Comprehensive Exam, Field 2 Proposal

Toward Cultural Policy in the City: Delineating Discourses of 'Culture'

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The central problematic of the second comprehensive is how shifting theoretical and popular conceptualizations of 'culture,' in the post-war era to present, have intersected with emergent, urban cultural policy strategies, from the 1980s to present. Tracing the historical trajectory of cultural discourse (from critical analysis of the central productive logic of the culture industry to projects for nation or community building) during this period will be further circumscribed by a second problematic, specifically, how the city has emerged, particularly in the last quarter century, as a site where much of the prevailing cultural policy discourse is brought to bear. In particular, I will address how increasingly instrumentalist visions of culture (insofar as it is rationalized in economistic and technicist language) are imbricated with place promotion and the new service economies, often articulated through 'creative cities' policies. Related to this second problematic, is the emergence and historical transformations of urban cultural policy as a critical object of study and as a site of contestation for community activists. Examples of the deployment of or interventions in cultural policy are touched on in a manner complimentary to successive 'moments' of cultural discourse; however, the purpose of this comprehensive is less a comparative analysis of cultural policy in these moments, than to understand the trajectory of discourse around culture that has led to contemporary urban cultural policy.

This comprehensive will trace three 'moves' in the study of culture and cultural policy. The first is the emergence of a critical discourse around the commercialization and commodification of culture, specifically that which catered to the 'masses,' termed the 'culture industry' by Horkheimer and Adorno. This is not strictly the domain of municipal governments, though the language developed during this moment remains central to efforts in the second half of the twentieth century to establish policies that support local cultural activities. The second moment encompasses the expansion of notions of culture both as a policy shift and as a theoretical move (such as in the expansion of sites of study to include 'subcultures' and popular culture, pioneered by Birmingham School theorists, and the development of notions of governmentality and dispersed sites of power contestation via Foucault). The Greater London Councils of the 1980s and their cultural policy interventions, intended as a rejection of elitist notions of culture, and expansion of their policy purview to include everyday materiality, through a re-negotiation of cultural labour/production but also distribution/consumption is exemplary of this moment. The third section is focused on the neo-liberal turn, and the attendant shift in cultural policy language toward 'creative industries,' particularly within municipal policy, and the relationship between creative industries policies and urban revitalization.

Mass Culture and the Culture Industry

In "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" ([1944] 2002), Theodor Adorno and Max Horkeimer make a strong indictment of modern, capitalist cultural configurations, expressed as a singular 'culture industry.' Their object of study (subsequently pluralized) was industrially produced commercial entertainment, which they held to be distinct from high, or traditional, arts. Their objection to the culture industry is in part rooted in what they view as the false promise of a discourse that extends beyond cultural forms: enlightenment rationality. Rational, scientific approaches are raised to the level of ideology, and integrated into capitalist industries of broad scope, including the mass culture industries that they address in this essay, and, as a result, there is little room for dissent or critical intervention. For the authors, the specter of fascism against which they wrote is sufficient evidence of the habituated suppression of individual critique is and is not otherwise investigated; however, the mechanisms of this

suppression are identified as the capitalist logic of production applied to cultural forms, and the reduction of cultural content to formulaic types. In brief, similar to the mitigation of risk in other mass industries, the mitigation of financial risk in the culture industry translates into minimal experimentation in cultural content: "[The culture industry] asserts itself more imperiously the more the perfected technology reduces the tension between the culture product and everyday existence" (p.101). Content and detail are subsumed by formula and recurring types, with the effect of dulling the critical faculties of the audience. This is a singular effect; although the jargon or style of each medium across the culture industry may be distinct, the function is the same. Whereas 'genuine' style or identity was once decipherable by its resistance to prevailing tendencies within a given form (the 'negative truth' of so-called 'autonomous art'), the media of the culture industry has made general the practice of simulation and reproduction. As such, claims of cultural enlightenment of the 'masses' through exposure to 'high' culture or art, give way to the 'massifying' effects of modes of cultural mass production and distribution that are consistent in style and form to the extent that they are naturalized.

