

Department of Media and Communications public lecture

The Creative Economy: invention of a global orthodoxy

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Check against delivery

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you very much for coming along tonight and for showing just how much interest there is in this topic. And thank you to my colleagues in Media and Communications for the invitation to speak. [slide 1]

I've been increasingly struck by how difficult it is *not* to talk about the creative industries and the creative economy. And I want to argue that this has become both a conceptual and practical obstacle to thinking about culture and the complexity of cultural work.

For the past couple of decades, we've been building a framework of ideas and supporting institutions that have led us to a dominant, orthodox take on the value of culture as primarily economic.

Is that surprising, when we routinely see headline claims such as this? [slide 2]

The UK Government's *Creative industries economic estimates 2015* say that one in 12 UK jobs is in the creative economy. The creative industries are said to account for 5 percent of the UK economy's turnover.

Such statements depend on questionable calculations. [slide 3] At a fascinating panel discussion at the European Policy for Intellectual Property Conference in September, leading experts debated the complex nature of the right categories for defining cultural or creative occupations, and industries. They also discussed the challenges of establishing robust national measures and the even greater difficulty of international comparability.

No doubt, sound measurement is possible. At present, however, it is mantras of certainty that prevail in the public discourse, when really caveats ought to be issued. Measurement has also become the measure of all things, which I think is a problem. There is nothing wrong with calculation, of course. It is how it is being used.

The focus on headline figures has been central to ensuring that it is the economic value of culture that prevails in public discussion with government. Moreover, the measurement of public value tends to ape the processes used in establishing market value in what Michael Power has called the audit society.

Other voices are sometimes raised. [slide 4]

In the John Peel Lecture last September, the musician Brian Eno questioned the very idea of the creative industries and queried whether the arts should be considered to be an economic entity. Eno argued for a view of art as 'everything you *don't* have to do'. In a neat term, he talked about the 'scenius' – valuing the capabilities of a whole community, as opposed to the singular talent of the genius. He also commended the importance of major institutions that in his view, and life experience, have sustained the wider society, instancing the BBC, educational scholarships, and the dole – which kept him going as he was establishing himself as an artist. And which was hugely important to others.

This sort of thinking is not in the present mainstream. Behind the headline claims about what our culture is *worth* to the national or global economy, the idea of the creative industries and the economization of culture have become increasingly embedded and naturalized. [slide 5]

The evidence is before our eyes. There are creative industries conferences galore, and not a month passes without my receiving an invitation to at least several. On a recent quick search, I found no less than 30 universities around the UK – my own included - offering undergraduate and Masters courses in the creative and/or cultural industries or the creative economy. Our Research Councils have invested heavily in research into the creative and digital economies, defining the agenda – a point I'll return to. Part of my own work is in a centre focused on the creative economy, business models and copyright. It's called ... what else? CREATe.

Now that I've fessed up, let me point to a much more significant example of how the embedding of ideas takes place. The future of the BBC is greatly in contention now – rightly a matter of international interest. It's still the UK's premier mainstream cultural and journalistic body and, of course, a brand of huge importance in the serious global game of exercising 'soft power'.

In the UK, we're in the midst of a process known as the Charter Review. It's supposed to be an evidence-taking time, a period of reflection that occurs every ten years to revisit the BBC's purposes, scope and scale, and to result in a new deal for the British public. This time around – no secret – the Review has been striking for the crude backdoor deals made over its future funding between the corporation's leadership and the UK government. There's been a deeply questionable undermining of due process.

But that's another story. For tonight's purposes I'd just like to note - as it dives for cover - how the BBC has sought to redefine its legitimacy. Its submission to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's Consultation, published in September, is called, guess what? [slide 6]

British Bold *Creative*. It's not just the title, though, that proclaims membership of the creative club. The corporation will become, we're told, and I quote: [slide 7]

'Britain's creative partner and a platform for this country's incredible talent and the work done by its great public institutions.'

