, reproduction costs are often close to zero. Consequently once a product is successful in the market it is possible to continue to earn revenues with very few marginal costs. This accounts for the 'hits and misses' strategy of the major cultural distributors, with a handful of hits earning exponentially and subsidising a high proportion of failures. Accordingly the key intervention point for policy in the creative industries is not production, but distribution and infrastructure. Cultural policy makers, tied to the traditional production subsidy model, risk saturating the market with products which nobody wants and failing to connect potentially popular cultural products to appropriate

markets. The focus on individual talent instead of collective systems reinforces this tendency to invest in cultural producers instead of cultural distribution.

Of course, individual creativity is an important element in the creative industries, but it is only one small part of the value chain. Given that the creative industries suffer from an over-supply of good ideas and new talent, one could further argue that individual creativity is merely the starting point, not the fulcrum of that value chain. A cultural policy system tied to traditional approaches to cultural subsidy and dazzled by the bright lights of individual talent fails to recognise and invest in the underlying systems which allow those individual talents to flourish. These underlying systems are, of course, related to the underlying concepts of cultures and cultural values which today's policy-makers have removed from the political lexicon of the 'creative' industries.

Creativity and branding

The emphasis on individual talent in the creative industries is not confined to cultural policy. Marketers have long recognised that individual star performers are an effective means for branding complex cultural products, reassuring customers and thereby reducing the risks of consumption, and constructing predictable expectations and associations around products which are inherently unpredictable. Consequently cultural intermediaries, marketers and distributors routinely exaggerate the importance of individual talent, whether they are record labels touting the latest product of an ageing superstar or bright young thing, or a museum launching a blockbuster exhibition by a major artist.

In the art market and the art museum the star brand distracts the purchaser or viewer from the variable quality of the artist's work by exaggerating the ahistorical distinctiveness of the individual artist. Meanwhile the reliance of that work on other individuals and institutions which made up the individual artist's personal culture, and the

esoteric influence of other works by other artists, are either ignored or repackaged as a set of ancillary products, legitimised by association with other canonical great artists. This simplified version of art history is constructed around the achievements of a handful of great artists and more opportunistically around the collections of the major art museums and collections, ignoring the more complex personal histories and cultures of the artists concerned. By hanging a Picasso next to a Braques, or by placing the work of a Young British Artist opposite Marcel Duchamp's famous urinal 'Fountain (1917)', is the art museum telling us something important about the history and culture of the artists concerned or resorting to some skilful affinity branding?

This question highlights the tension between two different sets of relationships which make up the individual artist's art world. At the point of creation, artistic work is embedded in networks of cultural production as outlined in Williams' 'structure of feeling' or Csikszentmihalyi's systems theory of creativity. These 'horizontal' networks and relationships may be highly personal and esoteric, based on shared ideals, tastes and value judgements. The relationships may be real, between friends and fellow-artists, or imaginary, between a self-created set of traditions or artists, past or present. At the same time the pragmatic process of making the work and the commercial process of disseminating and selling it depends upon another set of 'vertical' relationships which provides access to resources, markets and money. These 'vertical' relationships flow through institutions, markets and intermediaries, amounting to a commercial system or culture which is often at odds with the 'horizontal' culture of peer approval, collaboration and personal tastes.

In the case of visual artists, the 'horizontal' network of the artist might include friends, fellow-artists, artistic 'schools' or movements, relationships with other art forms or other cultural traditions. The 'vertical' network would include galleries, dealers, critics, museums, auction houses and collectors. If the artist is lucky, these systems might be

aligned or even overlap with each other (critics and collectors might be numbered among the artist's friends and colleagues for example). More often, there are likely to be contradictions between the creative and commercial cultures and the judgements and requirements of the different networks will force the artist to compromise or play contradictory roles. As already noted, the ability to play multiple roles and to move between different perceptions and self-perceptions is one of the hallmarks of creative people and processes.

