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Creative cities, creative classes and the global modern

Justin O'Connor^{a,*}, Xin Gu^b, Michael Kho Lim^c

^aCultural Economy, University of South Australia, Magill, SA 5072, Australia

^bSchool of Media Film and Journalism, Monash University, Australia

^cSchool of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, United Kingdom

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Abstract

This article charts the development of the 'creative cities' discourse as one increasingly organised around 'a transnational hegemonic block'. It traces the tendency towards homogenisation during the adoption, translation and improvisation of creative cities' policies around the world, to that of an aspiration to be 'Modern'. Rejecting claims of a 'creative class', the article focuses on cultural intermediaries and how they function as a global epistemic community under the notion of modernisation. In addition, such a 'creative imaginary shaped by a US centric neo-liberal financialization model has replicated existing global hierarchies, undermining public services and exacerbating the commodification of the creative commons. The article argues that it may be possible for cities to transform the Creative City discourse in their own image only after a radical rethinking of a modernising imaginary, and basing themselves on a new conception of the possibilities of the local.

Keywords: Creative cities, Creative class, Modernisation, Cultural intermediaries, Cultural policy, Creative economy

1. The homogenisation of 'creative cities' discourse¹

This paper attempts to trace the path of the Creative Cities discourse from Europe to the rest of the world, especially Asia. It argues that this path did not unfold across a landscape of an open, diverse globalisation imagined by some cultural theorists - what Bruno Latour (2018) called 'globalisation-plus' - but one structured around US-centred financial hegemony which became increasingly singular and closed - 'globalisation-minus'. It suggests that the Creative City always had an affective buy-in beyond a formal policy elite, and this gave it a charge of energy which could envisage real change. This moment has now gone, and some radical rethinking needs to be done if these energies are to remain actively transformative.

The idea of the Creative City is a product of the 1990s. Of course, the idea has long roots in a Euro-American narrative of the city as a primary site for commercial and industrial development or 'modernisation', and as a locus for a certain quality of experience we call 'modern'. The Creative City involved a reframing of this narrative at a moment when the

* Corresponding author. E-mail addresses: Justin.oconnor@unisa.edu.au (J. O'Connor), xin.gu@monash.edu (X. Gu), limm2@cardiff.ac.uk (M. Kho Lim).

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Fordist-Keynesian settlement had broken down. That is, where 'Fordist' industrial production moved overseas and cities were expected to operate more independently—and entrepreneurially—inside and outside the Keynesian planning frame of the nation-state. The Creative City drew specifically on the cultural, even aesthetic, dimensions of the city, deemed to have been side-lined by the functionality of the Fordist city, as exemplified by the top-down architectural and planning regimes of Le Corbusier and Robert Moses. These 'soft' cultural capacities—unruly, messy, intuitive, iterative, emotional—were now to be the drivers of a new kind of post-industrial city. On the one hand, this agenda responded to the multiplying demands to take back control of the city, symbolically represented by the events of 1968 and articulated conceptually by Jane Jacobs (1985) and—more robustly—by Henri Lefebvre (1992). Cities were for people, not the other way around. On the other hand, this cultural dimension not only made cities liveable but was now set to become a benign economic driver for a post-industrial future. In this sense, the Creative City and what came to be known in 1998 as the 'creative industries' emerged at the same time, though they have not always remained so close.

The re-invention of the city mobilised a broad coalition of actors and aspirations under the shared 'imaginary' of the Creative City (Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008). As such it could take multiple directions. For some it meant investing in the arts and cultural infrastructure, hoping to attract global companies and their equally footloose senior staff. Or an iconic building could be catalytic for the local population, declaring a new future for the city, and maybe bringing in cultural tourists for good measure. These could be part of a city's ambitious bid for international cultural (or sporting) events, and the ever-growing conference trade—attempts at 're-branding' which extended to the various 'city of culture' programs that were emerging and, after 2004, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). Some of these cities sought a deeper and longer-term renegotiation of their identities and aspirations. Very few actioned that full transformation of urban governance envisaged by Franco Bianchini and Charles Landry in their 1995 book, in which the language 'of instrumental, rational and analytic thinking' would to be supplemented by one that could describe the 'messy' aspects of urban life, those 'which are subjective and not quantifiable: memory, emotions, passions, senses, desires, all of which engender motivations and loyalties' (Landry & Bianchini, 1995, p. 15).

