

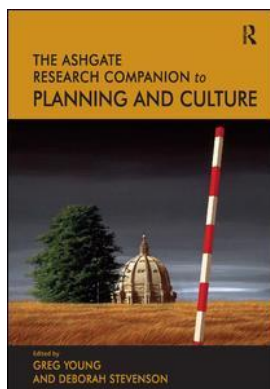
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Culture to Creativity to Environment – and Back Again¹

Toby Miller

This chapter examines the theory and history of cultural policy, a classically Enlightenment discourse that is under threat from the new right's discourse of creative industries. It then provides a brief case study of related environmental issues to highlight the risks when industrial priorities dominate cultural ones.²

Culture and Policy

The word 'culture' derives from the Latin 'colere', which implied tending and developing agriculture as part of subsistence (Adorno 2009: 146). With the advent of capitalism's division of labour, culture came both to *embody* instrumentalism and to *abjure* it, via the industrialization of farming, on the one hand, and the cultivation of individual taste, on the other. Eighteenth-century German, French and Spanish dictionaries bear witness to a metaphorical shift from culinary cultivation to spiritual elevation. The spread of literacy and printing saw customs and laws passed on, governed and adjudicated through the written word. Cultural texts supplemented and supplanted physical force as guarantors of authority. With the Industrial Revolution, populations urbanized, food was imported, textual forms were exchanged and an emergent consumer society stimulated horse racing, opera, art exhibitions, masquerades and balls. The impact of this shift was indexed in cultural labour: *poligrafia* in fifteenth-century Venice and hacks in eighteenth-century London wrote popular and influential conduct books. These works of instruction on everyday urban life marked the textualization of custom and the appearance of new occupational identities (Briggs and Burke 2003). Cultural policies emerged as secular, urban alternatives to deistic, rural knowledge (Schelling 1914: 180) in an emerging capitalist age focused on 'self-realization' (Weber 2000). These policies also informed imperial expansion through Spain's *conquista de América*,

¹ The editors provided useful feedback.

² As this is meant to be an omnibus survey, nations and regions are mentioned as well as cities.

Portugal's *missão civilizadora*, and France and Britain's *mission civilisatrice*, creating an anxiety that has never subsided (Mowlana 2000). The United States was a classic instance of an import culture. In 1820, Sydney Smith asked: 'In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?' (1844: 141) and Herman Melville criticized the nineteenth-century US devotion to all things English as an obstacle to bringing 'Republicanism into literature' (Newcomb 1996: 94). In imperial Britain, the study of culture formed 'the core of the educational system'. It was 'believed to have peculiar virtues in producing politicians, civil servants, Imperial administrators and legislators', incarnating and indexing 'the arcane wisdom of the Establishment' (Plumb 1964: 7). Culture was expected to produce and renovate what Matthew Arnold called 'that powerful but at present somewhat narrow-toned organ, the modern Englishman' (1875: x). A century ago, US higher education was dominated in its turn by moral philosophy, Latin, and Greek in an attempt to match and transcend that organ (Ayers 2009: 25).

Kant's *Critique of Judgment* ideologized these developments. He argued that culture ensured popular 'conformity to laws without the law'. Aesthetics could generate 'morally practical precepts' by schooling the populace to transcend particular interests via the development of a 'public sense, *i.e.* a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation ... to weight its judgement with the collective reason of mankind' (1987: 151). Kant's *Political Writings* envisaged 'emergence from ... self-incurred immaturity', independent of religious, governmental or commercial direction and animated by the desire to lead rather than consume (Kant 1991: 54, also see Hunter 2008: 590). For Coleridge, 'the fountain heads' of culture were 'watching over' the sciences, 'cultivating and enlarging the knowledge already possessed ... in order to be citizens' (1839: 46) while Rousseau maintained that it was 'not enough to say to the citizens, be good; they must be taught to be so' (1755: 130).