The branding of art and artists around individual talents and an institutional history of art constructed around them distorts the networks and relationships which comprise the art world. A simplified, consistent portrait of the artist is constructed to appeal to the 'vertical' network of money and markets, painting over the more complex relationships and identities necessary to the artist's work. Artists have themselves frequently been complicit in this branding of their work by deliberately playing a recognisable role. Salvador Dali was by no means the first artist to perfect such a persona, but his distinctive achievement was to graft the nineteenth century figure of the Romantic genius onto the twentieth century cult of celebrity. Picasso likewise recognised his personal reputation as a key business asset, obscuring his debts to other artists and cultures, notably African art. More recently prominent artist-celebrities, from Warhol to Damien Hirst have astutely traded off their personal notoriety to invest meaning and value back into their work. While some commentators have, like George Orwell (1968), found such commercial astuteness reprehensible, this seems more a case of artists learning to play the commercial game; if the artist does not turn him or herself into a brand, some other institution will do it instead. Brands reassure customers, inviting the assumption that quality and standards will be consistent. Such predictability is hardly true of real creative processes, but may be commercially necessary in order to construct a viable artistic career.

Techniques and technologies have accelerated this self-mythologising of the individual artist-brand. Whereas a traditional painter is required to master various technical skills and to work within the material limits of the medium such as pigments, canvas and colour, twenty-first century conceptual art is under no such constraints. It is possible for an artist to use commercial reproduction techniques (Warhol), or to hire technicians to undertake the material production of the work (Hirst). Consequently the only thing distinguishing the artist's work from the banality of mass production or the anonymous technician is the artist's name. For some, this questioning of the relationship between art and commerce is precisely what their art seeks to question. Yet at the same time, the effect is to focus attention on the artist's name and reputation; these are Warhol's soup cans and Damien Hirst's dots, accept no substitutes. Artists have been playing to the gallery for centuries, and Renaissance artists knew how to dazzle their patrons by performing the genius role. But today's artists are able to do so all the more effectively, by disconnecting their art from the material limitations of technique and training and focusing attention on the name and reputation of the artist, not the material substance of the work. In our own age of mechanical reproduction, the aura of the artist has replaced the aura of the work of art.

The construction of an individual artist-brand is not only driven by commercial considerations. Artistic careers are notoriously precarious, and an underlying self-confidence and self-belief is a necessary protection against rejection, failure and self-doubt. In the absence of any clear signifying system for status and recognition, playing a role which conforms to expectations and perceptions, even self-perceptions, provides a legitimising framework.

One of the effects of the branding of art around individual personalities is to obscure the connection with an underlying visual culture. The artist is brought into the media spotlight, while the art world recedes into the background. The image of art and

artists thus represented is incomplete, but it is comprehensible and presents a clear proposition to the customer. It allows minor works of art to be accorded an additional aesthetic importance and commercial value, provided they can be associated with the artist's overall brand. The role of the genius has personal and social benefits too, allowing certain exemptions from the normal rules of behaviour (Orwell, 1968). Many of today's artists, for example Tracey Emin or Sam Taylor-Wood, have learned how to play with the idea of individual exceptionalism, contriving to both subvert and parody the myth of individual genius whilst at the same time exploiting it for their own economic and personal benefit. Perhaps the wittiest take on the mythology of genius was by the Venezuelan born New York artist, René, whose work simply declared 'I am the best artist', painted in graffiti-style murals in downtown Manhattan through the 1970s and 1980s¹.

To some extent then, it is in the interest of both the artist and of the institutions and agencies involved in the business of art to present to the world a simplified version of creative work and of the processes which lie behind it. As noted, this is especially true in a commercial system where complex products must be translated into consistent and easily comprehended brands. But it applies also to public institutions which are using similar strategies in order to appeal to the expectations of visitors and critics and to legitimise their own status and expertise. Museums and galleries have their own narratives of art history and their own expectations of discipline, training and technique, to which the artist is expected to comply (even if the expected behaviours are self-consciously and predictably 'unconventional'). Artists in turn are encouraged to present their work as part of a narrative which plays to the gallery of popular and critical taste.

Creativity and self-denial

Aside from the obvious commercial advantages of branding artists as exceptional individual talents, we might also consider some other more personal reasons why artists might misrepresent or oversimplify their work. First-hand accounts of creativity are notoriously unreliable, tending to emphasise the sudden flashes of inspiration or dream like rapture of creative flow rather than dwelling on the laborious processes which precede and follow these rare moments. One explanation for this selective memory of the creative process, apart from the already noted advantages of building up a mystique and a marketable persona, is simply that artists want to tell an interesting story. Who is really interested in the tedious grind of the artist's everyday work? It is also possible that artists share this lack of interest and therefore simply underestimate or forget about the deliberate and purposeful steps which lead up to the moments of breakthrough (Ghiselin 1958).