In the early noughties, the Creative City would be increasingly re-oriented around Richard Florida's (2002; 2005) concept of the 'creative class'. This was a continuation of the strategy of 'attracting footloose talent' but with economic metrics and analytics, benchmarks and indexes to back it up. Florida's account focused on cultural infrastructure but more in terms of up-market, trendy leisure amenities and the kinds of 'lifestyle districts' that had proliferated in cities across the globe—celebrated in newspaper travel sections and in-flight magazines. Florida embraced the vibrancy of urban living—gays, bohemians, multi-ethnicity—but the urban community it explicitly targeted was a professional-managerial class, expanded to include artists, but in which 'blue-collar' workers (threats to tolerance and creativity) were not so welcome. Finally, though Florida eulogized the 'soft infrastructure' of creative urban landscapes, the creative class would require housing, leisure and entertainment amenities, up-market hospitality and retail, perhaps a gallery or two—and this required capital investment and development green-lights. These were enthusiastically forthcoming, as witnessed by the tsunami of global capital-led urban transformation over the last two decades, whose sheer scale and reach has now outgrown the quaint term 'gentrification'. In short, Florida's 'creative

class’—socially exclusive, consumption-oriented, capital-intensive, top-down and justified entirely by hard economic metrics—helped deliver almost the exact opposite of that promised in the Creative City imaginary.

Developing new forms of cultural production able to take the place of the old industries was a more difficult challenge; despite it being presented as part of the Creative City package it tended to develop in a different space. Of course, investing in a city’s cultural infrastructure, alongside the lifestyle zones of the creative class, was essential for any creative industries strategy; but in practice such a strategy required more detailed research and long-term investment than many cities were capable of providing. Cities were privileged sites for the creative industries, as these worked within agglomeration economies and complex ecosystems, where cultural consumption and production would ideally form a virtuous circle. In reality, however, the returns on consumption were quicker and bigger than those gained from investing in a set of creative micro-businesses. Up-market apartments and hospitality ventures drove out creative workspace and affordable housing. In any event, in the age of neoliberal austerity, few cities had the capacity for any forward-thinking long-term industrial strategy. A *de facto* creative industry recipe emerged, which combined elements of Landry’s creative city and Florida’s creative class with the ‘start-up’ entrepreneurial ethos that now animated much of creative industries thinking.

The Creative City has been seen as ‘fast-policy’ (Peck, 2005) an easily transferable piece of ‘policy-technology’ (Kong, 2014). Across the Global South, it could make multiple appeals to particular interests and collective aspirations in ways that could assemble powerful local coalitions. The Creative City covered projects around heritage, building new art galleries and concert halls, promoting festivals and cultural tourism, developing housing and up-market retail and leisure facilities, creating start-up and co-working spaces and so on. These coalitions were animated by a powerful imaginary, articulated especially by international agencies such as the British Council and (latterly) the Goethe Institut, as well as supranational agencies such as UNCTAD and, above all, UNESCO. This imaginary was of a new kind of development, a new connection to the global, and a new path to a viable future. To ratify the UNESCO 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, or to join its Creative City Network, was to be part of a new global club of moderns, this time articulated around culture and human creativity, both of which the Global South possessed in abundance. Asian Cities, the driving force of the new ‘Asian century’ were to be in the forefront of this new creative charge.

Whilst the Creative City might be embraced as an Asian possibility, it was marked with the provenance of the Global North. As with other developmental agendas issuing from the Global North, the transfer of both the imaginary and the policy technology of Creative City was fraught with multiple issues of replication, transposition and translation. There were familiar problems of ‘catching-up’ with a Western model, one to which the more one sought to approach, the more it receded into the distance. So too the well-worn problems of identity—of what ‘creative’ could mean in the context of an ‘Asia’ that represented a long-standing binary with ‘the West’ but was also multiple, distributed and diverse. And for many cities the familiar problem of resources—of infrastructure, capital, knowledge, technology. Were Asian cities to be pulled finally into orbit of Western modernity, their cities replicated non-places of global consumption? Or would we see another set of half-finished projects, the semi-ruins of another

failed modernity? Maybe some cities could take it and make it their own, transform it in their image; or perfect it, run it higher and faster than any western city had previously imaged?

