

The English Model of Creativity: Cultural Politics of an Idea

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to offer a social and political analysis of the New Labour government's creativity rhetorics in policy terms, which will specifically draw on the education aspect within the field of cultural policy. A particular theme of the paper will be to examine how the idea of creativity in policy discussions has been politically conceptualised by reflecting larger socio-political and economic agendas, problematise some underlying assumptions embedded in the New Labour's social-market construction of the creativity concept and discuss some distinctive characteristics of the recent creativity discourse in the British context.

Keywords

Creativity, British Cultural Policy, Social-market Governance, Arts Education, Convergence of Social and Cultural policies

Introduction

During the first ten years of the New Labour government (1997-2007) creativity has become one of the most ubiquitous policy terms not only within cultural policy discussions but also in the overall spectrum of public policies including education and economy. New hybrid policy terms such as 'creative industries', 'creative education' and 'creative economy' are frequently used and widely accepted whereas there is no unifying definition of 'creativity' offered throughout government's policy documents. For instance, the Cox Review published by the Department of Trade and Industries states that 'creativity is a key to future business success and national economy' (Cox 2005: 3) whereas the former Prime Minister Tony Blair declares that 'the arts and creativity sets us free' (DCMS 2001: 3). Chris Smith, the former cultural secretary advocates 'creativity is about adding the deepest value to human life' (Smith 1998: 1) and it can 'bring about social cohesion and regeneration' as well as economic prosperity (Ibid. 135, 146). Whilst the idea of creativity manifests fluid elasticity in terms of its flexible applications for different purposes in diverse policy contexts, it is also observed that creativity tends to be accepted in most cases as an autonomously positive concept that invites little critical interrogations within policy discussions.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that the field of cultural production cannot be understood in isolation from the 'structural relations' that shape the field and determine both what is valued and what is distributed (Bourdieu 1993). If the creativity concept has characterised the field of British cultural policy as a dominant theme for the past 10 years, it is then necessary to analyse the emergence and development of the idea in relation to the broader social and political context. Borrowing, Bourdieu's heuristic tool of relational analysis between the fields of cultural production and power, the paper starts from the premise that the current use of creativity in cultural policy discussions is not an autonomous notion, but a heteronomous concept which has been constructed and reconstructed in relation to the complex dynamics of economic, political and historical conditions.

The paper is structured in three parts. The first section of the paper will argue that the recent policy rhetorics of creativity closely mirror the dialogic dynamics of New Labour's social-market paradigm underpinning the recent formations of cultural policies. It will show how the social-market construction of creativity rhetorics operates as a crucial mediating factor that not only rationalises the convergence of cultural and social objectives but also reinforces the transformative belief in a positive, desirable notion of creativity. With specific reference to New Labour's flagship creative education programme *Creative Partnerships*, the second section will explore to what extent the innate tensions of the government's creativity rhetorics between 'pro-social' and 'pro-market' positions are reflected in the programme and show how the contemporary rhetorics of creativity have evolved into policy discourses that tend to disassociate the arts from the idea of creativity. In the final section, the paper will problematise and analyse the underlying assumptions of 'democratic' and 'weightless' notions of creativity embedded in the government's policy rhetorics and discuss some distinctive characteristics of the English model of creativity.

New Labour's Social-Market Governance and the Emergence of Creativity Rhetorics in the Field of Cultural Policy

New Labour's blueprint of cultural policy became conceptualised even before it took office in 1997. Their policy discussions in *Create the Future: a Strategy for Cultural Policy, Arts and the Creative Economy*, the first cultural policy manifesto published by New Labour, claimed that creativity is an important source of capital for modern Britain in both social and economic domains. It emphasised the potential benefits of 'creativity' in the 21st century and proposed the government's duty to foster every individual's creative potential through education (Labour Party 1997: 14). New Labour's creativity rhetorics became further materialized in *Creative Britain*, a collection of speeches by Chris Smith, the first Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport of the New Labour administration. In the introduction of the publication, Smith argued that New Labour's cultural policy is predicated on the idea of 'creativity' and stressed the government's cultural policy should be about 'the cultural ferment and imaginative heights to which creativity leads, the enormous impact that both creativity and culture have on society' and promoting 'the growing importance to the modern economy of Britain of all those activities and industries that spring from the creative impulse' (Smith 1998: 1). He specifically stressed four main goals of New Labour's cultural policy of 'access', 'excellence', 'education' and 'economy', all of which can be successfully realised through the idea of creativity (Ibid. 2).