Theories of creativity and the realities of creative practice require artists to switch between different roles and ways of thinking. Yet rather than present this complexity to public view, artists choose to edit out some parts of the creative process and present a simplified version of their practice. There are many possible explanations for this. For example many artists are reluctant to overanalyse creative processes for fear that self-consciousness will inhibit the creative flow; several writers, artists and musicians have cited this reluctance when invited to discuss their working methods with my own students. For others, the mythologies around creative genius are part of their subject matter; by playing with partial and stereotypical versions of their own persona, artists may deliberately challenge our perceptions of the meaning and value of art, as with the examples of Emin or René noted above. They are also perhaps playing with their own self-perceptions and contrary views of the place of the artist in society and the relationship of art to individual talent. A third possible explanation is simple lack of confidence or reticence. By playing down certain parts of the creative process or hiding

behind a persona, artists are concealing their own self-doubt. The 'genius' figure is both a subject of self-deprecation and self-aggrandisement. On the one hand, the genius mythology perpetuates the illusion that artistic creativity is effortless and natural, rather than the product of hard work; on the other hand the genius is a marketable fiction which allows the artist to work undisturbed behind a hard shell of outward self-confidence.

It may be that these evasions and half-truths about the creative process are themselves part of the creative character. Several commentators have argued that the creative process is a composite of multiple thinking styles, beginning with Henri Poincaré's nineteenth prescription of 'preparation, incubation, illumination, verification' through to Edward De Bono's twentieth century distinction between lateral and vertical thinking or Howard Gardner's 'multiple intelligences'. According to these arguments, the creative individual is not simply in possession of some perfect combination of talents; indeed many of the 'trait-based' definitions of creativity collapse under the weight of their expectations, with a list of attributes too numerous and diverse to be plausibly embodied by any one individual. The failed attempt to find the perfect recipe for a creative person has given way to cognitive approaches which look at the way in which these ingredients are connected together in a creative process. Here the key cognitive skills seems to be an ability to make connections – between different types of thinking, different perceptions and realities, even between different types of people. Seen from this perspective, the artist is a cultural chameleon, switching lightly between different parts of the brain and different aspects of experience, and at the same time making external connections between different parts of the art world. Neuroscientific research highlights how different parts of the brain are stimulated during the creative process; what the encephalograms seem to reveal are an ability to make connections between different areas of the brain, rather than the importance of one part of the brain (left brain vs. right

brain) over another. Playing roles and playing with expectations thus becomes an analogy for the creative process.

The incomplete narratives of the creative process can be seen as an extension of this chameleon quality. Artists play multiple roles in the process of making their work. The role of genius is one of several available identities; equally artists may adopt a self-consciously anti-romantic, iconoclastic position, deliberately distancing themselves from their peers in the art world. The artist's identity and self-perception is often defined through opposition and resistance – even if the assumed role involves a degree of self-deprecation or self-denial, or an apparently dismissive attitude to fellow artists. An element of self-dramatisation, even self-parody, indicates the extent to which these roles take on a vitality of their own, at least temporarily. In the way they choose to define themselves and their work, artists dramatise these different roles. Accordingly we should not expect stories told of art by artists to provide a consistent, comprehensive representation, only fragments out of which we might construct the underlying pattern.

Organisational researchers use storytelling as a methodology to explore the underlying culture of organisations by examining surface artefacts, behaviour and individual perspectives (Gabriel 2004; Turner 1992). The task of the organisational researcher is to mediate between 'official discourse' and 'subversive voices' and 'ascertain the dialogue across these fragmented discourses' (Boje 1995). Through this method, the researcher can make sense of an underlying pattern, even if that pattern is perceived differently by different members of the organisation. Similarly, artists spin multiple narratives of the creative process, both inside their work and outside it. Simplifications and stereotypes are not the whole story, only fragments of a more complex whole.

So far in this chapter I have argued that artistic creativity is a multidimensional process which requires an ability to link together different, often contradictory, thinking

styles and frames of reference. This complexity is magnified by the technical and material aspects of cultural production, which require the individual artist to connect with various networks and systems which provide access to the resources, contacts and materials necessary for creative work. Yet at the same time I have argued that the complexity of the creative process and the cultural connections which lie behind the individual artist or art work tend to be obscured by an emphasis on the individual creative genius. I have argued that the rhetoric of the 'creative industries', the pragmatics of the market and the complicity of the artists themselves have all contributed to this mythology of individual talent. In the remainder of the chapter I want to consider the impact this selective oversimplification of creative processes and creative individuals can have on our understanding of individual and cultural change.