Nineteenth-century capitalism generated a specialized and expansive division of person and labour, articulated through the shift from rural to urban living and the growth of European empires. Revolutionary thinkers also picked up on this issue. Marx wrote: 'it is impossible to create a moral power by paragraphs of law.' There must also be 'organic laws supplementing the Constitution' (1978: 27, 35). Gramsci (1971: 204) theorized this supplement as an 'equilibrium' between constitutional law ('political society' or a 'dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in conformity with a given type of production and economy') and organic law ('civil society' or the 'hegemony of a social group over the entire nation exercised through so-called private organizations such as the church, the unions, the schools, etc.'). These organic laws and their textual manifestations represent each 'epoch's consciousness of itself' (Althusser 1969: 108); hence the extraordinary investments by audiences, creators, governments and corporations in culture.

Cultural policy today refers to institutional supports for aesthetic production and memory. It bridges the distance between art and everyday life. Governments, trade unions, colleges, social movements, community groups, foundations, charities, churches and businesses aid, fund, control, promote, teach and evaluate culture. This happens through law courts protecting exotic dancing as free speech; curricula requiring students to study texts because they are uplifting; film commissions sponsoring scripts to reflect national identity; cities working with companies to gentrify downtown districts; and foundations funding minorities to supplement dominant norms. These criteria derive

from legal doctrine, citizenship education, tourism goals, urban plans or philanthropic desires.

There is a seemingly interminable struggle between consumerist and *dirigiste* approaches to cultural policy. The consumerist approach argues that culture circulates satisfactorily through the mechanics of price: whatever succeeds commercially is *ipso facto* in tune with popular taste and is an efficient, effective and just allocation of resources. The *dirigiste* approach counters that cultural improvement of the population is necessary, because markets favour pleasure over sophistication and popular taste is ephemeral. In other words, markets fail to encourage and sustain art's function of defining and developing universal human values and forms of expression. At the junction of these approaches, a contest ensues over whether 'it is more worthwhile to look at a Titian on a wall than watch a football game on television' (Dworkin 1985: 232–3). As most people supposedly prefer the latter – a preference that can be quantified through their preparedness to pay – it is deemed condescending to force them to subsidize the former as part of their generic tax burden on the grounds that timeless art can only survive if the *poloi* are required to admire it.

Cultural policy studies began in the 1970s within the positivistic social sciences as a means of managing these dilemmas. It developed through evaluations of policies and programmes through the Association of Cultural Economics; conferences on economics, social theory and the arts; and publications such as *Arts and Education Policy Review*, the *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *Poetics* and the *Journal of Cultural Economics*, which investigated audience preferences and the ethical and technical management of the arts. Then a challenge came from the left. Habermas problematized conventional cultural policy thus:

Cultural policy is assigned the task of operating on two fronts. On the one hand, it is supposed to discredit intellectuals as a power-crazy and non-productive social class supporting modernism; for post-material values, especially expressive needs for self-fulfillment and critical judgements of universalistic morality, are threats to the motivational resources of a functioning labor society and a depoliticized public sphere. On the other hand, conventional morality, patriotism, bourgeois religion and folk culture, is to be carefully nurtured, in order to compensate for personal burdens on one's private life and to offer some cushion against the pressures of a competitive society and its accelerated modernization. (1986: 11)

Then Stuart Cunningham suggested that applying cultural studies to policy matters might renew both areas. Cultural studies could transcend its tendency to criticize without bringing about change by drawing energy and direction from 'a social democratic view of citizenship and the trainings necessary to activate and motivate it'. (See also Stevenson, Chapter 9, this volume.) Such an 'engagement with policy' would avoid 'a politics of the status quo' as per the conventional social sciences thanks to cultural studies' concern with power (1992: 11).

A policy trend within cultural studies took off. Key figures included Tom O'Regan (1996) and Tony Bennett (1995). Working on the media and museums respectively, they drew on *dirigiste* French models of urban planning to designate cultural precincts and the like. Their methods – archival studies, survey research, policy analysis and Foucauldian theory – emphasized the foundational nature of government in the creation