As the Frankfurt School theorists saw this as a recursive relationship (whereby as cultural conventions coalesce and naturalize, they become expected by the audience and feedback into the production of future cultural forms), the ideological dominance of the cultural industry is nearly inescapable. From this premise (and the premise that state bureaucracy plays a central role in mitigating the tensions between the capitalist industry and everyday life) the conception of the culture industry seems at odds with any potential policy intervention. However, mid-century cultural policies were often designed with the intention of bolstering the 'high' arts, in the face of an onslaught of mass culture. David Hesmondhalgh and Andy C. Pratt (2005) argue that culture industries were, for much of their histories, the 'other,' "against which cultural policy reacted, in the shape of arts subsidies, but also in the formation of public service broadcasting" (p.3). This is certainly true in Canada, where the efforts of 'culturalists' such as Vincent Massey were directed toward establishing and protecting non-commercial media institutions, such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board, as well as arts support through the Canada Council for the Arts. From the start, these projects were justified within a discourse of nation-building, as was much of the later government support of private sector cultural industries in the post-war era (Edwardson, 2008). However, Michael Denning (1996) emphasizes the formation of cultural industries as not only an apparatus of the state or capital, but also a site of struggle for labour. I draw from Denning's *The cultural front* to better engage with this moment as one of unionization and collective organization within cultural industries, and map the above discursive formations of culture against material shifts in relations of production during that period.

Culture is Ordinary

The above intellectual tradition distinguished popular or mass culture from the autonomous, high arts, and to some extent coincided with efforts to support, usually at the national level, those 'higher' and 'cultivating' arts, as a means to counter the moral or cultural debasement propagated through commercial culture. These mid-century debates and distinctions around high art and popular or mass culture were revived by the second intellectual (and attendant policy) tradition addressed here, though with a shift in the latter category toward local cultures or the cultures of 'communities of interest.'

For Raymond Williams, as he expresses it in "Culture is ordinary" ([1958] 2002), his theoretical orientation toward the notion of culture is largely formed out of his own experience of being categorically excluded from it. Having grown up in a farming valley, he was excluded from English culture (specifically that which encompasses 'higher' forms of art and education) by virtue of his class stature. However, he refuses to accept that he and his family are somehow without culture, and argues that the referential field for the term should be expanded to include ways of life; this referential field is thus often identified as the anthropological definition of culture. However, to avoid expanding the definition to the point of being useless, he retains institutional aspects of the first referential field, so that culture, as an object of study and potential site of intervention, is circumscribed by the practices and institutions that are primarily concerned with making and sharing meaning:

> The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. The making of a mind is, first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons, and meanings. A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested… We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort… Culture is ordinary, in every society and every mind. (p.93)

Evident in the above quote is the participatory role of the individual in the making of shared cultural meanings. This is significant, as, along with the expansion of the cultural domain, it poses a challenge to previous notions that mass or popular culture is uniform and is passively received. The implication of this intervention is that culture is a valuable site of meaning making, and was is taken up in some instances through collective claims to the right to locally access the means of cultural production or a diversity of cultural goods. Though, Williams' notion of culture was not entirely satisfying to some thinkers, such as Tony Bennett (1992), who challenged Williams' loose, anthropological definition of 'culture' for failing to capture the institutional/governmental characteristics and relations of culture that transform and regulate populations. Within this comprehensive, these debates will be mapped against a broad transition toward information and services economies and flexible accumulation, away from Fordist-industrialist modes of accumulation, via David Harvey (1990). The discursive shift is put to practice in the 1980s in England by the Greater London Labour Councils (GLCs). I will look to a number of critical accounts of this moment to further understand the relationship between the GLC policy interventions and shifting discourses around culture (Garnham, 2005; GLC, 1984, 1985; Peck, 2011)

