

WHY PUT 'CLASS' IN THE CREATIVE CLASS?

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ABSTRACT. This paper pinpoints the problematic use of grouping creative people as a social class. Observations of the 'creative clusters' in Lower East Side (New York) and Islington Mill (Manchester) are used to illustrate this point. Instead, creative actors should be seen as a unique blend of work practices, and have different philosophical and aesthetic appreciation of art, which in turn influences their spatial and geographical consumption patterns inside a building and/or city. This observation questions the use of 'class' in Richard Florida's (2002) *The rise of the Creative Class*, and consequently asks if place-making practitioners should adopt one-size-fits-all creative policies.

KEY WORDS: class, creatives, practice, cognition, consumption

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1. Introduction

This year is the 10th anniversary of Richard Florida's well-known book *The rise of the Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. For those who are not aware of the content, its essence argued that creative and knowledge workers (which make up a third of the USA's population) are the most important catalyst in today's economy. Furthermore, they cluster in places that have an infrastructure that enables flexible working and living conditions. This book has had a huge impact on place-making policymakers: there are increasing numbers of creative-orientated policies that aim at bringing together a wide range of creative and

knowledge workers, and their varying activities, in a concentrated area.

According to Moss (2002), Markusen & Gadwa (2010) and Peck (2011), policies using creativity are not new, some British local governments in the 1980s used cultural policies for urban growth. Only recently has it been used as a major tool for economic and social impact in many countries (Shields 1999, Landry 2000, Florida 2002, Kunzmann 2004, Thomas & Darnton 2006). The first notable case of using creativity as an economic driver was Australia's 1994 *Creative Nation* (Thurley 2009). During the mid- to late 1990s some countries followed suit, such as Tanzania (Ministry of Education and Culture 1997), but rarely fulfilled the promise (British Council 2009). It was

not Australia's pioneering policy that became the template for cultural policy, but the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport's *Creative industries mapping document* (1998). Like Florida (2002), the British Council also grouped a wide range of professions as 'creative actors'. Nevertheless, the appealing and well-argued texts are influential in numerous creative-orientated urban policies, from a neighbourhood to a continental level. This paper is interested in investigating the elasticity of these creative members.

Since Florida's *Creative Class* is the dominant approach in adopting the British Council's creative industries, it is important to investigate two important aspects of this term: if this collective of people can be arranged and analysed as a 'class', and how is the *Creative Class* 'creative'.

This paper will first compare different classic class theories with Florida's *Creative Class*. This will suggest to the reader that this grouping is not fit-for-purpose for creative-orientated place-makers because it does not explain fully the different space and place consumption of creative people. It will then observe two clusters in New York and Greater Manchester, commenting why certain creatives are found in certain places and not others. Some of these observations are at the level of a building. Ultimately, the different consumption patterns question the class grouping of creative people.

2. Class

Contemporary discourse on class originated from the French Enlightenment (Calvert 1982), but the term was given its most famous treatment in Marx's publication, the *Communist manifesto* (Marx & Engels 1848). It examined the dissonance between economic production and political interests, with the concept of a class structure seen as a conflict of interests between those with labour power, the owners of capital, and landowners (Marx 1993).

However, during his analysis of French peasants in the 19th century, he suggested that one must be careful when categorising people into a class. They may live in similar conditions, yet they have varying, and self-sufficient, modes of production, which provide little evidence of a di-

vision of labour. This leads to lack of communication and weak common interests, isolating one lot of the peasant community from another (Marx 1852). Members of Florida's Creative Class "do not see themselves as a unique social grouping, [though] they actually share many similar tastes, desires and preferences" (Florida 2002: 145). Marx believed it was not possible for such a weak grouping to constitute a class, in that its members did not have the capability of setting up political organisations or representing a collective interest or consciousness, in response to a common political or economic situation.