of the liberal individual (that is, a person open to new ideas delivered in a rational form and reasoned manner). In 1991, the Australian Academy of the Humanities responded to such developments, introducing its venerable members to cultural studies, cultural policy, feminism and multiculturalism, then adding these as fellowship categories (Morris 2005: 111–13, 116–17). In Latin America, influential engagements with cultural policy materialized in the work of Néstor García Canclini (2001) and cognate practice was underway in Canada (Robertson 2006) and Britain (Lewis 1991). But more was at stake than a new trend in cultural studies. Congruent changes were taking place in the political economy.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, economic production in the global North shifted from a farming and manufacturing base to a cultural one. The population was harnessed to jobs in music, theatre, animation, recording, radio, TV, architecture, software, design, toys, books, heritage, tourism, advertising, fashion, crafts, photography, performance, the Internet, games, sports and cinema. In 2005, the International Intellectual Property Alliance estimated the value of the copyright industries (its term for the cultural industries) at US\$1.38 trillion in the United States. That was 11.12 per cent of total Gross Domestic Product, and it accounted for 23.78 per cent of overall economic growth. Culture employed more than 11 million people across the country, over 8 per cent of the workforce. In terms of foreign sales, 2005 exports of music, software, film, television and print were US\$110.82 billion (Siwek 2006).

Such developments raised the stakes of culture and policy from binding populations together to keeping them fed and housed. They also promised a way out of the opposition between choice and paternalism, which became moot when commitments to building citizens married commitments to building economies. We might say that a nineteenth-century Arnold (Matthew) endorsed a twentieth-century one (Schwarzenegger) and *vice versa*.

Creativity: The New Right of Cultural Studies

Not surprisingly, latter-day practitioners and students of cultural policy are in thrall to economism, notably the creative-industry approach of Richard Florida (2002) and his acolytes from the new right of cultural studies. (See also Sasaki, Chapter 12, this volume.) Florida speaks of a ‘creative class®’ that he says is revitalizing post-industrial towns in the global North devastated by the relocation of agriculture and manufacturing to places with cheaper labour pools. The revival of such cities, Florida argues, is driven by a magic elixir of tolerance, technology and talent, as measured by same-sex households, broadband connections and higher degrees. As a performative and profitable point, he has even trademarked the brand: 3298801 is Florida’s registration number for ‘creative class®’ with the US Patent and Trademark Office (<http://tess2.uspto.gov>).³

True believers argue that cultural policy is outmoded, because post-industrialized societies have seen an efflorescence of the creative sector via new technology and small business. Kantian concerns barely apply, let alone Gramscian ones. Culture is

³ Thanks to Bill Grantham for directing me to the Office’s Trademark Electronic Search System.

central to employment, rather than a mechanism for holding societies together. In the words of the lapsed-leftist cultural theorist and President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Jacques Attali (2008: 31), a new ‘mercantile order forms wherever a creative class masters a key innovation from navigation to accounting or, in our own time, where services are most efficiently mass produced, thus generating enormous wealth’. This is said to give rise to an ‘aristocracy of talent’ (Kotkin 2001: 22) as magically multiplying meritocrats luxuriate in ever-changing techniques, technologies and networks.

As they wander the globe promoting tertiary industry against agriculture and manufacturing, creative-industry consultants become branded celebrities, carpetbaggers carefully sidestepping the historic tasks laid out by the left. Prone to cybertarianism, these chorines of digital capitalism and the technological sublime pile out of business class and onto the jet way, descending on welcoming burghers eager to be made over at public expense by professors whose books appear on airport newsstands rather than cloistered scholarly shelves (Gibson and Klocker 2004). Should you wish to hear Florida at your next convention, visit the website of the ‘Creative Class Group’ (<http://creativeclass.com>). Celebrity Speakers (<http://speakers.co.uk/csaWeb/speaker,JAQATT>) will link you to the Global Speakers Bureau for a date with Attali.

Creative-cities chorines alight from the tarmac in three major groups. Richard Floridians hop a limousine from the airport then ride around town on bicycles, spying on ballet-loving, gay-friendly, multicultural computer geeks who have moved to deindustrialized rustbelts. Australian creationists criticize cultural policy studies as residually socialistic and textual. And Brussels bureaucrats offer blueprints to cities eager for affluence and prepared to be reinvented via culture and tolerance.