2. The synchronisation of 'creative cities' policy transfer

Though the Creative City has long roots in both the history of the European city, and in the post-Sixties transformations of culture, economy and society, its widespread formulation in the 1990s, and rapid proliferation outside of its Euro-American heartlands after 2000, suggests a deep entanglement with the process of US-led globalization that took off after 1989-91. Already in 1990 Arjun Appadurai had sketched a new global 'ideoscape' - post-imperial, post-colonial – across which non-isomorphic flows of ideas, images and texts gave rise to a diverse and hybrid range of local configurations, not reducible to the straight centre-periphery model of Western-centric developmentalism (Appadurai, 1990). The dissolution of the Cold War binary seemed to open up a more multiple global space, one in which the US would have to work hard, using new 'soft power' tools, if it were to remain hegemonic in this more complex landscape (Nye, 1990). This was the era of what Bruno Latour calls 'globalisation-plus', where,

shifting from a local to a global viewpoint 'ought to mean *multiplying* viewpoints, *registering* a great number of varieties, *taking into account* a larger number of beings, cultures, phenomena, organisms, and people. (2018:12–13. Emphasis in original).

A literature of policy transfer emerged in the noughties to reflect this. Though Jamie Peck and colleagues were sceptical-critical about creative city policies – especially when linked to the 'creative class, noting how they spread meme-like as 'fast policy' – their idea of policy 'released into the wild', undergoing random mutation from sender to receiver, described a similarly variegated 'policyscape' (Peck, 2005; Peck & Theodore, 2010; 2012). Perhaps then, whatever its original provenance, the rapid global adoption of the creative city can be seen as equally wild and non-isomorphic, with the adapted visions as multiply variegated as those described to the aging Kublai Khan in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.

This, to some extent, is a matter of empirical investigation as well as theoretical re-imagining. At the risk of doing violence to the nuances of any such accounts accounts, we suggest that in the case of creative city policies, as with the creative industries or economy with which they are intrinsically linked, the Western provenance is often entirely the point. The creative cities, creative economy discourse is one of modernisation, the force of its imaginary derived from an aspiration to be Modern. Of course, there may be multiple modernities, as argued forcefully within the post-colonial literature (Gaonkar and Parameshwar, 2001; Chakrabarty, 2002). And yet the creative city imaginary has resulted in a growing homogenisation of city policies, and of the very idea of the modern.

Political scientist Pertti Alasuutari, recently argued that there has been a global 'synchronisation' of policy discourses, including those of 'creative economy' and 'creative city' (Alasuutari, 2016). Global policies, he argues, are increasingly similar, with policy ideas – neoliberalism, creative economy for example – rapidly circulating across the globe. This synchronisation is possible because policy elites share what he calls the 'isomorphism of the modern'. Global policy is made by a 'tribe of moderns', an elite 'tribe without a chief' whose

actions cohere as they operate across the range of government, non-government and international organisations that have influence over global policy discourse. Alasuutari's 'tribe of moderns' embraced the creative economy as a global epistemic community (Haas, 1992) with a strong, normative modernising vision of 'enhancing human welfare'. Ultimately rooted, he suggests, in the institution of the Westphalian Nation-State, the 'tribe of moderns' shares the view 'that all nations are heading toward ever-changing modernisation, and that "leading" countries have better knowledge of where modernisation is leading us, which is why they follow their lead or, if they think they know the way, aspire to become the leading nation in that area.' (2016: xxi).

There are problems with Alasuutari's account, mainly around a lack of any (global) political economy or anything resembling a 'postcolonial' analysis of the 'modern'. Alasuutari's singular notion of 'modernity', ignores the role the West has played in enforcing (through economic and military power) a particular form of modernity over others. However, his account of a global conformity built around a modernising economic discourse has a clear resonance with the rapid spread of creative economy and creative city policy scripts, as they held out a promise of new economic benefits from culture.