There is little evidence of a mass action/movement amongst the Creative Class, even during the global trends in cuts to cultural funding. Hypothetically speaking, amateur photographers and well-known photographers in a given area have different social standing and wealth, and are unlikely to unite in ideology, mode of production, and/or habitual and consumption patterns. Furthermore, they lack common (and often have conflicting) interests, which influence group interactions and locational divergence, meaning that they cannot be considered as a class in the Marxist sense. Many writers have found that shared interests and collective consciousness are absent among many other groups in society (Giddens 1979, Massey 1984, Urry 1981). In other words, Florida's Creative Class should be considered as a broad grouping of differing categories and not as a class within itself. The confusion with the use of 'class' could be from mistranslation (Calvert 1982, Ossowski 1963) and longitudinal development of the term (Florida 2002).

Another definition of 'class' comes from Max Weber. His definition reflects people's situation in a society, and is measured in terms of goods (property class), life condition (acquisition class), and satisfaction/frustration (social class). His subsequent study led him to his influential three-component theory of stratification (Gerth & Wright Mills 1946), where he suggested that there was an interaction between 'class' (of economic order), 'estate' (of social order), and 'parties' (of the distribution of power). Class is not the only component in influencing an individual's standing in society, and from this we can conclude that it is not an appropriate term or interpretation for the grouping Florida refers to.



Key:
 normal = creative class professions (listed and defined in Florida, 2002)
italic = associated creative professions (mentioned throughout Florida, 2002)
 ----- = 'super-creative core' boundary: the most important creative actors in urban regeneration
 _____ = 'creative professional' boundary: important creative actors in urban regeneration

Fig. 1. Diagram of Richard Florida's Creative Class developed from his definition of this class given in chapter 4 and the appendix (Florida 2002).

Concerning the first two components, Osowski (1963) and Calvert (1982) warned of the words and definitions being lost in translation¹,

leading to interchangeable use of 'class' and 'estate' in social discourse. Moreover, in essence the word 'estate' has different meanings in German and in English. Hence, it is better to use the word 'status' when writing in English. Nevertheless, Florida utilises the term 'class' as an all-encom-

¹ Weber's essay "Class, status and party" was originally written in German, most subsequent studies on 'status' were in English.

passing economic group: "The main point I want to make here is that the basis of the Creative Class is economic. I define it as an economic class and argue that its economic function both underpins and informs its members' social, cultural and lifestyle choices" (Florida 2002: 68).

Florida rejects the traditional Marxist class categories because of today's progressive employer-employee relations and increasing fluidity of knowledge transfer from a broad range of professions². In essence, Florida's interpretation simplifies the complex and multifaceted dimensions of social classification to simply the 'Creative Class' (consisting of a 'Super-Creative Core' and 'Creative Professionals'), the 'Working Class', the 'Service Class', and 'Agriculture' [*sic*], as defined by their economic functions. There is only high mobility within Florida's Creative Class, while a glass ceiling is placed for the other classes. Figure 1 is a diagram that summarises those who are deemed to be part of the Creative Class.

The suggestion of social mobility between the elite and other members of the Creative Class is debatable. Florida credited the idea to Paul Fussell's anti-class grouping called 'category X' or 'X people', incorrectly named 'X class'³ (Florida 2002: 67). He also placed more weight on the cultural dimension by suggesting that there is 'emerging coherence' in these people sharing similar desires, tastes, consumption and buying habits, social identity, and devotion to creative work. This idea of Florida is similar to Veblen's (1899) concept of the 'leisure class' by replacing the word 'leisure' with 'creative' and incorporating Fussell's observations of the X-class, as well as including young people devoted to art, writing and forms of creative work in combination to form his Creative Class.

² The idea of including any profession that uses someone to imaginatively manipulate knowledge (the suggestion from Florida 2002 includes legal and financial occupations) does not mean he or she is working in a creative industry. The majority follow routines and regular procedures in a non-creative way. If you are going to add bankers into a 'creative community' because there are some creative bankers, then why not bring in all occupations since all jobs can, in a sense, be done creatively.

³ In fact Fussell wrote: "X people are better conceived as belonging to a category than a class because you are not born an X person, as you are born and reared a prole [*sic*] or a middle" (Fussell 1983: 179).