Meanwhile, the US President’s Committee on Arts and the Humanities welcomes the ‘creative economy’ as a central focus of its activities, stressing:

The President’s Committee focuses its leadership, with other agencies and the private sector, on the power of the arts and humanities as an economic driver, sustaining critical cultural resources and fostering civic investment in cultural assets and infrastructure. These efforts help speed innovation and expand markets and consumers, directly benefiting local economies. (<http://www.pcah.gov/creative-economy> [accessed 4 April 2013])

This approach promises a pragmatic uptake of cultural difference, import substitution, export orientation, and national and regional pride and influence. Municipal, regional, state, continental and global agencies have responded by replacing older funding and administrative categories of culture with the discourse of the creative industries. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) decrees that ‘[c]reativity, more than labor and capital, or even traditional technologies, is deeply embedded in every country’s cultural context’ (2004: 3). Nowadays, far from looking to destabilize capitalism and neo-colonialism through culture – as they once did – UNCTAD and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) maintain that ‘the interface among creativity, culture, economics and technology, as expressed in the ability to create and circulate intellectual capital, has the potential to generate income, jobs and export earnings while at the same time promoting social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development’ (United Nations Conference on Trade

and Development/United Nations Development Program 2008). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has a Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity (2002) that heralds the creative industries as a *portmanteau* term covering the cultural sector that goes even further, beyond output and into that favourite neoliberal *canard* of process. In 2006 Rwanda convened a global conference on the 'creative economy' to take the social healing engendered by culture and commodify it. Brazil houses UNCTAD and UNDP's International Forum for Creative Industries. Even India's venerable last gasp of Nehruvianism, its Planning Commission, boasts a committee for creative industries; Singapore, Hong Kong Japan, and South Korea follow similar strategies (Cunningham 2009b, Keane 2006, Ramanathan 2006) and China is moving 'from an older, state-dominated focus on cultural industries ... towards a more market-oriented pattern of creative industries' (UNCTAD 2004: 7).

The change is an intellectual one as well. This new right of cultural studies is part of an innovative interdisciplinarity that blends research and social inclusiveness (Brint et al. 2009 describe this tendency). Professors already interested in cultural policy, for reasons of cultural nationalism or in opposition to corporate culture, hope to be something more than 'the little match seller, nose pressed to the window, looking in on the grand life within' (Cunningham 2006). Many have shifted their discourse from nation-building to copyright protection, focusing on comparative advantage and competition rather than heritage and aesthetics.

Put another way, neoliberal emphases on creativity have succeeded old-school cultural patrimony. Cunningham, for instance, no longer speaks of mixing socialist ideals with reformism. His rhetoric favours 'a better matching of curriculum to career' via 'practical business challenges', such that 'non-market disciplines' generate internal markets in competition with others and forge 'an alliance with the business sector' (2009a, 2007a, 2007b).

These powerful advocates and institutions are in thrall to the idea of culture as an endlessly growing resource that can dynamize societies. The Australian Research Council, which once supported a major cultural policy initiative under the Gramscian-turned-Foucauldian Bennett, now funds a Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (<http://cci.edu.au>) run by Cunningham and, for a time, the lapsed semiotic romantic John Hartley, who preaches evolutionary economics as 'cultural science' (<http://cultural-science.org>). In the same vein, the Australian Academy for the Humanities calls for 'research in the humanities and creative arts' to be tax-exempt because of their contribution to research and development, and subject to the same surveys of 'employer demand' as the professions and the sciences (Cunningham 2007a).

Britain's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts say '[t]he arts and humanities have a particularly strong affiliation with the creative industries' and undertake research that 'helps to fuel' them and boost innovation across the economy (Bakhshi, Schneider and Walker 2008: 1). The British Academy seeks to understand and further the 'creative and cultural industries' (2004: viii) and even the very sober National Research Council of the US National Academies notes that the electronic media stimulate 'economic development' (Mitchell, Inouye and Blumenthal 2003: 1).

In other words, a neoliberal bequest of creativity has succeeded the old-school patrimony of culture. Economic transformations have comprehensively challenged the idea of culture as removed from industry because the comparatively cheap and

easy access to making and distributing meaning afforded by internet media and genres is thought to have eroded the one-way hold on culture that saw a small segment of the world as producers and the larger segment as consumers. The result is said to be a democratized media, higher skill levels, more sovereign customers, powerful challenges to old patterns of expertise and institutional authority, and more liveable, sustainable and pleasurable regions, especially cities. Creativity is distributed rather than centralized and it becomes both a pleasure and a responsibility to invest in human capital and ensure a robust civil society and self.