According to Smith, 'the great thing about creativity' is that 'it lends itself to a democracy of involvement': every individual has creative potentials and is entitled to enjoy creative and cultural activities (Ibid. 144). By acknowledging that creativity is not confined within a few gifted individuals but open for everybody so that it can be nurtured for personal fulfilment, social development and economic opportunities, he refutes both the 'misleading distinction' between high and low art and the dichotomous access/excellence arguments, such as the dumbing down of quality at the expense of access rationale, that have hitherto characterised the field of British cultural policy (Ibid. 3, 145). He called this new direction of New Labour's cultural policy as 'a cultural democracy – a cultured democracy – [that] will want to embrace the best of everything'

(Ibid. 3), through which both excellence in and access to creativity can fundamentally go together (Ibid. 145).

Smith's 'democratic' notion of creativity can be explained in two strands of arguments relating to 'social' and 'economic' outcomes (Ibid. 22-27). By 'social' it relates to personal fulfilment, identity building and social cohesion whereas by 'economic' it refers to the economic benefits of Cultural and Creative Industries. Smith asserts that the social and economic purposes are 'both important, both essential' because 'the intrinsic cultural value of creativity sits side by side with and acts in synergy with the economic opportunities that are now opening up' (Ibid. 16). Regarding the education agenda in particular, the interrelation between social and economic is most explicitly advocated. Smith emphasises that 'nurturing the spark of creativity through the education system is not just about 'enabling people to fulfil their own potential' and personal development (Ibid. 133) but also about 'the equipping of society with the creative wealth-makers of tomorrow' (Ibid. 145). In other words, the idea of creativity is suggested as the policy glue that can not only consolidate these two purposes of social and market, but also rationalise the very interdependence in between them.

As Estrin and Le Grand note (1989: 1), the reconciliatory argument between 'social' and 'market' is the main tenet of the New Labour's Third Way political approach, which claims that 'social ends' can be achieved through the efficacy of 'market means'. Anthony Giddens also asserts that the 'social-market' position or 'a mixed economy', seeks a synergy effect between public and private sectors, 'utilising dynamism of markets but with the public interest in mind' and it involves 'a balance between the economic and non-economic in the life of the society' (Giddens 1998: 99-100). The reconciliatory idea between social and market embedded in the government's creativity rhetorics is an example of a consistent theme running through New Labour's cultural, social and educational policy, which is sometimes referred to as a social inclusion agenda. This theme has its origins in the findings of the Commission on Social Justice, chaired by Gordon Borrie from 1992 to 1994, which established the political principles for a post-socialist or Third Way of government which would attempt to transform the welfare state 'from a safety net in times of trouble to a springboard for economic opportunity' (Commission on Social Justice 1994: 1). The report insisted that 'an economic high road of growth and productivity must also be a social high road of opportunity and security'. In other words, they believed that 'economic and social policies are inextricably linked just like two sides of the same coin' (Ibid. 97). The Commission saw social inequalities as being rooted in 'connected issues of social, economic and political structures' (Ibid. 96). Thus, it proposed that government should become an 'investor' in people 'combining the ethics of community with the dynamics of the market economy' in order to tackle widening socio-economic inequalities and cope with the advent of the knowledge economy in the era of globalisation (Ibid. 64-77, 119-150).

According to New Labour's social-market paradigm, the government's strategy to redress social and economic inequalities is to redistribute 'opportunities' rather than 'income' because 'the extension of economic opportunity is not only the source of economic prosperity but also the basis of social justice' (Commission on Justice 1994: 95). Therefore 'investment in people is the top priority' (Ibid. 4). The government's duty is suggested to support 'self-realisation' rights of every individual, especially for the socially and economically disadvantaged, by offering opportunities to nurture their own potential to thrive in the knowledge economy defined by constantly changing economic conditions and equipping them to be competitive with new sets of skills and knowledge required in the market.

The argument for a need to foster a new creative workforce has been shared by a number of documents. Amongst those, Kimberly Seltzer and Tom Bentley's *The Creative Age*, published by New Labour's think-tank DEMOS, argues that 'creativity' is the most efficient response for coping with economic changes in the knowledge economy of the twenty first century where weightless and intangible knowledge and skills are the primary resources of productivity and competitiveness (Seltzer and Bentley 1999). They argue that in order to better cope with the 'weightlessness' of the new knowledge economy, workers need to be prepared for 'diversifying

their ranges of skills and knowledge' and more adaptable and flexible in applying 'what they know in multiple work contexts' (Ibid. 4). This is exactly what they mean by creativity: the ability of 'the application of knowledge and skills' that is a 'prerequisite for independence, self-reliance, success in the creative age' (Ibid 11). Seltzer and Bentley argue that nurturing creativity is necessary not just to 'fulfil their new job requirements' in the new economy, but also to 'organise and manage their own lives effectively' (Ibid.). And they point out that the education system needs to be transformed to create more space for young people's creativity to be nurtured so that they can learn and develop new skills demanded by the changing economy.

