

REVIEWS

Creative Industries

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Oxford, Blackwell, 2005

ISBN 1-4051-0147-4 (hbk); ISBN 1-4051-0148-2 (pbk)

In the 2004 Hollywood romantic comedy *In Good Company*, Dennis Quaid plays Dan Foreman, a 51-year-old advertising executive whose career slides when *Sports America*, the magazine for which he sells ads, is acquired by media mogul ‘Teddy K’, played by Malcolm McDowell. Teddy K, who bears more than a slight resemblance in appearance and persona to Rupert Murdoch, owns GlobeCom, a colossal conglomerate that includes mobile phones, cereal, crackers, magazines, and more. One day, Teddy K makes a scheduled stop at the offices of *Sports America* to give a bells-and-whistles multimedia speech about his mantra and core business concept: *synergy*. Being somewhat of a Neanderthal when it comes to new-economy tradespeak, Dan Foreman blurts out in the middle of Teddy K’s motivational monologue some reasonable questions about whether all this talk of synergy with other GlobeCom products and services is going to make a better magazine out of *Sports America*. For his audacity in publicly asking whether the emperor is appropriately attired, Dan immediately is fired by one of Teddy K’s sycophantic and ruthless middle managers. *In Good Company*, a lightweight and modestly successful send-up of contemporary corporate culture, attempts no sustained critique of the wages of synergy, but this scene offers a pleasantly provocative moment to reflect on whether there’s any *there* there, indeed, if there is any meaningful value in the concept for the citizen-consumer. For the most part, synergy in the United States is a producer-oriented term, and one that is most commonly uttered by media CEOs advocating the breakdown of regulations that impede corporate growth and diversification, and by countless captured regulators who need to find a publicly palatable rhetoric for advancing the causes of the firms that will reward them handsomely once they leave government and become consultants, lobbyists and dealmakers who sell access to, and influence within, the federal bureaucracy.

In a tongue-in-cheek glossary on the subject of media mergers, the Freedom Forum’s *Media Studies Journal* puts a humorous spin on the idea of synergy:

SYNERGY—*Current*: the transcendental, binding arc of energy that radiates throughout the land and all peoples in it when two behemoths in the media industry seek to unite in order to clobber all known competition. *Obsolete*: oligopoly. (Douglas & Durham, 1996)

In practice, 'synergy' is well illustrated by the sort of churn that recycles information across the varied platforms owned by a single media conglomerate. It is a similar logic as 'churn' in financial trading: Don't create new product. Just re-package, re-purpose and re-sell existing product. That is evident in Clear Channel's 'local news' networking operation in the United States, which is a 'hub and spoke' system that has reporters reading news copy from a hub that is distant (even out of state) from the location where the reported news has taken place. Sometimes, the distant reports bear little relevance or importance to local citizens, and sometimes the mark is missed entirely due to significant time lags between when an important event occurs (such as a tornado) and when the news of it was needed. Reporters have very little idea of what news is important to the local community on which they are reporting, all the while adding the appearance of localism to cross-platform churn. This makes for the effective bundling of radio ad sales in multiple markets, but leaves much to be desired from the perspective of those needing local news.

Creative Industries does not advocate this sort of smoke-and-mirrors approach to cultural policy. Instead of neglecting the importance of the local within the local-global nexus, it explicitly and repeatedly recognizes that sustained creative endeavour and productivity are often the product of the conjuncture of place-specific talent and resources. The book promotes synergy while trying to shift the use of the term from a producer- to a consumer-oriented locus. In fact, in theorizing the transition from 'cultural industries' to 'creative industries', the book places front and centre the shift from producer to consumer. In this sense, it aims to depart from the mass-society and producer-oriented connotations associated with the viewpoint of Adorno and Horkheimer, familiar whipping boys in much of late cultural theory. In seeking to go beyond the 'cultural industries' problematic, *Creative Industries* asserts an empirical reality whose boundaries are maddeningly difficult, if not impossible, to identify, alongside a normative project that aims steadfastly to promote the conditions seen as necessary for creative enterprises to thrive. The book challenges a metaphor in which the consumer is acted upon, and in turn is expected to 'behave' in predictable fashion as a response to a manufactured cultural landscape, and it poses instead a model (and prevailing theme throughout the book) of 'consumption as action, not behavior'. Thus, according to the editor, 'consumption is part of the creative industries cycle rather than its destination' (p. 24). Within this cycle, the consumer also is at once the producer, a creative force in the production of meaning and social action. This is not a surprising characterization, coming as it does from a scholar who has contributed to bringing wider recognition within cultural theory to the limits of a productionist critique of media and culture.