One of the BBC's proposed public purposes – part of its very *raison d'être* will now be:

'*Growing the creative industries* and promoting the UK abroad.' [slide 8]

This captures perfectly the reflex, modal way of talking about the role of culture in the public sphere, across arts bodies, support agencies, government and indeed higher education. Ever-ready creative partners proclaim their virtue above all by being useful to the national or global economy.

The case of the BBC reflects the increased normalisation of creative industries thinking in the public discourse. Fifteen years ago, Director-General Greg Dyke pursued internal culture change by making what he called an 'aspirational value' of creativity. But he didn't say he'd nurture the creative industries. His successor, Mark Thompson, announced the BBC's 'Creative Future' and

set up a commissioning system for independent TV production known as the 'window of creative competition'. But that was a quite different bending with the wind, a more light touch use of terminological cover. Today we really have moved on from that stage. It's actually more serious. The BBC's new buy-in to the creative industries agenda is more fundamental as it's likened to its commitment to the digital future.

Well, how did we get here? How did the so-called creative turn become so pervasive?

What *is* the 'creative economy' supposed to be?

I can retell a well-worn tale, doubtless known to many here. And it could be told in several other ways, with added refinements. For the curious, a short reading list will go online with the rest of the slides and the text of this talk.

But here's a thread, a way in. Most will agree that it was the marketing of the term 'creative industries' in 1997/98 by the first New Labour government led by Tony Blair that firmly put this trope first, on the national and then, the global agenda.

Creative industries discourse was developed as a political economic project. Expertise provided by think tanks, policy advisers, and industry figures contributed significantly to shaping the policy process. Contrary to the view that the intellectuals are at best a marginal force in our society, that they have become mere interpreters, rather than legislators in the terms espoused by Zygmunt Bauman, we plainly have a public policy intelligentsia that is eager to shape the world through discourse and action. [slide 9]

It is striking to note how influential a single, expediently written policy paper has been in this discussion. Academic authors would give their eyeteeth for the citation rate achieved by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's – the DCMS's - definition on page 3 of the *Creative Industries Mapping Document* 1998 – cited not only in the Anglosphere but everywhere. [slide 10]

In a nutshell, the key move was to *aggregate* 13 distinct fields of cultural practice, to *designate* these as 'industries', and so to *constitute* a new policy object whose central purpose was - and still is - to 'maximise economic impact ... at home and abroad'. Moreover, by making the exploitation of intellectual property so crucial, the complexity of cultural value has been subordinated to economic value.

Now, some have denounced this approach as the acme of neo-liberalism – the celebration of individualistic entrepreneurship in a free market. As a corrective, in their definitive new book on New Labour cultural policy, David Hesmondhalgh and his colleagues have rightly pointed to the wider objectives pursued - the boost to arts spending, the attempts at social inclusion. But this is *not* what has gelled into the prevailing orthodoxy. [slide 11]

One influential take suggests that the conceptual journey started with the idea of the 'culture industry' critiqued by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1947. This was reformulated in the Marxist political economy of the 'cultural *industries*' (to which media were central). This was the basis for cultural industries policies pursued by left-wing policy-makers as a response to urban decline and de-industrialisation, and in some instances as part of the struggle against cultural imperialism. The economic imperative remained central, moreover, when it ended up as the arguably neo-liberal 'creative industries' trope forged by New Labour. Ever since, this particular formulation has been used incessantly and widely, irrespective of political colour. [slide 12]

It would seem that creative industries thinking has become a kind of blueprint to be applied or modified. Read the official and academic literature and you will find that the number and type of 'industries' may – and do - vary from one country to another. And then the 'cultural industries' may be carefully defined as distinct from 'creative industries', with culture often depicted as more

fundamental or at the core of a society. This is just one visualisation that encapsulates these variously imagined relations. There are plenty of others to choose from.