Russel Prince, in his analysis of creative industry policy in the UK, has a much looser conception of policy expertise as an 'assemblage', one in which any new policy paradigm might change configurations of power and influence within it (Prince, 2010). For Prince the rise of the creative industries heralded such a paradigm shift, opening up a knowledge gap as it moved the debates beyond the established arts and cultural policy settings. This new uncertainty created a strategic opportunity for a previously peripheral group to come forward, claiming the requisite expertise, seizing the chance to advance themselves. Tracing the rise of this loose group of experts in the UK, Prince suggests that these same players have now gone on to become increasingly influential internationally, as we see 'a global governmental assemblage emerging for the creative industries' (2010: 882). The 'creative industries' then was not a fad spreading through an established global policy community but the turbulent reconfiguration of an assemblage, new players and new forms of discourse jostling for position.

Adopting a Latourian actor-network perspective, Prince seems only concerned with describing how such experts jostle for advantage, and the values animating them are not considered at all.² But global policy shifts should not be conceived only as a form of 'technology transfer' or 'fad', nor just with experts jostling for influence - policy shifts are also strongly ideational and normative. Alasuutari's global epistemic community around 'modernisation' does give a degree of isomorphism to global *policyscapes*, but it fails to account for how this might be contested at local level by non-formal policy intermediaries who seek not to resist but to implement it in ways that might conflict with local policy elites. Further, it fails to register how the very idea of this 'modern' has been fundamentally changed in the last forty years.

Since 1945 the US has been a leading global hegemon; since 1989- 91, until the recent rise of China, it has been the only one. The US set the terms of the post-1945 modern – its production systems, its organisation of labour, its validation in terms of the growth of consumer spending power and so on. The radical transformation in the global 'scapes evoked by Appadurai in 1990

² Though in the very last lines Prince calls for research into policy forms 'not interested in reproducing the status quo, providing a rejoinder to representations of the tyranny of expertise and pointing to the possibility of its redemption in alternative governmental visions.' (2010:883) We can only guess what these might be.

perhaps represented only a moment of possibility at a time when the meaning of ‘the modern’ was being radically reframed by a US whose hegemonic block now extended further than ever. The ‘modern’ was no longer about manufacture but services, about entrepreneurship not collective effort, about meritocracy not equality, about ‘immaterial’ value (including financial return) not necessarily ‘making things’. It was now the ‘new’ service driven middle classes, not the industrial working class, that were the key index of modernisation and development. It is the ability to draw in other nations willing to institute economic and social structures in line with the US’s structural dominance of the global economy, that establishes hegemony.

In his discussion of ‘hegemony’, [Anderson \(2017\)](#) refers to Wang Hui, approvingly, that this transnational level is about ‘globalised market relations’, a ‘market-ideological apparatus’ of media, advertising and shopping, where ‘their greatest power lies in their appeal to “common sense”, ordinary needs which turn people into consumers, voluntarily following market logic in their daily lives’ ([Wang, 2006](#), p. 42). We suggest that the creative city and creative economy discourses fall into this transnational hegemonic space, as a site for the re-imagining of self, of work, and of everyday life in the city. It is both a site of intense affective investment, for a particular group of people, just as it is highly fraught and contested, for just that reason.

3. Cultural intermediaries as global epistemic community

This new hegemonic discourse was not simply promoted by a global elite policy elite, but what we might call ‘cultural intermediaries’ ([O’Connor, 2015](#)). Cultural intermediaries have figured intermittently in the literature as a loose social grouping who exemplified new ‘artistic’ or ‘bohemian’ ways of life. They pioneered new relationships to work, career and life-course, and opened up new spaces of the city to forms of cultural production and consumption. Cultural intermediaries are organised around an informal network of actors operating along a permeable policy interface of ‘governance’ rather than in government *per se*. They claim to give voice to a wider set of social and cultural transformations, previously marginal, now growing in importance. The ‘creative imaginary’ as it emerged from the late 1960s on, had a wide resonance, drawing in people from outside the traditional boundaries of urban and cultural policy. They increasingly engaged with formal policy making processes, as contesting or co-opted parties. This emerging field was open to newer actors, coming without established policy track records, introducing a level of unpredictability and *ad hoc* into the process. The claims of those affectively invested in the creative imaginary always threatened to challenge established government policy – which was part of its attraction! In this context cultural intermediaries could assert their connections to this broader social coalition, a ‘creative sector’ that stretched beyond the established arts and cultural bodies but demanding to be brought into policy consultations if any creative industries or creative cities project was to be viable.