The establishment of the National Advisory Committee for Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) reflects the government's interest in finding ways to nurture creative workforce for the new century. The NACCCE, chaired by Ken Robinson a long time arts education advocate, was jointly commissioned by DCMS and DfEE¹ and its main task was to propose a series of suggestions for a new education vision. In their final report *All Our Futures*, the committee argued that there is 'the need for a balance in education' to cope with new social, technological and social challenges not only because the current standardised education no longer fit for coping with constantly changing economic and social environments but also it fails to offer a balanced curriculum that can encourage young people's emotional and imaginative development as well as provisional knowledge attainment (NACCCE 1999: 9). In order to realise 'a balanced curriculum' in schools, they argued that the idea of creativity should be adopted at the heart of education and the current education system should be complemented with enriched 'provision for creative and cultural education' which can be assisted through sustainable partnerships between schools and the cultural sector (Ibid. 138).

NACCCE defines creativity as 'imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value' (Ibid. 29). Although they acknowledge 'exceptional creative gifts of limited few' as in an élite definition of creativity, they embrace a both democratic and ubiquitous notion of creativity that everybody has potential to become creative and 'creative possibilities are pervasive in the concerns of every day life' (Ibid. 28). Nevertheless, whilst the committee's democratic definition of creativity aims to transcend a narrow sectoral view of the restricted association with the arts and accept cross-applicability of creativity across all domains of life, their central argument lies in the re-recognition of the importance of the arts and humanities and reinstating their reduced status within the education paradigm in order to maintain 'a culturally and creatively balanced curriculum' that 'actively promotes synergistic interaction between science and technology on the one hand and the arts and humanities on the other' (Ibid. 76).

If the NACCCE report's argument represents an 'arts-based definition of creativity' by claiming that 'practising and understanding the arts in all their forms are essential elements of creative and cultural education' (NACCCE 1999: 41), Seltzer and Bentley's argument represents 'a market-led' definition by asserting that 'the most common misconception about creativity is that it involves artistic sensibility' (Seltzer and Bentley 1999: 18). Whilst both documents agree that there is a crisis in education, which necessitates a creative turn, they take a different perspective on what is wrong and what needs doing – their rhetorical claims are different. The NACCCE report argues that 'the conventional academic curriculum' is neither designed to respond to young people's 'social, moral and spiritual' needs, nor to help them discover their 'passions and sensibilities' (NACCCE ibid. 23). In contrast, Seltzer and Bentley argue that in order to thrive in an economy defined by the innovative application of knowledge, 'learners and workers' must learn how to

¹ DCMS represents Department of Culture, Media and Sport. And DfEE represents Department of Education and Employment. DfEE changed its name to DfES (Department of Education and Skills) in 2001, which was later split into two in 2007: DCSF (Department of Children, Schools and Families) and DIUS (Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills).

apply knowledge and skills in 'meaningful contexts', and 'make an impact on the work around them' (Seltzer and Bentley *ibid.* viii)².

New Labour's cultural policy on 'creativity' has directly or indirectly been influenced by both of these positions. Depending on one's political position, the apparent inconsistency between the NACCCE report's stress on the centrality of the arts and the need for a more humanizing curriculum in order to 'nurture' creativity and the blunter insistence on a curriculum that is geared towards 'the market need for a more flexible, adaptive and self-directed work force' in *The Creative Age*, either mirror the positive and dialogic dynamics of a social-market political paradigm, or expose the inherent contradictions of this political position. However we argue that whilst these two authoritative statements may seem contradictory, the government's rhetorics of creativity represent a tension between pro-social and pro-market paradigms of governance. In the following section, we will consider, as a representative case, the policy context of the Creative Partnerships project and discuss how this tension is represented in the programme's rhetorical uses of the idea of creativity.

Creative Partnerships: the Tensions between Pro-social and Pro-market Constructions of Creativity

Creative Partnerships is a 'New Labour's flagship programme in creative education' which has been funded both by DCMS and DfES and managed through the Arts Council of England. The programme was initially established as a pilot project in 2002 in 16 of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in England. It has worked as a brokering organisation with approximately 25 schools in each area to help them establish 'sustainable partnerships' with the creative and cultural sector and 'deliver high quality cultural and creative opportunities for young people to develop their learning both across and beyond the formal curriculum' (CP 2004: 9). The number of operation areas has been expanded from 16 in 2004, to 36 in 2005 due to the government's continued commitment. The programme has received an unprecedented scale financial support totalling approximately £150 million pounds allocated from 2002 to 2008 (CP website 2006a³).