But, after all the debate, what remains common and largely undisturbed, is the overall strategy pursued by many states of seeing the creative economy as a policy object that can be managed to secure primarily economic outcomes and increase competitiveness.

The economization of national culture is globally attractive. Any nation can adopt it and policy transfer has proven relatively easy. The creative industries idea is protean and can be readily indigenized to fit local circumstances. It can become the official policy of the Chinese Communist Party or a development ideology espoused by the United Nations.

It can be used supra-nationally, at nation-state or sub-state levels, and in the region or city. Consequently, creative nations, regions and cities, are so much part of the landscape that everyone takes them for granted, along with the curatorial institutions that invent new spaces, and then mow their lawns and trim their hedges. [slide 13]

Thus, what is now called 'creative place-making' is an inherently restless, unfinished process, because new icons of differentiation have continually to be found – here are some examples - and new policies have to be devised the better to compete in film, TV, games or performances. Or new incentives have to be found to stimulate location and relocation. This means that the marketplace for cultural gabfests for the likeminded and the quest for advice by creative consultants is never exhausted. Nor, of course, is the continuous flow of academic commentary. [slide 14]

If the UK and Australia made the initial policy moves, it was in the USA that the best-known academic interventions were initially fashioned. The economist, Richard Caves, was first to offer a serious book-length analysis of the 'creative industries' in 2000. His work avoided the now commonplace fetishisation of the term. He wrote of diverse 'creative goods' that had something in common – that the production of films, recorded music, the visual arts, and cultural events and performances are all highly risky in terms of any calculation of success or failure. Caves' interest, however, was firmly in the specifics of contracts and industrial organization of relevant sectors and how these played. He didn't create a unitary policy object. That was left to others.

Only a couple of years later, another US economist, Richard Florida, in a very different, more popular, style took centre stage, to hail the rise of the 'creative class' – in essence, to sell the attractive notion that almost a third of Americans could be classified as 'creative' and that the world should now know that by making sure that local conditions were right for those cool people engaged in cultural work, policy intervention could make a wide range of places into creative cities or regions. In a re-versioning of Alvin Gouldner's New Class theory, symbol-manipulating intellectuals were transformed into productive creatives.

It was a short step from the increasingly pervasive talk about creative industries to the follow-on coinage of the 'creative economy'. The invitation to think of designated industries as systemically interconnected. The British consultant, John Howkins, first effectively marketed this notion, in a book published in 2001. Like the DCMS, he laid emphasis on the value of intellectual property and the consequent 'global battle for comparative advantage'. From this perspective, creativity becomes interesting because it is identified with human capital – which defines our qualities and agency as primarily having an economic value.

For the most part, the 'creative economy' has been a mobilizing slogan. It has been deployed alongside a range of cognate ideas – and associated practical interventions. The conceptual parade includes creative cities, creative innovation, creative skills, creative education and creative ecology. Moreover, as during the past decade, in particular, the digital revolution has reshaped policy thinking everywhere, the 'creative' turn has spawned neologisms such as such as the

'digital creative economy' to try and capture current transformations in production, circulation and consumption.

To note the prevalence of the economic dimension does not mean that other valuations of culture have been eclipsed. People may engage in cultural practices for their inherent satisfaction, the pursuit of aesthetic goals, their own fulfilment and interest. Craft sensibilities – such as shape the patient achievement of high-level skills or the fastidious making of objects, described so well by Richard Sennett - have not disappeared. When it comes to making a living out of cultural work, though, this is always in tension with economic value.

The European Union, for instance, has been an interesting theatre for how that process plays out. [slide 15] In the past decade, we can easily trace how member states, and the European Commission and Parliament, have adjusted their thinking about the value of culture in successive official reports. While not all have taken up the creative economy cause with equal enthusiasm, the European institutions have increasingly adopted the rhetoric, along with its accompanying economism.