Creativity and cultural change

I began this chapter by referring to Raymond Williams' model of culture comprising dominant, residual and emergent elements. Williams' theory of culture encompasses a process of continual cultural change. The different elements form an interlocking whole, even if the mix conceals implicit tensions and contradictions. Over time the emergent elements will gradually bubble to the surface and the dominant culture will sink into the background, visible only as a residual remnant. What appears from the surface to be a rapid transition from one set of values and assumptions to the next may on closer examination be revealed as a gradual emergence or re-emergence of suppressed elements.

Williams' explanation of cultural change is closely modelled on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. 'Hegemony' describes the dominant culture, but Gramsci also emphasised that what appears to be stable and dominant is in reality an 'unstable equilibrium'², founded on underlying 'incurable structural contradictions'. Eventually

these contradictions build to a crisis, 'sometimes lasting for decades' (Gramsci 1971, 177-178). During the ensuing period of crisis, competing factions attempt to construct a new consensus, based around their own interests. Although the consequent realignment may result in a new hegemony, it is premature to assume that the situation is resolved. The basic elements may have been rearranged, different views representing different factions may predominate, but the inherent contradictions and conflicts will remain suspended in solution ready to re-emerge in the future. The contradictions are 'resolved to a relative degree', only to recur through a series of 'convulsions at ever longer intervals' (Gramsci 1971, 180). Furthermore the different stages in this process overlap, so that 'hegemony' is continually being undermined and renewed. Every hegemony thus contains the seeds of its own destruction in the form of 'counter-hegemonic' tendencies. The role of the intellectual, according to Gramsci, is to identify and nurture these counter-hegemonic tendencies.

Gramsci's theory was based on a Marxist view of history as the product of a fundamental, 'organic' conflict between the classes under capitalism. The underlying contradictions of the capitalist order are incurable because they are rooted 'organically' in the fundamental (economic) organisation of society. Williams reapplied Gramsci's political and economic theories to describe cultural change, capturing the slow unfolding of contradictions, with a continual deconstruction and reassembling of disparate elements into new formations. This model of cultural change does not deny the possibility of individual innovation, but connects the avant-garde back into a changing pattern of competing cultural elements, rather than positioning it as something alien or opposed to mainstream culture.

Against these incremental and cyclical patterns of change stands a 'heroic' model of revolutionary change led by a handful of pioneering individuals. According to this model, cultural change is the result of individual artistic innovation. This narrative of

individual breakthrough thinking and clean historical breaks from one artistic school or period to the next dovetails neatly with the institutional imperatives of the art museum. The heroic version of art history plays to the strengths of the major collections, premised on a canonical history of great art and great artists which museums and galleries have in turn helped to legitimise.

As we broaden the historical canvas to take in the contradictory cross currents and sub-cultures identified by Williams and Gramsci, this heroic model of cultural change appears partial and self-serving. Yet it remains persuasive precisely because it chimes in with the imperatives of the market, the art institution and even the self-identification of the artist, as described in the previous section. So the gradual and holistic shifts of cultural change are reinterpreted as radical breaks with tradition led by individual discoveries. As with the individual artistic career, a simplified narrative of a complex process becomes a form of branding or marketing rather than a true account of collective and individual change.

A similar narrative is superimposed on the individual artistic career, charting a progressive narrative through moments of discovery and consolidation, when in reality the story of an artist's work may be more circular and repetitive. Works frequently reconfigure elements of previous works, revolving around a familiar set of problems and concerns. The idea that artists progress logically towards a distillation of their essential vision in their final works seems counter-intuitive. Why should we assume that artistic development follows a trajectory of growth and progress? Again these narratives of orderly progress fit with the imperatives of the art market and the art museum, as well as with the individual artist's partial account of the creative process. And again the emphasis on individual, discontinuous change disconnects the individual artistic career from the richer more complex patterns of cultural contradiction and unstable equilibria identified by Gramsci and Williams.