The official policy rationales behind the inception of the programme are well illustrated in New Labour's first cultural policy green paper, *Culture and Creativity: The Next 10 Years*, where the idea of 'creativity' is suggested as a central theme for New Labour's cultural policy vision in terms of enhancing people's enjoyment of life and contributing to 'the successful economy in an advanced knowledge-based economy' (DCMS 2001: 5). In this green paper, the government's democratic notion of creativity is consistently reiterated that 'everyone is creative' and has equal rights to access cultural entitlement (*ibid.* 5, 17), which serves as a key rationale to address the social inclusion agenda of expanding cultural accessibility. The paper suggests Creative Partnerships as 'a cultural pledge' to enable every child to enjoy and participate in the best of artistic and cultural activities and to ensure that young people's cultural entitlement is not held back by their social and economic backgrounds (*ibid.* 17-19). DCMS introduces Creative Partnerships as an 'arts-focused' education initiative and emphasises the transformative impacts of the arts and creativity that can be achieved through Creative Partnerships as following:

[T]he participation in arts education leads to personal enjoyment and fulfilment; richer understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which we live; development of

² It needs to be noted that regarding Seltzer and Bentley's discussions on the knowledge economy, knowledge and skills are generally referred to IT skills, science and technology and make little reference to the arts and humanities.

³ CP website (2006a). <http://www.creative-partnerships.com/aboutcp/funding> Last accessed on 14 July 2006. This section was deleted as of 14 Aug 2006 after a series of website updates and is no longer available on line. According to the website's information, out of the total budget £149 million allocated for the programme, approximately 95% (£40+70+32 million) came from DCMS as opposed to 5% (£ 2+2.5+2.5 million) from DfES.

thinking and communication skills; improved self-esteem and personal and social development; and transferable skills. So the arts and creativity can play an important part in tackling disaffection and alienation, whilst also being a powerful force for social cohesion. (Ibid. 21, section 4.4)

The establishment of Creative Partnerships was a political response to the inter-related agendas of both social and economic objectives. The programme was conceived as a way of addressing social inclusion agenda by redistributing opportunities for cultural engagement to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds on the one hand and nurturing their creativity leading to the country's economic success in the knowledge economy on the other (DCMS Ibid. 5). In this sense, Creative Partnerships represents a typical example of New Labour's joined-up policy initiative formulated by the social market principle that consolidates 'social' and 'market' agendas.

It is interesting to note that Creative Partnerships has shifted the focus of the programme and modified their creativity rhetorics over the last five years. According to the green paper, Creative Partnerships was introduced as a cultural policy scheme to enable young people to develop 'creative skills' or artistic skills employed in various forms of arts genres⁴ and enhance their 'critical appreciation' of the arts 'through regular experiences of culture in all its forms' (Ibid. 18). Indeed, Creative Partnerships began as an arts education type of resource and agency in response to the NACCCE report which emphasised the need to complement the narrow and standardised national curriculum with cultural and creative education provision. However, if we look at their recent rhetoric, their central argument for the programme has been shifted towards developing 'creative learning' and initiating 'school change' (CP 2005a: 10). In fact, Creative Partnerships has differentiated its own approach from other arts education programmes claiming that 'it moves beyond the arts education model of the past by putting creativity at the heart of learning' (CP Website 2006b⁵). It stresses its core mission of 'school change' through creative teaching and learning that can influence and transform the overall education practices (CP 2005a: 9). It argues that the programme 'engages directly with the standards agenda and with the national curriculum' (CP Website Ibid) so that it can draw transformative impacts on young people in terms of raising academic attainment's levels and providing potential career paths as well as improving their confidence and self-esteem (CP 2005b⁶).

This 'beyond the arts' rhetoric marks an interesting contrast particularly in that 70% of CP expenditure goes to the artists and cultural organisations (BOP 2006). Nonetheless, CP now understands that 'creativity is not just doing the arts' or developing 'artistic' skills; it is instead about 'creative thinking, questioning, making connections, inventing and reinventing', and 'flexing imaginative muscles' (CP 2007). It believes that 'working with creative professionals from many different art forms and disciplines helps develop creative thinking, as these processes are central to the work of such practitioners' (CP Ibid.). In other words, the arts are assumed as a context where pupils' creative thinking skills can be developed and improved.