The cultural and creative industries are at the heart of the European Agenda for Culture, part of the framework of the EU's Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth. There have been efforts to '[b]rand Europe as the place to create' along with establishing new programmes, institutions and regulatory frameworks to support 'creative and cultural collaboration'. Longstanding EC interventions to promote the audiovisual industries and cultural cities, for instance, now come under the badge of *Creative Europe* – a significant way of repackaging earlier schemes.

The value of European culture, therefore, can be summarized in a familiar kind of topline statement: in effect, that the creative sectors represent more than 3 percent of European GDP and employ some 3 percent of the EU's workforce.

To be sure, the creative policy turn has not produced uniformity of thinking inside the EU, but it has impacted on how culture is thought about in policy-making circles. National differences, though, do persist regarding what to include in, or exclude from, the creative economy. The categorization of creative industries is everywhere deeply linked to measurement – of employment, industrial scale and tradable value - because counting is what is politically comprehensible and has therefore become the primary mode of accountability.

Talk of cultural *and* creative industries in the EU is a conscious compromise, acknowledging the primary value attached to culture by many member states. At a time of economic crisis, looking for solutions to unemployment and for products that will trade are at the top of the agenda.

Alongside such regional shifts, as in Europe, the globalization of these ideas has perhaps been best illustrated by the UN's series of three *Creative economy reports*, the first of which, published in 2008, called the creative economy a 'new development paradigm' that covers all forms of cultural work. Diverse political regimes and distinct levels of economic development have shaped the specific take-up of ideas originally minted in London. These have been indigenised in East Asia, China and Australasia. The Richard Florida stable has developed a 'global creativity index', based on weighting the presence of factors such as talent, technology and tolerance in different territories. [slide 16]

Some now argue that the latest of the UNESCO reports, published in 2013, has represented a challenge to the dominant discourse and, in effect, is subverting it from within. Great hopes are placed on rehabilitating of the idea of a 'cultural economy' – with the emphasis on culture rather than economy, on the social rather than the individual. Although these views do not occupy the mainstream, this is part of an international counter-discourse to that of the creative economy.

Interestingly enough, along with the movement occurring in UNESCO, there are signs of this revisionist current being taken up in some national cultural agencies. It is perhaps odd – but

telling – to get excited about the idea that there is more to our inventiveness and originality than its economic consequences. Maybe we are at the start of a long march when policy makers will rethink how to intervene in culture. But that is still a work in progress. My own research on this topic, as I will show shortly, instead reflects the continuing power of received ideas.

The institutionalization of the creative economy agenda in British universities has developed apace. The bevy of degree courses already mentioned is supplying talent for a saturated and largely underpaying marketplace, where personal connections count hugely, unpaid internships are common, in which precarious portfolio work is the norm – although this does not diminish its attractiveness. In many respects, this sums up the state of play for generations entering the job market as such right now.

The UK Research Councils have been increasingly committed to research on the creative economy and the overlapping 'digital economy'. Similar kinds of investment have been made in other countries. [slide 17]

A key initiative here in the UK has been the establishment of five university consortia. These centres are now coming to the end of their four-year life span, with uncertain futures. Four are so-called 'knowledge exchange hubs for the creative economy'. CREATE, the research centre in which I work, is the fifth.

Such initiatives mobilize significant numbers of academic researchers and organize their connections with a range of enterprises, artists and performers, public bodies and governments. I am very positive about engagement of this kind because academics are also citizens and can benefit society by their knowledgeable involvement. We *should* use our expertise to play into policy debate and advice. That said, *how* we do this, and on what terms, is a matter for discussion. I'm conscious from my own practice of how difficult it is at times to be both engaged and detached and to remain clear about which role is being played at different times. And just how complicated it is to deal with the pressures exercised by specific interests to do what they want and to tell it their way.

My broader point is that the terms of trade for academic researchers of the creative economy are not unambiguous. Although the programmatic approach taken by the Research Councils does not necessarily exclude any particular project nor preclude the possibility of critique, there is a continuous demand to demonstrate the relevance of your work to the driving aim, which is to build up specific sectors of the national economy in conditions of global competitiveness.