With regard to economic production, Florida believes that a person within the class is self-sufficient on his own land (or in his own mind), without relying on outside labour. They are part of an exclusive group of people with varying modes of production which provides little evidence of a division of labour. This self-sufficiency is similar to Marx's study of French peasants in the 19th century, which considered that the observed lack of dependence on each other or other 'classes' was one of the main reasons that they were a group rather than a 'class'. Moreover, there is recognition that members of the said Creative Class are found at all tiers of society and have no concept of collective, class identity, nor share common concerns (Florida 2002, Markusen 2006). Essentially, creative people should not be grouped as a 'class', as it is both misleading and inaccurate.

3. Stratified consumption of ideas

This paper acknowledges that the concept of class is ever evolving and becoming more complex, which means that Florida's (2002) inclusion of the cultural dimension when observing the phenomenon is valid. However, the vagueness and general 'anti-class' scope of his discourse is hard to reconcile with the widely held and more comprehensive interpretations of class (DeFazio 2002, Ban et al. 2003, Peck 2005, Ponzini & Rossi 2010).

If we relate spatial patterns to consumption, then we see that not all members of the Creative Class live or shop in the same area. This is particularly important for urban regeneration, as members of this so-called class are from such a broad social spectrum that they could equally play the role of a gentrifier, the gentrified, or even gentrifying mercenaries (who are deliberately introduced to an area to catalyse gentrification). Policies adopting this broad understanding of social class and a blurring between identity, production, and property⁴ have indirectly led to creative-led gentrification because they aim to group knowledge workers as being easier to manage and fitting the provision of smaller units. Therefore, it is

⁴ Today, there is more emphasis on intellectual property and less on land ownership.

important to look at the makeup of various creative communities and their respective positions within a society. In doing so, we observe a broad divergence of spatial and cultural consumption within the Creative Class, which runs counter to the defining characteristics of class.

Giddens (1979), Massey (1984), and Urry (1981) believed that spatial separation was a major feature of class differentiation. Whatever class someone fits into, a distinctive lifestyle, habits, behaviour, and traits are adopted as part of being members of a class. The underlining feature is that the economy influences wealth and employment, which in turn condition a person's position in society through life and relative social standing. Such spatial separation can therefore influence the level of social mobility. Socio-economic relations are spatially structured, aiding and/or inhibiting class interactions and the development of class cultures, and can motivate collective action in response to the stratification of society.

Spatial separation of creative people within a city has been observed. However, it is unclear if this is because of class issues. There are observations that unrelated creative clusters within large cities exist because of genres (Hauge & Hrac's 2010, Currid 2007). Differences in shared cognitive working patterns, aesthetic appreciation, and philosophy of art, shape these genres and scenes. In fact, O'Connor & Gu (2010) note that those in the creative industries may not identify themselves as working in such an industry. Some of them even go as far as refusing to recognise themselves as part of a creative economic sector.

Creative scenes are the cultural output from the genre which can be used as an identification of a place; for example, the 'ghetto' is often related to hip hop. Hauge and Hrac's (2010) paper on the indie scene in the Canadian cities of Halifax and Toronto suggests that it is not common for the members and consumers of certain scenes to interact with another scene in the same city, but more common to link up with associated scenes in other cities and countries.

The wealth, distinctive approach and appreciation of art (cognitive patterns) of individual members of the Creative Class could be poles apart, to the degree that it would be meaningless to consider them as a class in the economic sense. As discussed below, groupings of creative actors

are more validly defined by their choice of consumption as well as cognitive and occupational working behaviour.

4. Creatives

What Florida calls the Creative Class is broad and actually made up of individuals from multiple classes and social standings. For this reason, the concept of class cannot be applied here to creative people. Instead, this paper prefers to use the collective term 'creatives' when describing creative actors.

The paper's analysis of differences among creative people will go deeper than Florida's occupational categories listed in the appendix (Florida 2002: 328). The initial category that this paper is concerned with is professions associated with the arts and creative modes of production, as they are related strands to the creative communities' DNA (Mo 2009). Fussell (1983) also noted X people's tendency to fall into a particular profession, e.g., writers, because of their common way of working and outlook on the world. In short, creativity is more a predisposition of certain individuals rather than a trait of an economic function.