CP's shifting focus towards a pro-market led notion of 'creative skills' is best exemplified in their emphasis on the economic contribution of 'creative learning'. CP has claimed that the efficiency of the programme to make young people equipped with creative skills which can be applicable to overall new social and economic contexts:

Creativity in all areas of work is widely regarded as a critical factor in the future economic success of the country. It is a source of competitive advantage in a knowledge economy.

⁴ The green paper explains 'creative skills' in terms of genre-based artistic skills as following: 'to dance, sing, and learn a musical instrument, act, paint, sculpt, make crafts, design, create television, radio internet content, write scripts, stage manage, choreograph, direct and produce; put on performance; exhibit their own work.' (DCMS 2001: 18)

⁵ CP website (2006b). <http://www.creative-partnerships.com/aboutcp/cpphilosophy> Last accessed on 14 July 2006. This section was deleted as of 14 Aug 2006 after a series of website updates and is no longer available on line.

⁶ Creative Partnerships (2005b). Creative Partnerships and the Creative Industries. Available at <http://www.creative-partnerships.com/creativeind.pdf>

[...] Developing creative skills in young people, which will fuel the future growth of the creative industries, lies at the heart of CP's work. We recognise the valuable creative thinking skills that underpin successful creative industry companies – skills such as thinking independently, posing unusual questions, making unexpected connections, developing a climate for innovation and taking risks. (CP 2005b)

According to a recent report *Nurturing Creativity in Young People*⁷, led by Paul Roberts and published by DCMS, the connection between creativity and its economic benefits is more explicitly advocated. The report argues for joined-up collaborations between cultural, education and business sectors to develop 'a more coherent creativity offer' for young people and nurture their creative skills from early years education to career development (Roberts 2006: 13). In this report, CP is considered as a successful model for the suggested endeavour (Ibid. 58) and the national roll-out of CP is proposed as 'a network of creative hotspots' between education and business sectors to cultivate young people's creative potentials so that it can act as a facilitating scheme to make them prosper in the creative economy (Ibid. 59).

Having reviewed the trajectory of Creative Partnership' rhetorics of creativity, it may appear that their creativity rhetoric has '*changed*' or have been distanced from the social inclusion agenda of expanding cultural accessibility. However, we argue that the recent development of CP's creativity rhetorics continues to represent the innate tensions between 'pro-social' and 'pro-market' positions within the field of cultural policy underpinned by New Labour's social market paradigm. CP's rhetorical focus on developing creative skills, such as problem solving skills and possibility thinking, is in fact closely related to New Labour's political objective of enhancing disadvantaged individual and community 'self-realisation' rights in order to overcome dependency on state support. The whole rhetorical construction of 'self-actualisation' and independence of personal agency affirms that every individual needs to be self-directed to 'personally' tackle social and economic inequalities surrounding them. According to this logic of thought, the disadvantaged are expected to acquire, through government's interventions such as CP, creative skills demanded by the new knowledge economy, which can offer them new economic opportunities to prosper and eventually redress social and economic inequalities. In this regard, the CP's creativity rhetorics still remain within the remit of the social-market political paradigm.

Increasingly, CP has embraced the pro-market emphasis within the social-market political paradigm: a position represented by Seltzer and Bentley's arguments for the necessity of developing creative adaptable skills in order to foster more successful self-actualised economic participation in the knowledge economy. And this combination of cultural and economic participation as the foundation of a new public realm is also at the heart of Charles Leadbeater's influential theory of 'personalisation', which promotes 'social innovation within society', 'self organising solutions' and 'public good emerging from within society' (Leadbeater 2004). The focus of the CP programme is centred on equipping disadvantaged young people with the adaptable and transferable skills required by the new knowledge economy, rather than advocating the need for these young people to be given opportunities to learn and appreciate the 'complex' arts. We argue that the pro-market construction of the creativity concept must be counter-balanced with a culturally sensitive ethical and arts-centred creativity that offers critical and reflexive interrogations about our creativity-preoccupied age through a social, cultural and ethical critique. If the balance, as Giddens describes 'between the economic and no-economic in the life of the society' (Giddens 1998: 99-100) is not maintained, the key plank of the reconciliatory belief between pro-social and pro-market governance underpinned by New Labour's social-market paradigm would be undermined.

⁷ Paul Roberts (2006). *Nurturing Creativity in Young People*, London: DCMS. This document is a policy proposal developed in response to the request of Minister for Creative Industries and Tourism (then James Purnell) to inform the basis of the government's future policy on creativity. See the executive summary.