No doubt, in recognition of this, there has been a small counter-current of Research Council-funded work focused on the idea of cultural value. If anything, that underlines the need to ask wider questions about the priorities of research and how these are arrived at. As we draw to the close of this phase, it is heartening to see that more colleagues are now asking questions about how well this broad initiative has worked and what it has achieved. [slide 18]

To put it differently, since the creative economy became a policy object, it has gradually given rise to a supporting creative economy *industry*, which is not only national but also international. Here in the UK, academic research and publishing have become an important part of this, alongside the flow of reports from policy advisers, creative consultants, and the conferences organized by brokers such as the Westminster Media Forum and the Creative Industries Federation.

So far, I have bent the stick in one direction.

Most obviously: I have argued that the espousal of creative economy thinking means that culture is seen primarily as embodying tradable economic value. A self-sustaining, self-referential framework of ideas has developed that has become largely impervious to critique. Paradoxically, it is some of the most vocal advocates of creative economy thinking who have argued that policy makers are ignoring the creative industries.

In this last part of my lecture, I'd like to draw on my most recent research to illustrate the present complexity of intervention by government in the range of cultural fields officially designated as the creative economy. *Illustrate* is the keyword: I want to draw out some features of current practice in the UK and not to make generalisations, although I do think some wider issues are raised. I am going to talk about agencies for which the creative economy is a constitutive fact of life, whether they are dealing with a specific sector or a range of highly diverse cultural practices.

Cultural policy is certainly not exclusively concerned with economic outcomes. But the dominant focus of policy has set parameters for bodies intervening in the cultural sphere – whether these be arts councils, museums and galleries, public service broadcasters, operas and orchestras or theatres and libraries. This takes us into the realm of cultural intermediaries, a little-studied area with which my most recent studies have been concerned.

In the past couple of years, I've worked with my colleagues at the University of Glasgow on two investigations of cultural bodies that are highly relevant for our discussion tonight. I can only say a few headline things about these but obviously I do hope that some of you will then be interested enough to read our published work. And we can talk about these studies in the Q&A, or after this event.

I didn't think this way at the start, but eventually I realized that I'd ended up working on the role of 'cultural intermediaries' - a term originally coined by Pierre Bourdieu. [slide 19] I'd use it here in a particular sense: to describe public bodies whose mission is to make the creative economy work more effectively in line with the overarching national goals pursued by states. And in that regard, although I've studied British agencies, the organizational rationales pursued are typical of many bodies worldwide that have been set up to intervene purposefully in culture.

You quickly realize the importance of the distinct institutional landscapes within which such support bodies work. Each agency connects with its political masters and funders, with its clientele, and a range of businesses of diverse scales. They are shaped by a distinct history of policy ideas as well as fashionable thought about what constitutes relevant know-how for intervening in, and building, a competitive creative economy.

Our team analysed the creation, life and death of the UK Film Council, which was based here in London. [slide 20] It's a piece of contemporary history and cultural sociology using documents and interviews with key players. Film policy, with its constant oscillation between cultural and economic goals, has been the model for the wider creative industries policies now in place. But importantly, film policy has retained its distinctiveness – which to me underlines the continuing importance of a focus on sectors that can easily dispense with the creative industries umbrella. The Film Council was the key strategic body set up to bring 'sustainability' (one of those weasel buzzwords) to the film industry and culture in Britain. It lasted for just over a decade – from 2000 to 2011.

We've concluded that on its demise nothing fundamental had changed: the film industry was still fragmented; but yes, there were some successes - inward investment to the UK from the US went up; British box office receipts increased somewhat; the digitization of exhibition was accelerated; regional film funding rose. Ironically, Oscar-winning *The King's Speech* was an outstanding post mortem success for a defunct agency.