I take no issue with that fundamental theme of the book, for we have much to gain in thinking about culture and creativity in the new ways outlined by the broad range of contributions to *Creative Industries*. There is much to ponder about the future-oriented discourse this book aims to generate, posing as it does as a source

of hope in place of ‘the totalizing discourses of the left and right of the twentieth century’ (p. 39). As a good work of scholarship should do, *Creative Industries* raises more questions than it answers, although that trait alone does not make for good social theory. At least as important is the capacity to stake out a domain that constitutes a frame of reference for theoretical engagement and future inquiry. In the case of science, empirical claims about the unity of a domain of inquiry constitute a basic act of theory construction, a principal purpose of which is to ascertain ‘the clarity, precision, and significance of the formulation of the domain and the theoretical problem regarding it’ (Shapere, 1977, p. 532). The editor is modest in asserting a domain and a related disciplinary matrix: ‘Whether such an approach constitutes a ‘new paradigm’ remains to be seen, but in the meantime what it says is of interest to—and in the interests of—people in business administration, communication, creative arts, cultural studies, economics, geography, IT, media studies, sociology, and urban studies, as well as non-academic readers interested in business and policy as well as creativity’ (p. 32). But this moment of caution about the degree to which consensus exists among this vast range of distinct parties contrasts rather sharply with the overall tone of the book in its generally unproblematic and repeated assertions as to the reality of the domain.

Whether or not the idea of creative industries is posed in this book as a *scientific* construct, the questions remain: *Has a consensus been established regarding the empirical validity of ‘creative industries’? Moreover, who are the adherents to such a consensus?* Some, if not several, contributors to this book appear as loose associates, invited to contribute to a project not of their invention, rather than committed exponents of the creative industries rubric, the latter of whom are perhaps best represented by the book’s editor and those who have written introductions to each of the sections. *Does the construct serve primarily as a heuristic device to guide the normative aspirations of those who embrace it?* If one is guided by the will to make the creative industries idea increasingly real, that is, to build an intellectual and professional community aimed at nurturing its development, the disinterest needed to credibly make the empirical claim may be unwittingly compromised. To be compelling, the claim must be more rigorously outlined than what the book offers. This, I suspect, is the most pressing challenge facing enthusiasts and interested sceptics alike. The reader needs to know what are the criteria for inclusion into and exclusion from the frame of creative industries. At present, because of its wide-ranging eclecticism, the book can at best be viewed as a starting point for what may in time become a more mature and demonstrably coherent field of inquiry. For now, the concept is more of a hypothesis about a domain that may not be as unified as some contributors to this book maintain, leading one to ponder why it is that ‘The creative industries, in short, have been rather slow to *name themselves* as such’ (p. 26; emphasis in original). If we follow Hartley’s prescription and step back far enough, the creative industries field does seem to hold together: ‘Their shape, interrelationships, and trends can only be observed from a bird’s-eye view, where larger patterns can be seen’ (p. 26).

The view from 40,000 feet may permit the appearance of unity among processes, enterprises and localities that otherwise might seem unrelated. But is the distance too great to enable us to see how generalities are manifested on the ground in the relationships among the parts?

'Creative industries' is a seductive term, used as it is to synergistically blend hip digital entrepreneurialism with progressive politics, global consciousness, avant-garde aestheticism, go-to new-economy optimism, workforce casualization and 'multitasking', and a bit of post-development hybridity theory, while simultaneously challenging the dichotomy between subsidized 'high' art, on the one hand, and commercially viable popular culture, on the other. According to the book's definition, 'The idea of the CREATIVE INDUSTRIES seeks to describe the *conceptual and practical convergence* of the CREATIVE ARTS (individual talent) with Cultural Industries (mass scale), in the context of the NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs) within a NEW KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY, for the use of newly INTERACTIVE CITIZEN-CONSUMERS' (p. 5; emphases and parentheses in original). Based on this definition, Hartley starts with the arguable premise that creative industries are a real and coherent entity with distinct, stable, readily describable and generally agreed-upon properties. However, he also readily acknowledges the definitional problem: 'The creative industries are so varied in scale, organization, and sector of economic activity that they are barely recognizable as a coherent object of analysis' (p. 23). Putting a sharper edge on what is problematic about the term, contributor John Howkins states simply: 'It is jargon; it does not fit common sense' (p. 119). Nevertheless, as with numerous other contributors to the book who press on in embracing and asserting the term, if not at times uncomfortably so, Hartley anticipates and confronts criticism that the discourse on creative industries is 'over-optimistic' by explaining that the book's purpose is to 'explore the capacity of this new system' (p. 39). In sum, the book holds fast to a core concept that is vague, while presuming that a common understanding is shared by all about the empirical reality and widespread potential rewards of embracing 'this new system'. Where ambivalence towards the idea of creative industries might be the better part of prudence, one generally finds exuberance.