Cultured democracy and the charisma of creativity

In 2002, Tessa Jowell the former Secretary of State at DCMS stressed that 'investment in the arts is not only an end itself; it is also a means of achieving our promises, our policies, and our values' (Jowell 2002⁸). In this sense the two arguments of pro-social and pro-market reflect a dual and inter-dependent concern both to invest in and give cultural recognition to marginalised and disadvantaged populations through initiatives such as CP and free access to museums and galleries; but also to focus on tackling what Tessa Jowell has called 'the poverty of aspiration' that breeds dependency on state support by encouraging individuals and communities to become more self-actualising and participatory in both cultural and economic spheres

There has been much scholarly criticism of the policy convergence between social and cultural objectives and challenges to the perceived instrumentalism of cultural policies⁹. Amongst others, Eleonora Belfiore and Munira Mirza point out that the recent cultural policy formations targeting social objectives tend to undermine the importance of the intrinsic value of the arts and marginalise artistic considerations from cultural policy thinking (Belfiore 2002; Mirza 2005, 2006). Belfiore argues that artistic considerations for the government funding criteria have been de-prioritised by various social and economic instrumental agendas and points out that culture is not treated 'an end itself' but 'a means' to an end in the recent cultural policy formations (Belfiore 2002). According to Mirza, New Labour's cultural policy is driven by the 'therapeutic state' mentality which takes an 'emotional' approach to issues of social inequalities by 'making people feel content and reconciled to their lives' through cultural provisions (Mirza 2005: 270). She warns that 'the agenda of social policy results in a culture of mediocrity' (Mirza 2006: 17).

These critical warnings are located within the historical line of a culturally conservative position that claims the autonomy of the cultural sphere from the social sphere, which fundamentally stands against the New Labour's reconciliatory position that attempts to combine social and cultural, access and excellence agendas. However, the increasing drift between pro-market and pro-social uses of 'creativity' and 'culture' is becoming formalised in the new policy distinction between 'creative learning' as exemplified by recent CP rhetoric and 'cultural learning' which is coming to mean learning in the arts. And the 'cultural learning' agenda is beginning to move away from the ideas of social cohesion and individual and community 'self-realisation' through the arts towards using cultural policy to 'share' the personal rewards of artistic engagement more widely. In this sense there is a turn towards the idea of the autonomous artistic field freed from social targets and objectives.

Tessa Jowell's monograph *The Value of Culture* published in 2004, argues for 'a change of direction' within the political debates about culture by acknowledging its own autonomous merits as well as its indirect benefits. Jonathan Neelands, Viv Freakley and Geoff Lindsay argue that her monograph reflects 'a shift of cultural policy thinking' from the idea that 'culture plays an important role in realising a social justice agenda' to the idea that culture is now 'a private and autonomous and individual resource of 'personal social capital'' (Neelands et al. 2006: 97-98). According to Jowell, 'engagement with culture can help alleviate this poverty of aspiration – but there is a huge gulf between the haves and have-nots' (Jowell 2004: 3). As Neelands et al. note, Jowell's pro-social argument acknowledges that 'access to the 'complex' arts depends upon 'a specific and class differentiated education which has not been universally available in England' (Neelands et al. 2006: 98).

We are only just beginning to emerge from an English cultural tradition of 'creativity' as a charismatic and usually artistic gift, which has tended to favour certain social and cultural groups

⁸ Tessa Jowell (2002). Speech to the Labour Party Conference. 1 October 2002. The Full text available at <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/labour2002/story/0,,802518,00.html> Last accessed on 5 Feb 2008.

⁹ See Eleonora Belfiore (2002, 2006); Munira Mirza (2005, 2006) for the discussions on confluence between cultural and social objectives in New Labour's cultural policies. See also Howard Gibson (2005); David Buckingham and Ken Jones (2001) for the discussions on confluence between educational and cultural policies.

rather than others in both cultural and economic terms. This tendency is particularly obvious in the 'Creative Genius' rhetorics of creativity identified by Banaji et al., which is associated with the Romantic tradition that 'argues for creativity as a special quality of a few individuals, either highly educated and disciplined, or inspired in some way, or both' (Banaji et al. 2006: 55). In his seminal empirical study of the social anthropology of 'taste', Bourdieu established that the social hierarchisation of the arts into 'high' and 'low', or 'complex' or 'simple' corresponds to a social hierarchy of consumers and this 'predisposes tastes to function as markers of class' and that 'culture also has its titles of nobility – awarded by the educational system (Bourdieu 1984). We argue that the differences between the 'creative genius' rhetorics and the 'democratic' and 'ubiquitous' rhetorics of creativity are the difficulties for the New Labour government in providing access to the full range of cultural and artistic activity for the many, whilst ensuring that standards of excellence for the few are maintained.