The working assumption is that the individual talent of the creative sector is progressively overrunning the mass scale of the culture industries. (See also O'Connor, and Montgomery, Chapters 10 and 20, this volume). It's a kind of Marxist/Godardian dream, where people fish, film, fornicate and finance from morning to midnight as technology obliterates geography, sovereignty and hierarchy in an alchemy of truth and beauty. A deregulated, individuated world makes consumers into producers, frees the disabled from confinement, encourages new subjectivities, rewards intellect and competitiveness, links people across cultures, and allows billions of flowers to bloom in a post-political cornucopia. Consumption is privileged, production is discounted, and labour is forgotten (Dahlström and Hermelin 2007, Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). This discourse avowedly stands against elitism, for populism, against subvention, for markets, against public service, for philanthropy and so on.

A Counter-Discourse

A paradox lies at the base of this movement. Thirty years ago, Foucault identified co-operated think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute as intellectual handservants of neoliberalism, whilst recognizing that these vocalists of a 'permanent criticism of government policy' (2008: 247) actually sought permanent influence *over* such policy, using markets as their privileged 'interface of government and the individual' (2008: 253). Neoliberalism governed populations through market imperatives, invoking and training them as ratiocinative liberal actors waiting for their inner creativity to be unlocked. Consumption was turned on its head: everyone was creative, no one was simply a spectator, and we were all manufacturing pleasure while witnessing activities we had paid to watch. Internally divided – but happily so – each person was 'a consumer on the one hand, but ... also a producer' (2008: 226). We can see this duality at play in the *dirigiste* mode of urban cultural planning mentioned above, which sought to do good by doing accumulation (Stevenson 2004).

Unsurprisingly, not everyone accepts the creative-industry chorines' embrace of techno-charged capitalist culture with equanimity. And cultural policy has a radical as well as a reactionary lineage. For instance, during the 1970s UNESCO sought a fundamental transformation of international cultural exchange, based on post-colonial states undoing their dependent relationships with the global North. This vibrant desire, which animated many countries and social movements, was shut down in the mid-1980s when Britain and the United States withdrew from UNESCO, crippling its funding and legitimacy (Gerbner, Mowlana and Nordenstreng 1994). Something similar happened when the Organization recognized Palestine in 2011. Again, the United States engaged

in symbolic violence, refusing to pay its dues after losing a crucial vote on the matter (Nuland 2011).

Apart from these ideological concerns, creative-industries discourse is questionable on its own terms. There is minimal proof that a creative class exists or that 'creative cities' outperform their drab brethren economically following makeovers 'from the rusty coinage of "cultural industries" to the newly minted "creative industries"' (Ross 2006–7: 1). Companies certainly seek skills when deciding where to locate their businesses; but skills also seek work. City centres generally attract workers who are young and not yet breeding. And the centrality of gay culture in the Floridian calculus derives from assuming all same-sex households are queer. Even if this were accurate, many successful cities in the United States roll with reaction (consider Orlando or Phoenix). The definition of urbanism in US statistics includes the suburbs (which now hold more residents than do cities) so that, too, is suspect in terms of the importance of downtown lofts to economies. There is no evidence of an overlap of tastes, values, living arrangements and locations between artists on the one hand and accountants on the other, despite their being bundled together in the creative concept; nor is it sensible to assume other countries replicate the massive internal mobility of the US population. Finally, other surveys pour scorn on the claim that quality of life is central to selecting business campuses as opposed to low costs, good communications technology, proximity to markets, and adequate transportation systems. A European Commission evaluation of 29 Cities of Culture disclosed that their principal goal – economic growth stimulated by the public subvention of culture to renew failed cities – has failed. Glasgow, for instance, was initially hailed as a success of the programme; but despite many years of rhetoric, it has seen no sustained growth (Alanen 2007, Nathan 2005). Anyone who has spent time in Mexico City (see http://mim.promexico.gob.mx/wb/mim/ind_perfil_del_sector for boosterism) or downtown Los Angeles (see <http://www.laane.org/about-us/what-we-do> for critique), where I have lived this past year, can bear witness to the impact of the creativity *ethos* as it smuggles middle-class privilege through customs and expels the homeless and the bereft in the name of renewal.