The idea of creative industries seems to offer a trendy and comforting vantage point from which to see the economic, political and technological changes that are 're-purposing' culture, so evident, for example, in the enterprise culture of the UK's New Labour government (Selwood, 2001). Perhaps it is curmudgeonly, if not Neanderthal, not to 'get it', and consequently to question, in the face of this collection containing many excellent essays by distinguished writers, why and how the creative industries project holds together. The idea, as a basis upon which to build an intellectual field, seems a gamble, albeit no more of a gamble than asserting a field of 'mass communication', based as the latter notion is on dubious claims about a 'mass society'.¹ Among those who have called the latter term into question is Raymond Williams, who famously wrote 'There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of

seeing people as masses' (Williams, 1958, p. 300). *Creative Industries* features a dizzying range of cultural sites, strategies and tactics, and there does appear to be a nascent unity in many of them, especially the open source movement, the idea of a creative commons, community media centres, flash mobs, collaborative cyberdrama, and massively multiplayer online games. If such collective forms of expression and engagement were all that the term 'creative industries' is aimed at evoking, grasping the boundaries of this field would seem simpler. But these 'creative practices' are presented within a context that includes conglomerated multimedia and very small-scale 'creative enterprises', technopoles or 'creative cities' such as London and Hong Kong, and a backdrop of the 'creative economy', which is of necessity global in scale.

Perhaps it is in the discussion of the 'creative economy' that we confront most directly the motivational context that explains the rise and spread of creativity observed by contributors to this book. As Terry Flew notes in his introduction to this section, 'debates about creative industries often get tied up with arguments about the nature of a "Third Way" between post-World War II social democracy and neo-liberal free market capitalism' (p. 355). This is certainly understandable, given the great transformation we have seen in the conditions under which creative enterprise must take place. In her contribution to this section, Angela McRobbie explores a darker side of the meaning of creative industries for many who seek a livelihood in them. Under political-economic conditions 'where social structures are increasingly illegible or opaque', the failures of cultural entrepreneurs are explained by individualized self-blame, 'ensuring the absence of social critique' (p. 380). Self-reflection on one's inability to excel or make a living in the enterprise culture becomes 'a de-politicizing, de-socializing mechanism: "Where have I gone wrong?"' (p. 381). McRobbie's critique highlights the tendency of the theory of reflexive modernization to individualize social responsibility in the form of self-help movements, an observation that proves helpful in her explanation of the flourishing of creativity in the new economy. If necessity is the mother of invention, then perhaps the destruction of social safety nets is the best way to extract the greatest amount of creativity from a society of frantically multitasking *bricoleurs*.

The idea of creative industries is by all means worth the exploration that this book offers, although perhaps it would be wise to do so with a healthy bit of scepticism both towards the reality of the idea and the social value it offers. As a teacher, I would adopt this book in order to provoke students to explore the possibilities of the creative industries rubric, and for this purpose it makes a valuable contribution to contemporary discourses on cultural theory and cultural policy. As a scholar, I would not yet bet the farm that the creative industries idea has empirical validity or lasting heuristic value. I would counsel my students to reserve judgment about the future of a project that is at once so ambitious and so vague.

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Note

- [1] It is worth noting that the editor of *Creative Industries*, John Hartley, is Professor and Dean of the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology, and that the programme is, as he notes, 'the first of its kind in Australia and perhaps internationally' (p. 33). For the sake of candid disclosure, I was an honoured guest as a visiting research fellow at QUT in 1999, not long before the Creative Industries Faculty was established out of the School of Media and Journalism. It should also be noted that one of the main contributors to *Creative Industries* is Terry Flew, a member of the QUT Creative Industries Faculty and book review editor of *Continuum*, of which I am North American corresponding editor. The scepticism and respectful disagreements expressed above do not lessen my fondness towards and high regard for the intellectual quality of the QUT faculty.