England has never enjoyed such high levels of spending on the arts and culture and much of this new money has, through initiatives such as CP or free entry policy for museums and galleries, been targeted on areas and populations experiencing various forms of disadvantage. Nevertheless, according to the MORI report of *The Impact of Free Entry to Museums* (2003: 4), the profile of a 'typical populations' of museum and gallery goers has remained relatively stable and 'traditional' despite the dramatic increase in the number of visitors to museums. An audience attendance survey *Arts in England: attendance, participation and attitudes in 2001* conducted by Arts Council of England and Resource shows that 'there was a clear association between socio-economic status and the likelihood of attendance at arts and cultural events' (ACE 2002). At the same time, it is still the case that 25% of the Arts Council England's grant-in-aid funding goes to only six major regularly funded organisations (RFOs) out of more than 1,000 beneficiaries supported (ACE 2005¹⁰).

Within the government's rhetorics of creativity, there is a pattern of ambiguity and silence around the claim, which is found in the NACCCE and the Creative Age as well as various policy documents on CP, that creativity is a generally available faculty and equally distributed in equal measure. This claim is often made in opposition to the idea that the term 'creative', particularly when it relates to artistic achievement, has been restricted and awarded to those of exceptional ability. Jowell argues that there is little point in subsidising complex cultural activities unless it is accompanied by an educational policy which provides all pupils with the education required to access the codes and histories constituting the 'complexity' of the arts which have been 'hitherto the preserve of the middle classes' (Jowell 2004: 11-15). Nevertheless, under the democratic and ubiquitous assumptions embedded in the CP's creativity rhetorics, we find little evidence that CP seeks to offer a differentiated and personalised artistic and cultural education which will challenge cultural, educational and economic inequalities. We argue that we all are creative and capable of being more so, but we also accept that being creative in an exceptional sense and being cultured in terms of possessing a socially valued artistic sensibility and education remain class differentiated marks of social and economic distinction.

The English model of creativity is distinctive in the sense that it is not tied to ideas of knowledge, domain, field, specialism or recognition of exceptional ability and achievement. By emphasising 'democratic', 'ubiquitous' and 'undifferentiated' general aspects of creativity that disassociate any particular domains or the arts from the very concept, the idea has become 'weightless' in Seltzer and Bentley's sense because it refers, more often than not, to 'adaptive and transferable skills' and dispositions and cultural features tend to be left free standing from particular contexts of human activity or thought.

Increasingly, 'creative' has become synonymous with 'effective' and 'successful' in policy discourses. 'Creative skills' are also increasingly becoming synonymous with generally 'desirable

¹⁰ Arts Council of England (2005). Arts Council Annual Review 2004/5. These organisations include National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare company, English National Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House and English National Opera.

virtues' in learners and schools – for instance, virtues such as pupils who work well with others and schools that are 'welcoming'. They are also accepted as positive virtues that are required for workers in the new economy. The key to this recent tendency to disassociate the arts from creativity lies in a confusion which is in part historical. As Banaji et al. have shown (2006), there has been an explosion of meanings of creativity in a wide range of fields and contexts in recent years beyond the arts. This has brought into question what is sometimes seen as an 'old fashioned' tendency to make the arts synonymous with creativity in much the same ways we now understand that culture means more than the arts.

The English model of creativity, generally avoids making a connection between creativity and giftedness, preferring in the official texts at least to stress that creativity is a 'ubiquitous' and 'undifferentiated' human faculty unrelated to intelligence or levels of achievement except in a very general sense. In other words, the democratic and ubiquitous notion of creativity, whilst being eminently egalitarian, actually works against the interests of highly intelligent young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by reinforcing the idea that 'social' gifts of exceptional creativity are in fact 'natural' gifts. By stressing that we all have equal access to creativity in equal measure we ignore the significant socio-cultural variables that determine access to high levels of training and achievement not just in the cultural and creative spheres but in all walks of life where personal creativity becomes a badge of distinction. Bourdieu has identified this tendency as the 'ideology of charisma'; by treating all pupils as if they were equally 'creative', we reinforce rather than diminish social injustices (Bourdieu 1991: 54).

In the education sector in particular, Banaji et al. point out that although there is a tension between 'élite' and 'democratic' approaches to the notion of creativity in education policies, inclusive practices embracing both democratic and ubiquitous notions of creativity have been gaining currency in the recent policy discussions (Banaji et al. Ibid. 13). In the policy contexts emanating from organisations such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (OCA), creativity is understood in terms of 'creative thinking and behaviour' which 'enable pupils to respond positively to opportunities, challenges and responsibilities, to manage risk and to cope with change and adversity'¹¹.