The question of social justice and redistributive democracy hovers over the new right's soaring creative rhetoric (Pratt 2011). Kultur Macht Europa issued a sterling declaration following its Fourth Federal Congress on Cultural Policy in 2007 about the necessity of ensuring that artistic infrastructure is evaluated with regard to diverse and profound textuality. We see similar concerns in the Jodhpur Initiative for Promoting Cultural Industries in the Asia-Pacific Region, adopted in 2005 as the Jodhpur Consensus by 28 countries, and the Euromayday Network (Jodhpur Initiatives 2005, <http://euromayday.org>). And many scholars and activists are still committed to progressive cultural policy, such as George Yúdice (2002, Miller and Yúdice 2002) in Miami and San José and Kate Oakley (2006) and David Bell (2007) in Leeds. They beaver away, weathering slings and arrows from the comfortably pure ultra-left for engaging with commerce and the state, and sending a few of their own towards those who unproblematically embrace such links. It remains to be seen whether cultural policy will be organized in accord with neo-Kantianism, profiteering or progressive politics.

Cultural Waste

In any event, before there can be a story to sell, a message to influence, a consumer to buy or a renovated city to propagate in the collective and individual use of culture, there has to be a physical medium. Books, magazines, money and other printed media rely on papermaking and printing. Radios, televisions, computers, cell phones, easels, paintings, sculptures, instruments and music players arrive in our homes, offices and studios with parts that have been assembled, packaged and transported from excavated and manufactured materials. In short, apart from the immediate surroundings of buildings, classrooms, homes, subways, cars and campuses where people engage culture, its physical foundation is machinery that is created and operated through work and leaves an impact on the Earth. This is the very dirty, very large secret of cultural policy. Unravelling it requires both philosophical thinking and social-science method.

Consider an unlikely bedfellow for Habermas – Heidegger – or at least his famous paradox of the forester, a man who participates in the destruction of the very environment that gives meaning to his life in order to supply a key resource to *bourgeois* culture, which in turn uses it to shape his opinions:

The forester who measures the felled timber in the woods and who to all appearances walks the forest path in the same way his grandfather did is today ordered by the industry that produces commercial woods, whether he knows it or not. He is made subordinate to the orderability of cellulose, which for its part is challenged forth by the need for paper, which is then delivered to newspapers and illustrated magazines. The latter, in their turn, set public opinion to swallowing what is printed, so that a set configuration of opinion becomes available on demand. (1977: 299)

As the forester's work is subsumed into modern pulp and paper production, labour and the environment are further disarticulated from one another. Paper mills and printing presses are hailed as 'revolutionary' and newspapers, magazines, books and fine paper become signs of progress and intellectual life. They make no mention of his role or its environmental aftershocks.

For labour is acknowledged in today's brave new form of cultural policy only when it is abstracted from physical, dirty work (Mattelart 2002). The prevailing presumption is that the creative industries, especially the newer media, deliver a clean, post-industrial, capitalism. This myth has been continually reinforced by the 'virtual nature of much of the industry's content', which 'tends to obscure their responsibility for a vast proliferation of hardware, all with high levels of built-in obsolescence and decreasing levels of efficiency' (Boyce and Lewis 2009: 5).

Producing and distributing culture consumes, despoils and wastes natural resources and exploits human life at an ever-increasing rate. Cultural technologies contain toxic substances that pervade the sites and environs where they are manufactured, used and thrown away, poisoning humans, animals, vegetation, soil, air and water. Rapid cycles of innovation and planned obsolescence accelerate both the emergence of new electronic hardware and the accumulation of obsolete forms, which are transformed overnight into junk. Today's digital devices are made to break or become un-cool very rapidly indeed. This planned obsolescence reinforces consumerism and animates the

ideology of growth that says technological innovation is necessary. Immediacy and interactivity induce ignorance of inter-generational effects of consumption, including long-term harm to workers and the environment. Culture's residue is poisoned waterways, sickened workers and toxic habitats, and cities grow sick because of culture and 'creativity'.

In 2007, a combination of cultural technologies and production accounted for 3 per cent of all greenhouse gas emitted around the world. Between 20 and 50 million tonnes of electronic waste (e-waste) are generated annually, much of it via cell phones, televisions and computers, which wealthy people throw out regularly in order to buy replacements. E-waste is historically produced in Australasia, Western Europe, Japan, Canada and the United States, and dumped in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia in the form of a thousand different, often deadly, materials for each computer. Today, of course, India and China increasingly generate their own cultural detritus. Through the combined efforts of these creative nations, e-waste has become the fastest-growing part of municipal clean-ups around the world (Herat 2007, Malmmodin et al. 2010, Robinson 2009).

