

Fit and working again? The instrumental leisure of the ‘creative class’

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Abstract. The utopianization of ‘creative work’ is a pronounced feature of postindustrial societies. The author analyzes the attendant promotion of ‘creative leisure’, and its role in supporting discourses and practices of creative work. Through an analysis of Richard Florida’s influential text *The Rise of the Creative Class*, it is argued that, while creative leisure is offered up as a means of free and autonomous expression, it may be leading, paradoxically, to the erosion of freedom as the terrain of critical and disinterested leisure is pervasively colonized by discourses of economic rationality. Secondly, it is contended that whereas, traditionally, capital has always sought to regulate and administer leisure ‘from above’—with workers variably ‘resisting’ below—such a model may no longer apply since (according to Florida) creative-class subjects now appear to be actively choosing to perform (rather than being coerced into) economically directed leisure.

Introduction

As governments, chief-executive officers (CEOs), managers, and entrepreneurs continue to promote the virtues of postindustrial work, critical social scientists have sought to establish just how far the merits and freedoms of ‘creative’, ‘reflexive’, and ‘knowledge-based’ employment actually extend (Bauman, 2000; Deuze, 2007; Lash, 1994; Löfgren, 2003; McRobbie, 2002; Ross, 2003; Sennett, 2006). This paper is no exception. However, the specific aim here is not to study creative work per se, but the attendant realm of ‘creative leisure’. In particular, I focus on the leisure habits of those ‘creatives’ who appear in Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), a popular and influential work celebrating the emergence of postindustrial labour (see also Florida, 2005). Florida’s work is chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it has had an enormous influence on debates regarding the role of ‘creativity’ in the ‘new’ economy and has inspired a wide array of policy, planning, and economic development initiatives. As public and private interests have sought enthusiastically to apply Florida’s ideas to their own cities and regions, Bayliss notes that *The Rise of the Creative Class* has now become a most “popular manual of contemporary economic development thinking” (2007, page 893). Secondly, while Florida’s work has begun to attract some significant critical attention (see Bayliss, 2007; Clifton, 2008; Malanga, 2004; Markusen, 2006; Oudenampsen, 2007; Peck, 2005), these analyses have largely focused on Florida’s discussion of urban and regional development, and tended to ignore his (equally contentious, yet crucially related) writings on work, leisure, and lifestyle. This paper aims to (partly) address this oversight.

The particular focus here is on the promotion of leisure and its role in the creation of the economically productive ‘creative’ body. In this respect, my analysis of Florida’s book has three dimensions. Firstly, I examine how the (allegedly) ‘free’ and distinctive realm of postindustrial leisure that Florida promotes may exhibit certain patterns of regulation and constraint that uphold (rather than challenge) the instrumental imperatives of the ‘new’ capitalism (Bauman, 2000; Sennett, 2006). Secondly, I argue that, so close is the resemblance between the structure and purpose of creative leisure and creative work, it appears that the traditional notion of leisure as an autonomous

work-antithetical practice may be disappearing—at least amongst creative workers. Thirdly, I suggest that the apparent disappearance of noninstrumental leisure is not only endorsed by Florida, but also, apparently, by creative workers *themselves*, who, contrary to tradition, appear to be enthusiastically embracing (rather than resisting) the administration of leisure by instrumental rationality. The implications of this are considered, and there is then a discussion section that offers a more formal critique of Florida's work. In the conclusion I offer a final assessment of the efficacy of Florida's model of 'new' economy leisure.