These cultural intermediaries increasingly formed a loose global epistemic community, one that was peripheral to established policy networks, yet claimed to speak to those networks in the voice of a transformative cultural imaginary that was certainly economic but was much more than this (at least to begin with).³ They constituted a penumbra operating alongside the

³ Doreen Jakob and Bas Van Heur, introducing their Special Issue on ‘Intermediaries and the Creative Economy’ in 2015, see these as much more disciplinary with respect to the ‘creative imaginary’, working to pull outliers and dissenters back into line. Cf. (2015) ‘Taking Matters into Third Hands: Intermediaries and the Organization of the Creative Economy’, *Regional Studies*, 49:3:357–361.

formal global cultural policy players, jostling for influence and position certainly, but also connecting to a new modern 'creative' constituency on whose behalf they were proselytising. Peck and Theodore describe well the resultant mobile policies, which flowed across the transnational global *policyscape*,

breaching the borders between these policy-making sites, constructing symbiotic networks and circulatory systems across and between them, enabling cosmopolitan communities of practice and validating expert knowledge. Mobile policies, then, are not simply travelling across a landscape - they are remaking this landscape, and they are contributing to the interpenetration of distant policy-making sites (2010:173)

This aptly describes the emergent, transnational epistemic community of cultural (and later creative) industries and creative cities experts that emerged in the 1990s, primarily in Europe, North America and Australia, and increasingly in Latin America, Africa and East Asia. Its members were consultants and consultant-practitioners, local and regional government officers, cultural space managers, academics, festival organisers, creativity gurus, travel media (city guides and in-flight magazine features) and so on, all rubbing shoulders with representatives of national governmental agencies (British Council, Goethe Institute, Institut Français) and transnational cultural agencies (UNESCO, UNCTAD, WIPO, Ford Foundation, the European Commission, for example). This emergent community in the making was extended and consolidated across conferences, networks and projects for creative industries and cities. Its not-quite-recognised field of expertise benefited enormously from the UK government's 'creative industries' brand, and it was this transnational epistemic community that was partly responsible for the unexpected (by the UK government at least) success of this policy across the globe (O'Connor & Gu, 2016, pp. 21–35).

Their local impact should not be under-estimated, as they formed a kind of cosmopolitan micro-site in which global flows of images, sounds, texts, ideas (and people) could be accessed, creating links between similar sites elsewhere. These sites could attract flows of policy makers, consultants, practitioners and cultural consumers in a way that had real impact on the local and carried this local back to the transnational level (often via PowerPoint slides or guest speaker invites extended to managers or owners of these sites). These milieus had a particular relationship to the global, in which a certain cosmopolitan sensibility was fostered through these flows. They helped structure, and were structured by, a certain cosmopolitan sensibility, a *habitus* oriented both to the local and to the horizon of the global. We might see it as a form of global modernity that was certainly not a slavish copy of some imagined metropolitan origin but was more than the random mutation envisaged in Appadurai's 'indigenization'. It was an ideational response to a vision of modernity experienced as an affective identification with the promise of a global creativity. It was more than simply 'culture as resource' in Yúdice's sense, where arguments for cultural funding could utilize its various social benefits (Yúdice, 2003). It was culture as a resource, but for a different kind of future, both local and global at once.⁴

⁴ This was exemplified in the new global visibility of contemporary art, whose galleries rapidly shouldered out concert halls and opera houses from their emblematic position in the global cultural city. The example of Bilbao and the Guggenheim played a part, its success in attracting tourists and global media attention representing the old industrial city's re-invention of itself. But it is easy to miss the ways in which contemporary art had become articulated to forms of popular culture and lifestyle, becoming an important marker of a contemporary global subject. The ability to interpellate such subject positions became increasingly important for global cultural cities, the latest example being the spate of contemporary art museums in Dubai and