The accumulation of electronic hardware has caused grave environmental and health concerns that stem from the chemical and material composition of these commodities and their potential seepage into landfills, water sources and the bodies of workers. E-waste salvage yards have major implications for human health and safety wherever plastics and wires are burnt and circuit boards leached with acid or grilled then dumped in streams to minimize the volume of waste and retrieve valuable items. There are horrific implications for local and downstream land and water as well as residents. Perhaps 1 per cent of people in the global South now live as urban ragpickers, recycling the detritus of computers, printers, cell phones and the like. They amount to approximately 15 million people worldwide, often living and working in cities that have cultural policies designed to attract media technology and production – not to mention 'the creative class' – that poison land, air, water and bodies. Many ragpickers are pre-teen Chinese, Nigerian and Indian girls, picking away without protection at discarded televisions and computers in order to find precious metals and dump the remains in landfills. The metals are sold to recyclers, who rarely use landfills or labour in the global North because of environmental and industrial legislation *contra* the destruction to soil, water and workers caused by the dozens of poisonous chemicals and gases in these dangerous machines (Basel Action Network 2006, Basel Action Network and Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition 2002, Maxwell and Miller 2012, Osibanjo and Nnorom 2007, Ray et al. 2004, Tong and Wang 2004, Wong et al. 2007).⁴

Consider an environmental field very close to much cultural policy: film and television drama. The Political Economy Research Institute's 2004 *Misfortune 100: Top Corporate Air Polluters in the United States* placed media owners at numbers 1, 3, 16, 22 and 39. How can this be, given the advent of the Environmental Media Association's awards, the 2007 'Hollywood goes green' summit meeting, and *Hollywood Today's* boast that actors give green gifts of 'vintage-inspired' camisoles and recycled jewels (Pantera 2009, Ventre 2008)?

MSNBC.com admonishes that although 'the Prius reigns supreme as the current status symbol' in Hollywood, 'trucks that carry equipment from studios to locations

⁴ Thanks to Rick Maxwell, many of whose ideas inform this section.

and back continue to emit exhaust from diesel engines', as do generators on-set (Pantera 2009, Ventre 2008). Research into Hollywood's environmental impact has disclosed massive use of electricity and petroleum and the release of hundreds of thousands of tons of deadly emissions each year. In fact, the motion-picture industry is the biggest producer of conventional pollutants in Los Angeles. Municipal and state-wide levels of film-related energy consumption and greenhouse-gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) approximate to those of the aerospace and semi-conductor industries. Film consumers are also major producers of pollutants, from auto emissions, chemical run-off from parked cars and the energy to power home-entertainment devices (Corbett and Turco 2006).

Is this the brave new world of an urban economy driven by creativity, epitomized in a city like Los Angeles that is obsessed with culture to its very core? How can we engage and criticize this urban fantasy in ways that endow foresters, their equivalents and the public with power/knowledge? Via a cultural policy that tracks the materiality of the sign from start to finish along the commodity chain that makes it, brings it to us, then disposes of it.

A growing number of artists are criticizing apolitical celebrations of digital technology. Consider *Arte Povera's* use of found materials to rail at errant, arrogant consumption by highlighting e-waste, recycling and ragpickers, or such urban artists as Jessica Millman, Miguel Rivera, Alexdromeda, Sudhu Tewari, Natalie Jeremijenko, Nome Edonna, Chris Jordan, Erik Otto and Jane Kim. Yona Friedman and Jorge Crowe focus on artistic re-use rather than originality, while Julie Bargmann and Stacy Levy undertake creative clean-ups. Amsterdam's urbanscreens.org and Ars Electronica of Linz use electronic billboards to encourage active citizenship. Environmental art can cover both works that directly represent the environment – examples would include Monet's *London Series* or Constable's *Clouds* – and non-representational, performative works like Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, James Turrell's *Skyspace* or Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project*. They all assume nature is occupied and shaped by humanity and *vice versa*. Cultural producers such as these can return us to the original animation of culture – in its best Enlightenment form – as we look for progressive urban policies.

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