The problem of leisure

In modern societies the meaning and role of leisure have been intensely debated (for a recent review see Bramham, 2006). Although, ostensibly, leisure emerged in industrial societies as freely given reward for hard-working labour, critics were not slow to recognize how the social and the political strongly guided the provision and undertaking of leisure practice. To give a somewhat schematic overview of the main perspectives, Marxian scholars have characteristically argued that leisure provides only illusory and inauthentic distractions which mask the social divisions and systematic inequalities inherent to capitalist organization (for example, Clarke and Critcher, 1985; see also Rojek, 1985). Indeed, since the 1940s the whole economy of tourism, entertainment, and leisure has been more widely portrayed as a vast 'culture industry' which curtails those very essences it purports to provide: free will, self-determination, and existential satisfactions (Adorno, 2007). From another perspective, feminist scholars have long identified the apparently 'universal' freedoms of leisure as being gendered and unevenly distributed (Deem, 1986; Wearing, 1998; see also Aitchison, 2003). Alternatively, for 'figural' sociologists such as Elias and Dunning (1986), leisure has played a key role in the 'civilizing process', part of the repertoire of social ordering processes that has ensured stable and acquiescent socialization in modern societies. Here, leisure is seen to act as a kind of safety valve for sublimating aggression and for stabilizing identities, including those focused around locality, region, or nation (see also Jary, 1987).

However, contrastingly, for many, a belief in the radical potential of leisure has endured. For some, leisure has provided a medium for the cultivation of explicit social critique [for example, an 'escape' for Romantics and other opponents of modernization, or a focus for cultivating working-class consciousness (see Edensor, 2000; Jarvis, 1997)]. In "The adventure", Simmel (1959 [1911]) was amongst the first social critics to identify exotic or erotic engagements with others and with nature as a possible refuge from the depersonalizing and alienating effects of modernity, offering a discrete 'exclave of life' away from one's positioning in the industrial scheme. More recently, critics have identified similar forms of 'adventurous' and 'extreme' leisure as resistance against the tyrannous rule of modernity: for example, those celebrating 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990) practices which reject oppressive technologies of order and safety and emphasize sensuous engagement with the world and its kinaesthetic effects (see also Kiewa, 2002; Lewis, 2000). For others, the radical quality of leisure is demonstrated not in the possibility for alternative action, but in the chance to cultivate a conscious *inaction*. Practices of idling have long been valued for providing refuge from the otherwise universal obligation for purposeful behaviour. In his 1883 polemic *The Right to be Lazy* Paul Lafargue bemoaned work as "the cause of all intellectual degeneracy, of all organic deformity" (page 1) and in *In Praise of Idleness* Bertrand Russell (1932) proclaimed that "the road to happiness and prosperity lies in an organized diminution of work" (2004, page 3)—a durably popular view that continues to be (more humorously) championed to this day by self-confessed thumb-twiddlers like Hodgkinson (2004).

Yet, whether it has been understood as radical or reactionary, leisure has always been practically valued, at least amongst labour, as ‘not work’: that is, as a distinctive realm of practice that should stand apart from the demands of tenured labouring and the dictates of material necessity. Thus, the binary opposition between work and leisure has endured, partly because it has hitherto proved useful to capitalists and governments for stabilizing the economy and polity, but also due to the determined efforts of labour to protect their own autonomous time–space.⁽¹⁾ In the new economy, however, the legitimacy of this opposition has come increasingly under threat. Lewis (2003) feels compelled to ask whether “post-industrial work is becoming indistinguishable from leisure, as an activity of choice and source of enjoyment” (page 343), since the absorbing and skill-centred nature of so-called ‘reflexive’, ‘knowledge-led’, or ‘creative’ production appears to imbue at least some workers with the rewards and sense of fulfilment traditionally gleaned from the nonwork realm (see also Lash, 1994). If leisure is defined as “non-obligated time, activities which are perceived as freely chosen [and] intrinsically motivated” (Lewis, 2003, page 345), then those new-economy occupations which appear to offer autonomy and freedom of choice would appear in themselves to be becoming more like leisuretime activities. Indeed, it is the promotion of creative and reflexive work as *inherently* fun, pleasurable, and free (that is, like leisure) that has most tellingly struck at the work–leisure boundary, suggesting, as it does, a lack of necessary differentiation between the two realms. For many, work has now become the site where we achieve those levels of status, meaning, and self-fulfilment that appear increasingly unavailable to us in our nonwork lives. Indeed, Hochschild (1997) has famously identified that for an increasing number of workers the meanings of work and nonwork/home may actually have *reversed*, with many viewing work as the source of freedom, well-being, creativity, and pleasure, and home (and nonwork more generally) as the site of constraint, alienation, drudgery, and despair.