In his discussion of politics in the post-socialist social-market creative age, John Gray underlined the necessity for a critically reflexive form of creativity in order to address the task of age [which] is 'that of reconciling the human need for security with the permanent revolution of the market' (Gray 1996: 13). In this sense it is important to keep an ethically determined and humane balance between pro-social and pro-market tensions in the contemporary rhetorics of creativity. And this also implies the need to develop criticality alongside creativity in teaching and learning. It is interesting that Seltzer and Bentley's pro-market description of a future, in which the workforce needs to adapt to a 'weightless economy' in which workers become 'human capital' engaged in 'weightless work' and they must 'manage themselves in a more fluid and unstable organisational environment', never stops critically to reflect on the human consequences of this particular conception of a creative age. This uncritical acceptance of the human effects of late capitalism mirrors what Pierre Bourdieu describes as 'economic fatalism' that naturalises the progress of the market, underpinned by 'the law of the strongest' (Bourdieu 1998: 125). In these rhetorics of creativity which 'naturalise' what John Gray calls 'the permanent revolution of the market', the rhetorical strategy tends to ascribe the always positive term 'creative' to the development of the 'adaptive skills' required by the market and to make this as if a socially, morally and ethically as well as economically desirable virtue (Gray Ibid. 44).

Richard Sennett and Zygmunt Bauman illustrate the similar picture of our creative age but from the less fashionable perspective of the human cost in terms of the collapse of personal, cultural and social identities and increasingly transient and ephemeral private and social relationships. In *The Culture of New Capitalism*, Sennett describes a society in which workers become rootless,

¹¹ QCA Website(2001). Creativity: find it, promote it. See <http://www.ncaction.org.uk/creativity/whyis.htm> Last accessed on 4 Feb 2008.

shifting from task to task, place to place without any sense of a sustained life narrative, measured by their potential rather than their actual achievements; a society in which craftsmanship and experience become negative obstacles to progress; a society which has no hold on the past and a consuming appetite for an evanescent future (Sennett 2006). Sennett argues that 'the cultural ideal required in the new institutions' of the creative age 'damages many of the people who inhabit them (Ibid. 5). Indeed, these are, as Bauman describes, the conditions of 'liquid modernity' of the culture of our epoch (Bauman 2000).

The most acute and stubborn worries that haunt such a [liquid] life are the fears of being caught napping, of failing to catch up with fast-moving events, of being left behind, of overlooking 'use by' dates, of being saddled with possessions that are no longer desirable, of missing the moment that calls for a change of tack before crossing the point of no return. Liquid life is a succession of new beginnings – yet precisely for that reason it is the swift and painless endings, without which new beginnings would be unthinkable, that tend to be its most challenging moments and most upsetting headaches. Among the arts of liquid modern living and the skills needed to practise them, getting ride of things takes precedence over their acquisition. (Bauman 2005: 2).

John Hope Mason in his historical analysis of the meanings of 'creativity' warns (2003: 233-235) that it is 'a false assumption' to uncritically endorse 'creative' with 'overwhelmingly positive associations' applied to economic action; such as 'the more people are creative the better it will be', because it neglects 'the destructive aspects of our economies that tend to exacerbate inequalities and undermine social cohesion'. In this sense, there is the need for an investment in a culturally sensitive ethical concept of creativity, in which the limits of invention, innovation and creation are mediated by the touchstones of fairness, tolerance and common humanity that are, as John Gray has argued, vital in order to stem the excesses of an unfettered market (Gray Ibid. 32).

The growing tendency of the creativity rhetorics that distances the arts from the idea of creativity suggests that the balance between the pro-social and pro-market needs to be more critically maintained. The arts are vital to a critically reflexive social-market concept of creativity because the arts are the most obvious, popular and attractive way of both stimulating and nurturing creative imaginations and critical reflections about the world, which are shaped by ethical and aesthetic learning. Jeanette Winterson reminds us that 'art makes us better because it offers an alternative value system. Even the making of it is an affront to capitalism' (Winterson 2005¹²). If the pro-market construction of creativity tends to drive us to uncritically assume 'creativity' as a positive desirable value, the arts can offers us a reflexive criticality to counter-balance the excessive pre-occupation with weightless creativity. Most of all, unless this critical balance between the pro-social and pro-market constructions of creativity is maintained, it will lead to negation of its own premise of social-market governance that aims to reconcile the claims of humanity and the claims of the market.

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¹² Jeanette Winterson (2005) Do the Arts Matter? For the full quotation, see <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,6903,1478754,00.html>

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