Failure to properly understand or consider the differing requirements, behaviours and interactions of different types of creatives can lead to policies and approaches having a detrimental rather than a positive impact. However, it is exactly the narrow focus of Florida's approach and the 'one-size-fits-all' solutions it proposes which garners support from urban planners. The rest of this paper will make observations on the spatial and geographical divergence among creatives, which shows why creative people should not be considered a generic grouping.

4.1. Creative subgroups

So far this paper has argued for a narrowing of our interpretation of creative actors, and to acknowledge sensitivity in different creative activities. As Mo (2009) commented, it is important to consider geographical differences in everyday working and socialising activities. Since this pa-

per is interested in redefining creative groupings, we will only concentrate on the space and places that cater for their working practices.

The observation of different creative practices will be drawn from fieldwork on two creative clusters: New York's Lower East Side and Greater Manchester's Islington Mill. Lower East Side is a traditional working-class neighbourhood in Lower Manhattan, with a mixed land use. Its building stock is typically narrow tenement buildings. Islington Mill is a studio complex in a former cotton-spinning mill located in a residential part of Salford – a largely working-class city adjacent to Manchester.

It is possible to find a mix of creatives clustering in an area; however, it is also observed that creatives of a similar mode of production have a tendency to live in particular units with specific features and/or infrastructure, or floors of a building. Figure 2 gives a brief overview of five different modes of the production pattern, or subgroups, that many creatives fall into: fine art, plastic art, fashion, performance, and literature.

The fine art subgroup is typically made up of painters and designers. The universal demand of this subgroup is for storage space. Painters tend to have more spatial demands than their peers: as they work with natural light and solvents, large and movable windows are important. To make the most of sunlight, the room should have a skylight and windows positioned on the south wall. This subgroup is flexible in location; nonetheless the top floor is the preferred option.

Members of the plastic art subgroup share similar storage needs as their fine art counterparts. The most important difference is that their medium and equipment is bulkier and heavier, which means they have to be as close to the ground floor as possible and ideally have direct access to transport from their studio. If we look at ceramists in Islington Mill, as well as large storage space (for a potter's wheel, kiln and their products), close proximity to water is essential. Sinks at the Salford complex were found on the ground, first and fifth floors. The ground floor would be ideal, but it was earmarked as a gig and exhibition space, and a studio. The studio was used by a furniture maker, since Islington Mill's owner gave him priority as his products were hard to move up and down the stairs on a weekly basis. Subsequently,

the next best part of the studio complex was the first floor, which is known as the 'potter's floor'. A complex theory has created this cluster, not the desire to be amongst the same profession.

It was noted in Lower East Side and shopping districts of Greater Manchester that fashion subgroups combined production and selling activities in the same space. Depending on their products, such as hand-knitted scarves or tailored suits, the demand for certain amenities and infrastructure varies. They are commonly located in shopping areas because selling activities are more space- and place-specific: like shops, they need large windows and on-street/passageway frontage where there are large concentrations of people. Conversely, the fashion subgroup is found in more isolated locations like Islington Mill. Those are usually people/organisations who are successful enough to afford rent for a dedicated storage and production space. In these cases, there are no particular spatial and locational requirements; the most common infrastructural requirement is a lockable door.

The performance subgroup can range from musicians to thespians. They are grouped together because of their shared spatial requirements for performing, rehearsing and recording activities. The common issues in this subgroup are noise and the movement of equipment. The latter problem is similar to the plastic art subgroup.