However, as I will show, what seems most apparent amongst Florida’s emergent ‘creative class’ is not simply that work and nonwork have become somehow ‘imbalanced’, or even ‘reversed’ in meaning, but that work has come to colonize life to such an extent that it has pervasively *absorbed* leisure into its own logic, entirely effacing the work–leisure distinction and, what is more, now appears to have achieved this with the express support and enthusiasm of labour.

Defining the creative class

Since its publication in 2002 Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* has achieved consecration amongst disciples and acolytes of the new economy (for critical discussion on this, see Bayliss, 2007; Markusen, 2006; Peck, 2005). Indeed, Florida’s book has achieved the uncommon prestige of being widely adopted *globally* as a kind of guidebook for those local and regional authorities, economic development agencies, managers, and consultants hoping to make hay in the new-economy sunshine. The key (and highly seductive) idea in his book is that ‘creativity’ is now the fundamental source of competitive advantage, since, in postindustrial economies, “new technologies, new industries, new wealth and all other good economic things flow from it”

⁽¹⁾ While we should not essentialize leisure as some intrinsically free domain, we should remain cognizant of how, for many, it remains idealized as an important site of self-expression and autonomy, and contains a hard-to-destroy utopian promise. The mooted progressive postmodernization of work and leisure (see Rojek, 1995), and the implied demise of the work–leisure boundary, is not a process that is universally distributed, experienced, or recognized—particularly amongst those working in low-paid, low-end service and manufacturing jobs. The issue at stake in this paper is how far the utopian impulse remains embedded within the ‘creative’ wing of the middle-class constituency.

(Florida, 2002, page 21). A good dose of creativity is offered as the best (and, indeed, only) medicine available for those ailing cities and regions struggling to adapt to a putatively 'new' economy based primarily on the manipulation and application of information, knowledge, cultural symbols, and other aesthetic and immaterial goods. This has proved a popular prescription, not least for its intrinsically 'feel-good' quality and the "ostensibly cheap and easy implementation" (Bayliss, 2007, page 893) of many of the recommended strategies for enhancing creative production (such as the rebranding of fringe urban spaces as 'creative quarters' or 'clusters', offering flexible or high-tech workspaces and brokering the right kinds of 'soft', creatively focused, business-support networks). As Malanga (2004) and Peck (2005) detail, Florida's ideas have now been applied in a number of US cities and regions (including Austin, Cincinnati, Miami, New York, Pittsburgh, and Providence) and many others have bought into the notion that the best way to enhance economic development is to attract and boost various kinds of 'creative' production.

The message has also spread quickly to other territories. In a speech to Citigroup in 2004 Patricia Hewitt, the (then) UK Secretary of State for Trade and Industry approvingly offered that:

"Richard Florida argues in his book ... that human creativity is the ultimate economic resource. The ability to come up with new ideas and better ways of doing things is ultimately what raises productivity and thus in turn living standards. He is absolutely right."

Cities in Canada and Australia and Western Europe have also imported and implemented Florida's ideas—thus his influence on public policy, planning, and the ways in which (particularly) Westernized societies think about urban economic futures has been extremely significant.

At the vanguard of this creative economic transformation is identified a new 'creative class'. First, (and somewhat nebulously), Florida defines the creative class as that group of people who "add economic value through their creativity" (2002, page 68). More precisely he suggests that the creative class comprises those whose function it is to generate goods and services that rely upon specialist forms of specific knowledge, information, and expertise, or commodities that derive their value from their unique symbolic, aesthetic, or design-based qualities. Within this, the creative class is not, however, homogeneous but stratified: in what Florida calls the 'supercreative core' we find scientists, doctors, engineers, architects, and planners but also artists, entertainers, and academics—workers whose primary role is to be innovative and 'supercreative', autonomous, and problemsolving. Beyond this core, they are supported by a whole raft of 'creative professionals' (subordinate workers in the same aforementioned professions, also the legal professions, social services professionals, financial sector professionals, sales executives, managerial occupations generally) who are similarly identified as being engaged in creative work (though clearly not to the same extent as the supercreative core). Outside of these creative elites, the noncreative classes now comprise the service sector (personal care, low-end service and support work, clerical and domestic workers) and a residual working class (construction and extraction jobs, maintenance and repair occupations, assembly-line production, transport). 'Agriculture' is identified as being a class in itself.