From Culture to Creativity: The Neo-liberal Turn

Jim McGuigan (1996) comments on the strange coalescence of left and right politics around the support for commercialized local cultural industries. From the perspective of the right, commercial culture industries would be the realization of for-profit, market values in a domain previously thought too implicitly valuable (by various assessments, be it aesthetic, social or

political) to be left vulnerable to consumer preferences. From the perspective of the left, assessing support for cultural production based on audience preference demonstrated the disproportionate funding of 'high arts' that are consumed by the comparatively wealthy and privileged few. This strange coalition, (insofar as discourses of 'consumer preference' and 'community access' overlap), can partly be mapped against the historical dismantling of welfare state interventions toward deregulation, fiscal austerity and public-private partnerships as well as the increase in information- and service-economies. In the tradition of Max Weber, Luc Boltanksi and Eve Chiapello (2005) explore the relationship between these material shifts (including attendant shifts in working and living conditions) and emerging beliefs and ideologies that legitimize that historically specific set of social relations. These ideological justifications, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, are, post-1968, markedly cultural (or counter cultural). Thus, both ideologically and economically, this historical transition has amplified the importance of culture to local economies, and cities are increasingly required to demonstrate a distinct character on a global market in order to attract mobile investments.

Particularly since the 1970s, there has been an increase in production of primarily cultural forms and in the symbolic emphasis of non-cultural forms and products through marketing strategies. Allan Scott (1997) explores the relationship between cultural geographies and economic geographies, particularly how manufacturing and service economies are related to cultural product industries. He argues that distinct cultural product industries in urban centres have emerged as a result of unique histories, industrial/economic agglomeration and locational specialization. These urban-centred agglomerations increasingly compete globally which can further exaggerate the distinct identities of the cultural-product oriented places. This is partly the outcome of an increased tension between unique, place-bound culture/cultural products and increasingly mobile, placeless, and potentially transformative culture/cultural products. To some extent, Scott argues, geographic clustering of cultural production, and expanding networks of cultural consumption represent this tension. The result is not universal homogeneity, but regional cultural differentiation. The relationship between place and productive output is, in this way, particularly acute for culture-producing industries, as cultural industries have a recursive relationship to place identities.

A language shift in urban cultural policies often accompanies their instrumentalization toward capturing global capital: from the regulation of culture industries to creative industries, which unfold in so-called 'creative cities.' In a review of the debates and definitions that have developed around 'creative industries,' Terry Flew and Stuart Cunningham (2010) argue that the term has been generally applied, ad hoc, to encompass industries that were "capitalized and industrialized in their modes of production and distribution (e.g., film and television), and those that were more labor-intensive and artisanal (arts and crafts, designer fashion, music, the visual and performing arts)," in addition to a combination of "highly commercial sectors strongly affected by the business cycle (e.g., advertising, architecture), with arts sectors largely driven by public subsidy" (p.114).

Consistent with the aim of place-promotion, these new 'creative industries' directed cultural policies often coincide with internal neighbourhood 'revitalization' and 're-animation.' This is the type of language that Jamie Peck (2005) identifies as codes for gentrification in his critique of Richard Florida's concept of the 'creative class,' relative to the 'creative city': "The creative city's script has found, constituted and enrolled a widened civic audience for projects of

new-age urban revitalization, anointing favored strategies and privileged actors, determining what must be done, with whom, how and where" (p.742). Elsewhere, Peck (2011) notes the curious historical progression from interventions into cultural policy in order to increase community access, to cultural policy that potentially disenfranchises by privileging international capital; however, he argues that despite the appearance that the GLC and creative cities policies are historical analogs, their underlying logics and intentions are distinct. The express intention of the first was to improve the quality of life of 'communities of interest' by valuing local and otherwise marginalized cultural work, while the second involves supply-side interventions into industries that attract transnational capital flows.

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