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Neo-baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment

ANGELA NDALIANIS 2004

Cambridge, MA and London, MIT Press

336 pp., ISBN 0-262-14084-5

Without knowing what form it would take when it finally arrived, this is a book some of us have been waiting on for a long time. With meticulous acknowledgement not only of the many points of contact between this work and the various authors who have previously trodden related paths, but of the merit of some standpoints which are at variance with her own, Ndalianis carefully argues that developments in entertainment media over the last two decades or so are most clearly understood in the light of the baroque. This baroque, though, is construed not as something 'contained within the rough temporal confines of the seventeenth century' but as a form and a stylistic principle that 'still continued to have a life, one that recurred throughout history but existed beyond the limits of a canon' (p. 8).

The notion that all media, even the very 'newest', rely on and are only properly understood in terms of their historical antecedents has been well covered by Bolter and Grusin (1999) among others, and a specific connection between the audiovisuality of the late baroque period and the pivotal technical transformations of the late twentieth century was made by Barbara Stafford in 1994. Tom Gunning (1990) has on several occasions drawn attention to the thread of semi-rational spectacle that runs from the

earliest cinema through to the present day, and several Latin American authors have 'evaluated (from different perspectives) the affinities that exist between the baroque—or, rather, the neo-baroque—and the post-modern' (p. 12). Ndalians inclusively enlists all of these ideas in constructing a backdrop against which the logical emergence of her baroque/neo-baroque axis is irresistible. In five energetic chapters, which cover (*inter alia*) seriality, intertextuality, the many manifestations of the labyrinth, hypertextual forms, virtuosity, special effects and other spectacles, and the spiritual presence of the technological, she examines most contemporary entertainment media except, notably, television, with an emphasis on horror and science fiction movies, interactive computer games and cross-medium franchises. Her analysis is informed by a broad and deep cultural knowledge of capitalism, globalization, history and technology, and it is this masterful integration of the social, the economic and the aesthetic which raises the bar for media analysis by several notches.

Her scholarship is profound. Such is the perceptiveness of her sharp analyses of baroque art and culture, and her dissection of a complex swathe of current media forms, that either could stand comfortably on its own as independently interesting and informative interpretations. Combined and integrated, however, so that each reflectively informs the other, the effect is dazzling.

Two examples. If there is one artist who can help us to understand the historical baroque, its excesses and successes, it is the Italian sculptor Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680). Bernini has been, from his own time right through to the present, saluted as the master of the *bel composto*—'the unity of the arts . . . the beautiful union of multiple media'. The various components of his works—architecture, painting and sculpture—'all fold fluidly into one another', drawing the viewer into a participatory inclusion in the very space of the work. This is not, however, merely a concern for 'the production of a harmonious composition'; importantly, each medium maintains its separate significance, so that 'the movement between media directly elicits responses in the viewer' (p. 216). The significance of different aspects of the *bel composto* is demonstrated in Ndalians's analysis of four of Bernini's works. Of these, two are described here briefly: *David* (1623/1624), and *The Ecstasy of St Teresa of Avila* (1644–1652).

Not surprisingly, his *David* is compared with Michelangelo's *David*, and Ndalians shows clearly how, while the Michelangelo work is 'reliant on a frontal viewpoint', Bernini's 'sculptural narrative . . . is transformed into a narrative that changes as a result of its three-dimensional capacity to engage the spectator in spatial terms'. The Renaissance notion of guiding the viewer's perspective 'is replaced by a baroque concern with complex, dynamic motion and multiple perspectives dependent on the position of the viewer in relation to the work' (p. 153). Ndalians's analysis here is detailed; she shows us how a viewer circulating around Bernini's figure sees in turn David's concentrated expression, his sling poised ready to release the stone, and the twisting musculature of his body, and is thus subject to the dynamic unfolding of separate developments in the narrative. This dynamic narrative unfolding, in turn,

links the space inhabited by, and mediated by, the sculpture with its psychological impact on the viewer.