In the US case (on which the book is based), this (rather curious) occupational class structure is said to contain around 38 million creative-class workers (compared with 55 million service-class and 33 million working-class workers) who now enjoy significantly higher incomes and standards of living than their noncreative counterparts. Florida then argues that it is the ability of cities and regions to *attract and retain* this creative-class labour that will determine future levels of economic growth and

prosperity—and this is not only involves offering the appropriate infrastructure for facilitating creative production (as outlined above), but also (as we will see) providing amenities that can service the leisure and consumption preferences of creative workers. In the new economy it is not the case (as in the ‘old’ economy) that people will simply “cluster where the jobs are” (Florida, 2002, page 7)—but that the creative classes (in particular) deliberately choose to cluster in places that appeal to their distinctive lifestyle preferences.

The classifications, definitions, and aggregates are, of course, open to question (for comprehensive critiques, see Malanga, 2004; Markusen, 2006; O’Connor, 2007; Peck, 2005) but crucial to Florida’s assessment (and my reading of it) is that the creative class is now presented as “the dominant class in society” (Florida, 2002, page ix), not just in terms of wealth and incomes, but also of “influence” (page ix). That is, creatives are identified as the primary source of ideas and innovations, the key trend-setters and visionaries; destructive creators at the vanguard of the eagerly anticipated postindustrial work utopia—furthermore, they are also seen as pioneers of a putatively new *style of life*. Florida’s purpose is thus not simply to reflect on the economic consequences of the ‘rise’ of the creative class, but—as the subtitle of the book suggests—to understand how the emergence of this class is changing *everything*. Florida thus aspires for his work to be judged as not simply an exercise in economic forecasting, but as an attempt at total social theory—for the creative class are argued to be exerting the most profound bearing on *all* aspects of the operation and constitution of postindustrial societies.

Within this frame, Florida argues that it is certain core and shared *values* that bind and identify the creative class. Specifically, as harbingers of a new ‘creative ethos’, the creative class emphasise (i) *individuality*, (ii) *meritocracy*, and (iii) *diversity* and *openness*. Thus, the creative-class worker not only resists “traditional group-oriented norms” (Florida, 2002, page 77) in the pursuit of a self-determined, freely chosen identity, but also promotes the virtues of hard work and ‘getting on’ through individual merit, taking the view that “Talented people defy classification based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference or appearance” (page 77). The creative-class worker is thus an individualized subject, dismissive of ‘old’ economy values, and disregarding of tradition. Indeed, for Florida, now, the “old categories no longer apply at all” and the creative class “represent a new mainstream setting the norm and pace for much of society” (page 211).

However, it is arguably in *leisure* that Florida identifies creative workers at their most autonomous, self-directing, and dynamic, apparently embodying the kind of free-thinking ‘rugged individualists’ that Adorno (1990, page 306) once identified as socially extinct. Florida himself—as a self-identified member of the creative class—vigorously promotes the virtues of leisure as a means to intellectual and creative self-fulfilment, mind–body harmony, and personal freedom; though, as we will see, the qualitative essence of this freedom has radical implications for the (imagined) move to a ‘better’ kind of postindustrial society.

Creative leisure—the servant of capital?

“Because we identify ourselves as creative people, we increasingly demand a lifestyle built around creative experiences. We are impatient with strict separations that previously demarcated work, home and leisure. Whereas the lifestyle of the previous organizational age emphasized conformity, the new lifestyle favours individuality, self-statement, acceptance of difference and the desire for rich multidimensional experiences Spurred on by the creative ethos we blend work and lifestyle to construct our identities as creative people This kind of synthesis is integral to establishing a unique creative identity.”