When the Film Council was set up it involved lots of bureaucratic politics. The British Film Institute, until then the premier film body, with a primarily cultural role, became a subordinate institution. This was a strong signal of the pre-eminence of industrial purposes in cultural industries policy. The rest of that story is a lecture in its own right. So to spare you this awful fate, let me just make one major point.

It was the first New Labour government that created the Film Council as part of a wave of new bodies. It was summarily closed down by Conservative ministers at the start of the coalition government of 2010-15. When they decided to kill off the Film Council on supposed efficiency grounds, what did they do? They spent more money than they saved by shifting its functions elsewhere. In fact, they moved more than half the Film Council's staff into the British Film Institute, which became – yes, the lead body for film policy.

Now, the story is rather complicated, but such behaviour raises questions about the overall rationality of cultural policy-making, which in this case at least has lacked any long-term perspective. If you think intervention in the creative economy matters, then do try to give it some consistency of effort. Film policy in the UK has produced a scrapheap of defunct agencies, each originally set up to make things more efficient.

My second case concerns an ethnographic, sociological study that we conducted at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research. [slide 21] This was of a business support agency, Cultural Enterprise Office, set up in Glasgow by a coalition of public interests in 2001 a true embodiment of the creative turn that has survived its contemporaries. The formation of Cultural Enterprise Office was absolutely typical of moves taking place all over the UK at the time.

We found that, over its lifespan, whichever party was in power, the Nationalists included, intervention in the Scottish creative economy was modelled on the received wisdom produced by policymakers, think-tanks and academics working in London – *the* pre-eminent centre of such thinking in Europe.

In this inherited policy framework, Cultural Enterprise Office has been assisting microbusinesses in Scotland to become more businesslike. In the UK, most creative businesses are microbusinesses – employing fewer than 10 people.

Cultural Enterprise Office offers mostly 'soft' business support – advice and training. This type of intervention is one of the key levers that policymakers use when trying to increase the scale and robustness of creative enterprises.

On the evidence, it can be really hard to demonstrate the impact of such intervention to funders. This takes us back to the question of accounting. As with other such bodies, the inherent difficulty of showing unambiguous results has contributed to making Cultural Enterprise Office's position inherently precarious. The research evidence shows that precisely this kind of problem has been experienced elsewhere. One result is that such bodies are constantly hunting for funding – much like the working lives of the clients that they serve.

Both of my studies have focused on the mediation of policy, the day-to-day implementation that occurs in response to the formulation of grand ideas. The directing framework has remained very tenacious and intervention is deeply influenced by it. But there is an interesting tension between the overarching vision of developing a creative economy and achieving clearly evidenced effectiveness in translating ideas into action. [slide 22]

Whether you sign up to the creative economy idea or not, it seems obvious that once intermediary agencies have been set up they need to be given stable funding and institutional frameworks so that they can operate strategically within the sector they address, building strong relationships with policymakers, other business support agencies, and crucially, really understanding the springs of action of those who are engaged in cultural work. Of course, none of that guarantees that things will go smoothly but they may go more predictably and allow the pursuit of long-term goals to take place.

To conclude: the economic understanding of culture is dominant in public policy and discourse and also prevalent in academic teaching and research council agendas. The omnipresence of

creative economy thinking raises questions about how the research agenda is being formulated and the positioning of academics in debate.

Creative industries policy has been very tenacious - crossing political divides in the UK.

The ideas have become globally attractive and underpin a policy community and a substantial literature – a creative economy industry. In the EU there has been a notable shift towards the prevalent economism, but not without resistance. The creative industries agenda has been globalized and indigenized through the work of UNESCO and other international agencies – although there may be an emergent counter-current.

If we stopped talking about the creative economy would anything be lost? Hardly. We still have a language for human inventiveness and originality. Nothing stops us talking comprehensibly about the diversity of cultural practices that continue to exist but which are overshadowed by a compelling label of convenience that has put the economy in the driving seat and shaped the public discourse so insistently. Surely, that's an invitation to think afresh.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your attention. [slide 23]

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