4. 'Creative cities' discourse – towards local *plus*

Perhaps one way of approaching the challenge set by the Creative City is to think how it articulates both utopian aspiration and the most brutal gentrification; the grass-roots looking to the global as a possibility of local change, and local elites seeking to share the development dreams promoted by global capital; the liberation of creative work and its milieu, and the frequently darker outcome of precarity, eviction and digital surveillance. From the turn of the millennium we have moved, Latour suggests, from the multiplicity of globalisation-*plus* to a globalisation-*minus*, *a Western-centric neoliberal model focused extraction and domination*,

'a single vision, entirely provincial, proposed by a few individuals, representing a very small number of interests, limited to a few measuring instruments, to a few standards and protocols, has been imposed on everyone and spread everywhere. (Latour, 2018:13)

Neo-Gramscian (Saul, 2012) theory locates any international hegemonic block in terms of the class composition of internal national blocks. So, the rise of finance to its dominant position within the US has radically inflected the ways in which the US secures its 'structural dominance' globally, through the means of financial 'seigniorage' (Mann, 2013) (. This also would apply to the emergent new blocks in the countries increasingly drawn into its orbit in the 1990s. Though US-dominated global finance is central here, the specific modality of a country's interconnection with the US is contingent and complex – depending on whether this is around resource extraction, out-sourced manufacture, business services or data-extraction (all of which are dominated by finance of course). The cultural economy is no exception, structured differentially around intellectual property legislation, local creative labour contracts, ownership and control of communications infrastructure, access to local media markets, logistics, censorship, educational level and so on.

The paradox in this case is that the US is almost completely absent from the debates around creative cities, creative economies – not only withdrawing from UNESCO but simply not concerned with cultural policies or 'creative industries' *per se*. Yet it is globally dominant in the cultural industries. The paradox is explained by the fact that the US dominates both the hard and soft infrastructures of the global cultural economy - satellites, fibre-optics, telecom mergers, efficient enforceable intellectual property regimes, weakened state broadcasting monopolies, liquid capital (Hesmondhalgh, 2019). The neoliberal revolution happened also in the realm of culture and communications, rolling back the 'New World Information Order', to create a new global order under its own tutelage (Sparks & Roach, 1990; Carlsson, 2017; Garner & O'Connor, 2019)⁵. The cynical adage can be applied to soft power: grab them by the hardware, hearts and minds will follow. The US does not have to promote its 'creative industries' sector *per se*, just ensure that 'free trade' extends as far as possible to 'cultural

Abu Dhabi, not to mention Shanghai and Singapore. The art gallery, increasingly associated with urban gentrification, was also a portal into a cosmopolitan modernity (for practicing artists and visitors alike) as well as providing its local flagship presence.

⁵ This was part of a wider global defeat of the 'Third World'. Cf. Quinn Slobodian (2018) *Globalists. The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

goods'. UNESCO's 2005 Convention, which sought to promote global cultural diversity through enshrining the right of member states to treat culture as a non-commodity - the '*exception culturelle*' - can be seen as a late attempt to seize the utopian moment that floated in the space between one hegemonic order and the new. The 2005 Convention has been turned *de facto* into a vehicle to promote the cultural economy as a modern path to development (Garner & O'Connor, 2019).

Though UNESCO, as the leading forum for global cultural policy, promotes the cultural economy as a development opportunity for all, it also provides the local context in which governments and elites can promote a creative milieu to take advantage of this promised global economy. From this perspective we might see creative cities, especially in their highly capitalised media and digital versions (Gu, 2020), as akin to how Timothy Mitchell describes the 'technological zones' in the oil industry: 'a set of coordinated but widely dispersed regulations, calculative arrangements, infrastructures and technical procedures that render certain objects or flows governable' (Mitchell, 2011, p. 40). Or in less capitalised creative cities, akin to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's (2015) account of how capitalist value (in the *Matsutake* mushroom industry) is extracted from a dispersed, non-capitalist periphery, from actors whose main motivations are not about profit. Insertion into a global cultural economy does require state legislation and assent – in terms of intellectual property regulation, deregulation of state broadcasting, opening up of the communications infrastructure to competitive international bidding, tax breaks for media companies and so on. At the same time, it requires the co-ordination of actors who share a certain transnational professional understanding, which in this highly tactile and iterative sector, is in fact a shared transnational *habitus*. This is produced not within or between global firms but within and between local milieu, as we suggested above. This articulation of production and extraction at the global level also requires an affective buy in, via the imaginary of a creative city, and the new modern subjects it validates.