Florida (2002, page 13)

In his book Florida presents selective extracts and findings from interviews and focus groups with creative-class professionals, and offers some personal reflections on his own leisure habits as a self-identified member of this putatively new class. In reviewing these data what is most striking is how the *primary* role of creative-class leisure is to provide opportunities to undertake activities that directly (rather than indirectly or accidentally) enhance and improve the individual ability to undertake future creative work. Thus, the role of leisure is not so much the traditional one of providing the physical and mental relief sufficient to ensure a return to work (though this is certainly part of it); and leisure is clearly not designed to enable the negation of work identity ('escaping work', 'getting in touch with my real self', 'living for the weekend'), but appears more formally geared to actively developing and servicing individual 'creative powers' as a strategy for further economizing the body. Freedom is obtainable through working the body in the interests of work. Thus, amongst Florida's free-wheeling, posttraditional subjects, in leisure there is no conventional attempt at 'forgetting' about work: on the contrary, leisure appears to be conducted only if it helps reaffirm and remind one of one's own work identity and creative capability, as he asserts:

"Because we relate to the economy through our creativity and thus identify ourselves as 'creative beings', we pursue pastimes and cultural forms that express and nurture our creativity (2002, page 171).

Florida endorses what he calls the 'experiential life' of leisure, the enthusiastic pursuit of new consumption opportunities, in the form of sports, hobbies, games, travel, and relationships which are valued for their abilities to stimulate and reaffirm creative (work-oriented) identities rather than activities which provide escape or that are good to do in themselves.⁽²⁾ The intrinsic value of leisure, or its potential for cultivating critical consciousness, is entirely absent from the accounts provided:

"The new lifestyle is not mainly about 'fun'. Rather it complements the way members of the creative class work and is a fundamental part of the way they go about their lives" (page 169).

It is appropriate, then, that Florida understands the creative class less as a kind of 'leisure class' in the sense of Veblen (that is, conspicuous consumers of status-filled goods), and more as an 'active class' (in Florida's terms): that is, as a group committed to the purposeful utilization of leisure time (indeed, as he states, the creative classes avoid indolence and "do not participate in time-killing activities of any sort" (page 170). The acquisition of useful and convertible experiences fires creative impulses and creates new opportunities for workplace creativity and the commodity production it serves.

More specifically, for Florida's subjects, preferred leisure practices are identified as adventurous, extreme sports (rock climbing, road and mountain bicycling, snowboarding, trial running, and so on), nonconventional travel, cosmopolitan and 'authentic' consumption—in fact, any distinctive activities (requiring high levels of economic and cultural capital) that lie beyond the material, aesthetic, and intellectual reach of what

⁽²⁾ This is in some ways similar to Bourdieu's (1984) well-known observations regarding the apparent emergence of a "new petit bourgeoisie" a culturally literate and experimental middle class, one in constant search for a liberated and emancipated life, free from the mundane shackles of the 'old' petit bourgeoisie. As Bourdieu argues, while the working classes and the lower strata of the petit bourgeoisie "fling themselves into prefabricated leisure activities designed for them by the engineers of cultural mass production" (2003 [1984], page 179), the new upwardly mobile middle class imagine that they can evade such constraints through their own originality, creativity, and transgressive leisure practices. Of course, while Bourdieu is highly sceptical towards (what he sees as inherently class-bound) new petit bourgeois pretensions (he is pithily dismissive of what he terms their 'controlled transgressions' and 'dreams of social flying'), Florida is an enthusiastic arbiter of middle-class leisure and its apparently autonomous and radical characteristics.