Noise is the most contested issue for areas containing performance subgroup activities. Hence it is important that units must be well insulated or located away from people who require a quiet environment, i.e. residents in the evenings and at work. This is rarely possible in clustered areas. Because of Islington Mill's residential location and studios, performances in the gig space must be well insulated from the outside (there are two doors to the exit) and reduced to set hours in the evening or at weekends (studios are only work spaces and most people set themselves working hours). Furthermore, Islington Mill has a policy of only allowing those from the minimalist genre to record in the studio complex because it is the 'easiest type of music to work with'. Here, management is important. The noisy mixed-use location of Lower East Side means that temporal and genre management is less important as long as the activities are spatially separated: the major-

		Creatives' subgroup					
		Fine art	Plastic art	Fashion	Performance	Literature	
Essential needs	Workplace interior	Electricity	Depends on mode of production	Depends on mode of production	Yes	Depends on mode of production	Not essential
		Floor level	Not essential	Depends on size of work (normally at ground level)	Ground floor frontage	Flexible	Not essential
		High ceiling	Depends on mode of production	Depends on mode of production	Not essential	Not essential	Not essential
		Large windows	Depends on mode of production. Essential for painters	Not essential	Depends on mode of production	Depends on mode of production	Not essential
		Storage security	Depends on mode of production	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not essential
		Size of room(s)	Depends on mode of production	Depends on mode of production	Depends on mode of production	Flexible	Not essential
		Sound proofing	Not essential	Not essential	Not essential	Yes - especially during recording	Not essential
	Water	Depends on mode of production	Depends on mode of production	Not essential	Not essential	Not essential	
	Surroundings	Amenities	Not essential	Not essential	Not essential	Flexible	Relaxing
		Atmosphere	Flexible	Flexible	Centre of commerce (high footfall)	Area tolerant of noise	Relaxing
Infrastructure		Flexible	Close to good public transport or car park	At a transport hub	Close to good public transport or car park	Not essential	

Fig. 2. Subgroups generated by the divergence of particular needs, and their main land-use competitors.

ity of spaces for the performance subgroup are found at ground or basement level.

The literature subgroup, like poets and writers, is the least spatially attached of all subgroups. Henceforth, none of them rent studios at Islington Mill, although some go to the complex for discussion events, such as reading groups. I have attended such events in public places during my fieldwork in Lower East Side; those places were in pubs and cafes. A common response from informants in New York and Greater Manchester when asked about the most important aspect of the space and place for writing was the 'correct environment'. This ranged from being in a place when he or she is able to go 'people watching' and listen to good music, to complete isolation.

Both cases suggest that creatives can cluster and that they are not all the same. However, they are spatially separate because of work convenience and catering for their medium of production. The Islington Mill case further suggests that activities are not bound to a cluster. In addition, the DIY-esque events at the Islington Mill cluster can be identified as a scene where there is a translocational pattern of sharing DIY performers, artists, and consumers with cities like Leeds and Berlin, rather than with other clusters within Greater Manchester. Despite their close proximity to these events, few creatives renting studios in Islington Mill go to them. It appears that creatives naturally spread out across the city, and cluster if they hear of the correct space meeting their criteria when working.

5. Conclusion

This paper illustrates how creatives organise themselves within a cluster because of their practice and their immediate surroundings.

An important finding is that creatives can be split into five sets of general practices. It was suggested here that the subgroups can be split again according to their working medium. However, it can be seen that these subgroups have common preferred spatial consumption patterns at the building level. More research is necessary on the micro-level aspect of the urban spatial practices of creatives.

It is important to note that Lower East Side and Islington Mill are not the only creative clusters in their respective cities. This is especially important in the case of Islington Mill because it is located in a residential area of a city that is seldom visited; in fact, most of those working in Islington Mill often visit and rely on neighbouring Manchester, or other cities, to further their practice. Conversely, it is possible for creatives to be more self-sufficient in Lower East Side because it is a mixed-use and animated location situated in a well-populated part of New York's Manhattan.

Given that there are many studies of differences in the consumption of space and place between classes and that these consumption patterns vary within specific segments of Richard Florida's Creative Class (i.e. those producing products in the arts), it should now be clear to the reader that there is no one Creative Class, but a plethora of different creative groups and subgroups within which there are a wide range of practices and scenes across which a socially diverse range of actors consume and produce in greatly different ways. Creative people do not consume as a single *class*; creative-orientated policymakers should be aware of this fact when attempting to set up 'creative clusters'.

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