The Ecstasy of St Teresa of Avila is the focal point of an altar dedicated to the Spanish Saint Theresa, a sixteenth-century nun who had described, in a then-famous book, a religious vision in which the love of God had pierced her heart like a burning arrow. Bernini designed the Cornaro Chapel, with the altar and statue of Teresa which it houses, as a subsidiary chapel for the Cornaro family along the side of the small church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. Here the *bel composto* is at its theatrical zenith. The actual sculpture of Teresa, in quasi-orgasmic ecstasy as reported in the book, appears to descend on the very rays of light which both figuratively and actually illuminate her from above, while a smiling cupid-like angel holds the arrow which he is about to plunge into her heart. A semi-relief representation of the Cornaro family in dress-circle boxes at the sides of the chapel privileges the family's proximity to the saint, but simultaneously 'lures the viewer into an architecture of vision that embraces the polycentric nature of the composition. In turn, Bernini's skilful creation of surface, texture, and motion evokes shifting sensations and thoughts in the spectator' (p. 216).

The full analyses that are briefly summarized here would be enough to make this an engaging critical exposition on these historical works, in its own right. Without missing a beat, however, we leap forward by a century and a half. From the spectator's dynamic circulation around Bernini's baroque *David* we are transported to *The Matrix* (1999) in which, as Ndalians describes her 'senses [being] bombarded by imagery, movements, and sounds that plunged [her] into a state of disorientation and overstimulation', we can start to understand the equivalent neo-baroque 'concern with the kinaesthetic that once primarily belonged more exclusively to the realm of the theme park attraction' (p. 155). From the statue of St Teresa, which via its *bel composto* effects 'make[s] possible the representation of something—faith and the love of God—that is unrepresentable' (pp. 217–218), we are conducted to 'the hallucinogenic effects' of Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977):

The main focus of neo-baroque spectacle is the conjuring of the sublime embodied in the vision that is made possible through effects illusions. The spectator of *St. Teresa* is enveloped in an almost mystical experience. Much like the response Spielberg and Trumbull intend to invoke in the audience of *Close Encounters*. Virtuosity reigns supreme as the performance of special effects envelops and plunges the spectator into the space of the visionary-like spectacle, involving him or her more directly in the transcendental events taking place before him or her. (pp. 218–219)

What is so welcome about this book is the freshness of its explanatory power. So many of the issues and phenomena discussed here have long been the subject of debate under the rubric of postmodernism, and Ndalians explicitly recognizes that she follows the lead of some who 'understand (from different perspectives) the neo-baroque and the post-modern as kindred spirits' (p. 16). At the same time, her own determination to separate the neo-baroque from the postmodern stems from a well-justified aversion

to the reductionism in which ‘Cultural production, its aesthetics, its formal qualities, and its relation to audience responses are ultimately reduced to forces of globalisation and the corporate power of multinationalism’ (p. 58). Nowhere is this opposition better demonstrated, in this book, than in her discussion of polycentric serial narratives, exemplified by the *Alien* film series and its later blending and interpenetration with the *Predator* series. This use and re-use of story fragments, cyclically rebuilt and re-formed into new wholes, becomes an example of neo-baroque narrative revitalization, rather than being positioned yet again as evidence of the postmodern decay of classical narrative. With a typical retrospective explanatory flourish, the chapter ends with a discussion of J. S. Bach’s *Art of Fugue*, a piece in which a single theme is articulated and then cycled through 15 polyphonic and multi-rhythmic redevelopments, extensions and repetitions:

The listener recognizes this virtuosity only when each cycle—each fragment—is considered in relation to the system as a whole. Acknowledging himself as a virtuoso who masterfully creates uniqueness out of repetition, Bach also added a fugue in which his name (B-flat, A, C, B-natural) was repeated as a theme. Although they involve alternative media, neo-baroque serials involve a similar game of reception that engages the audience on the level of the relationship between fragment and whole. The fragment also invites the reader or viewer, while accepting the fragment on its own terms, to place it gradually within a web of multiple formations. (p. 69)

The term ‘baroque’ is still sometimes used pejoratively to describe that which is judged to be over-ornamented, unnecessarily complex, indirect or obscure in language. Ndalians’s book is anything but; it rescues contemporary media from what has been, for some time, a sometimes unhelpfully repetitive discussion. It sheds some light on a path forward from here, by throwing into high relief the value of linking good art theory to good art history. Here we have a revelation of the forces at play in contemporary entertainment media which allows us to understand much more about the historical baroque, and an illumination of the historical baroque which allows us to see why a very different cultural milieu, at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, has led to a dynamic and inventive transformation of the same phenomenon.

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