Yet such a loose, transnational 'block', should it exist (and we are speculating), would be much more complex and unstable than a state-to-state international block - especially in such a fissiparous and fiercely contested field as culture. In these transnational 'blocks', unorthodox lifestyles, marginalized and sometimes suppressed, received a certain degree of acceptance. New gender roles, expressions of sexuality, or counter-cultural views associated with the residents of these areas could acquire the validity of 'resource'.⁶ These sites could claim to speak for a younger, aspirant 'new middle class', invested in educational and cultural capital, as opposed to the incumbent powers of property and capital. These youthful groups would assemble around 'creative industries' and 'creative cities' in ways that could resonate with the kinds of more radical political interventions that followed the various 'Twitter' and 'colour' 'revolutions' over the last decade (Therborn, 2014) as well as the rolling series of global protests that continued right up to the onset of the C-19 pandemic. Here we might imagine, with Akbar Abbas, a modern cosmopolitanism, which 'involves not so much imagining a transnational state as reimagining the city', involving 'less privileged men and women placed or displaced in the transnational space of the city and who are trying to make sense of its spatial and temporal contradictions', the cosmopolitan as 'arbitrageur/arbitrageuse', capable of 'creating a global culture worthy of the name'. (Abbas, 2000, p. 786).

⁶ Similar things happened with 'gay villages' throughout the Global North, or indeed with the China Towns of previous eras, parlayed into tourism sites.

Conceived in this way, these cosmopolitans are not necessarily the global elite but could be rethought as exemplars of Latour's local-*plus*, who reject the singularity of the global-*minus*, wanting 'to preserve, maintain, ensure one's belonging to a land, a place, a soil, a community, a space, a milieu, a way of life, a trade, a skill? ... to remain capable of registering more differences, more viewpoints' (Latour, 2018, p. 15). Yet these transnational exemplars of local-*plus* cosmopolitan-*plus* face daunting problems.

Neo-liberal financialization, which provided much of the material and ideational basis of the new global middle class, has begun to create severe problems of inequality and social unrest (Piketty, 2020; Saull, 2012). The idea that a new 'rising' middle classes could spend countries like Brazil, Russia, China and India into the modern has become increasingly untenable, at least outside of China. Since at least 2016, as the more coercive and extractive globalisation-*minus* has been pursued by the US, many parts of the global have seen a nativist re-assertion of the local-*minus* of blood, soil, culture, and religion in authoritarian form. This has adversely impacted many of those zones of creative tolerance, with many of the new 'populist' blocks linking the older, fearful property and capital-invested middle classes with the dispossessed urban working and peasant classes - these days a fluid set of boundaries (Babic, 2020; Luttwak, 1994). The flows of global finance that did so much to facilitate the new ideoscapes have increasingly shifted the terrain away from educational and cultural capital – the embodied promise of creative labour – towards those with assets in property and finance. These same flows have undermined public services – free education, public health, affordable housing – in such a way as to increasingly exclude younger middle-class people from the modern future on which their aspirations so relied (Davies, 2020). This is exacerbated by the routinisation of creative labour, the increase in work discipline, the commodification of the creative commons and the other travails of the younger global 'creative class' (O'Connor & Gu, 2020).

All these would suggest an on-going 'buy-out' from the promise of the creative city – at least amongst the young who are very aware of its failed promises. The discontents of the creative class, especially across Asia, grow apace, as they are excluded from the promise of that creative city in which many of their hopes for the future were invested. At the same time, the rapid decline of US legitimacy after the election of Trump, accelerated now by the woeful response to the C-19 pandemic, has placed fundamental questions around the exemplary status of Euro-American modernity which can only proliferate (Mishra, 2020). Where this goes politically is hard to speculate, other than to say that as the transnational hegemonic block around the creative class breaks-down, new possibilities will emerge outside the specific imaginary of the Creative City launched by the end of Fordism, the collapse of Communism, and the positioning of Western modernity as the only viable source of historical creativity.

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