The choice between heroic and hegemonic accounts of cultural change will doubtless vary depending on the subject matter and the personal opinion of the narrator. However, the current emphasis on individual creativity at the expense of collective culture underestimates the cultural continuities which lie behind individual artistic innovation. At the same time, by overestimating the power of individuals to transform their own lives and those around them, the heroic model presents a linear, progressive view of cultural change, whether this is applied to the development of cultural traditions and art forms, or to the course of an individual artist's career. Artistic development is not best understood as a succession of breakthroughs. However exciting these visible transformations might be, they are framed by a more complex underlying dialectic in which different cultural influences and ways of seeing interact and eventually fall into a new pattern. Similarly the visible peaks of cultural achievement arise out of underlying tectonic shifts between different traditions and value systems, converging and pushing up the great artists and great works of art which are eventually commemorated by history.

The implications of this overemphasis on the individual are especially important when we consider the role of cultural policy in supporting the creative industries. I have already noted the tendency for cultural policy makers to focus on individual producers rather than collective systems of distribution. With the emergence of the creative industries and the accompanying policy rhetoric, there is an assumption that art and culture ultimately depend upon individual talent. In these circumstances, there seems relatively little that cultural policy can do to intervene – talent is, according to the rhetoric, innate and the truly talented will eventually rise to the top, eagerly promoted by a hungry market. At best, cultural policy becomes a matter of talent-spotting. The logic of an individualistic, talent-oriented view of cultural development is ultimately towards a laissez-faire, non-interventionist cultural policy. The rhetoric of individual creativity, skill

and talent in the UK definition of the creative industries is perfectly aligned with a cultural policy of neo-liberalism. Yet talent alone is not enough; the creative industries depend upon distribution as much as production, and a vibrant culture depends upon a collective capacity to absorb and disseminate new ideas as well as an individual capacity to generate them. Without investing in the infrastructure which provides a framework for these ideas and talents to develop, individual artists will either fail to achieve their potential or will be devoured by a global market which disconnects them still further from the cultural values which nourish them. Investing in collective culture is more complex and less spectacular than investing in individual creativity, but is ultimately necessary if we seek a sustainable creative culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the rhetoric of the creative industries and the commercial logic of the market has encouraged us to see artists as creative individuals rather than as part of a collective culture. Artists too have been complicit in describing creativity solely or primarily in terms of sudden and inexplicable moments of inspiration and individual achievement.

Arching over these identity games is a postmodern scepticism towards value judgements in general and cultural values in particular. The older generation of art critics, from Greenberg to Hughes, are no longer available to make their magisterial pronouncements on aesthetic value, and their successors no longer to be trusted. Cut loose from any plausible consensus on the meaning and value of their work or their value, artists are freed to play with contrary roles and identities, questioning our perceptions as well as their own. One product of this continual questioning of the status and meaning of art has been a greater curatorial reliance on individual artists. Identifying the iconic brand value of an individual artist has become easier than defining

the aesthetic value of a work of art. Of course celebrity artists have been with us since the Renaissance, but the new generation are more self-conscious in their attempts to project and protect their branded identities. This individualistic culture is supported by an art market which finds it easier to place a value on an artist's name than on the specific aesthetic qualities of their work.

The emphasis on individual creativity has contributed towards a heroic theory of cultural change and individual artistic development which neglects the underlying cultural values and cultural infrastructure which allow individual talents to thrive, aesthetically and (in the long run) commercially. This is particularly worrying from the perspective of cultural policy, where a belief in individual creativity segues neatly into a rather complacent non-interventionism. As neo-liberal values are applied across the public sector, laissez-faire cultural policies are increasingly plausible; at the same time the loss of confidence in aesthetic value judgements pushes cultural policy makers towards more instrumental approaches where economic and social outcomes outweigh intrinsic aesthetic qualities.

The solution may be to reaffirm the cultural content and context of the creative industries beginning with a recognition of the complexity and multiplicity of the creative process. Whether this is something likely to gain currency among policy makers, dealers, galleries or even among artists themselves remains an open question. By examining the relationship between creativity and culture we can begin to address some of these policy challenges.

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¹ René went by the name of René IABTA ('I Am The Best Artist'). His murals were painted with permission of the buildings' owners in prominent locations in SoHo, the centre of Manhattan's downtown gallery scene. His work was a deliberate comment on the complacency and cultishness of the art establishment at the time. Sadly, many of the murals have now been destroyed over time.

² 'The life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridicial plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups - equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point...' (Gramsci 1971), 182)