Florida identifies as the noncreative mass. Yet, to return to Simmel's analysis, where the role of 'adventure' was to provide an alternative to the turmoil and constraints of modernity, in Florida's world the role of 'adventure' appears to be geared to reaffirming the centrality of work. Indeed, adventuring (or at least its contemporary equivalent of practising 'extreme' travel or outdoor leisure) is seen either to provide new ideas for future creative work, or to reestablish the harmonious balance of the creative body in ways amenable to economic activity. While, traditionally, the sensual constraints of work are imagined to be released in outdoor leisure, amongst the creative class we find the same possibilities for somatic liberation being instrumentally harnessed in order to recharge the creative body for its desired return to economic activity. Now, in those forms of creative-class leisure that involve active and 'adventurous' engagement with the physical environment, any sensual blockages, emotional paralyses, or stymied arousals appear resolvable through kinaesthetic engagement of the body with what we might term the 'elemental forces'. Here, Florida describes how, in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001, he finds himself transfixed by the television, and so powerfully affected, anxious, and disturbed that he is unable to communicate and, most crucially, unable to *work*. His chosen remedy for recovery was an intense dose of road biking:

"The events of September 11 affected me powerfully. For two weeks I was unable to concentrate on my work or focus on my writing. I cancelled a number of speaking engagements because literally I couldn't speak But there was one thing I wanted to do—that I was pulled to do. And that was to ride my bicycle. I am an avid road cyclist, and I took several hours each day to just go out and ride ... and ride ... and ride. ... As a way of both disconnecting and recharging, *it is part of what we need to do as creative people*" (Florida, 2002, page 169, my emphasis)".

Only through such active leisure was a return to work made possible. Florida as a self-identifying 'creative', understands the demand for kinaesthetic physicality, for connecting body and environment, as innate to the creative worker, which may involve some elements of the traditional demand for 'disconnecting and recharging' but more directly helps satisfy desires for creative 'stimulation'—the aim being not to be passive in the environment but active, alive, and self-reflexively aware of how to utilize it in order to service one's own creative needs. As an aside, in his discussion of travel literature in *Mythologies*, Barthes (1972) took a satirical swipe at how the conquest of nature provided the middle classes with a much-needed sense of civic virtue, acting as a restorative for the working body, and serving the purpose of reconciling them to their own personal insignificance in the scheme of production—yet perhaps even he could not have envisaged how far the conscious instrumentalization of nature has now developed. For now, the creative class appear to view the natural world not as a retreat and escape from the wearying constraints of base commerce but, rather, as resource for the cultivation of a more focused and effective economic body. Rock climbing, cycling, trail running, kayaking, adventure sports in general are valued for their creative 'freelance' qualities, for their capacity to reinforce what Florida calls the 'I'm doing it' factor, for their abilities to set "you against nature [and] your own physical and mental limits" (2002, page 181). Nature, in providing the opportunity for continuous bodily engagement, mental stimulation, and a catalogue of individualized tests and attainments, offers an ideal proving ground for appraising the effectiveness of the enterprising new-economy 'creative'.

The growth of self-monitoring behaviours and obsessions with bodily image and performance have been seen by some as indicative of the transition to a posttraditional order where the individualized self becomes a primary unit of social reproduction (Bauman, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). While self-reflexivity can be liberating

(Giddens, 1991), such impulses often appear driven by the demands of maintaining an effective *working* body, with only 'useful' pleasures being valued for their capacity to reinforce the necessary sense of progress and self-improvement demanded by contemporary societies. The idea of purposeful and self-administered leisure has obvious affinity with the prevailing economic discourse, one which Lemke identifies as a kind of 'neoliberal harmony' in which "not only the individual body, but also collective bodies and institutions ... corporations and states have to be 'lean', 'fit', 'flexible' and 'autonomous'" (2001, page 203). Indeed, Florida's mantra that "fit regions are also creative regions" (2002, page 178) further reinforces the idea that some positive relationship exists between purposeful and efficient bodily activity (such as active leisure) and 'creative' economic performance—a speculative claim yet to be convincingly evidenced, even in Florida's own attempts to establish some 'basic correlations' between fitness and creativity (see Florida, 2002, pages 177–178).

In Florida's work the promotion of *useful* leisure corresponds with a disavowal of those traditional sources of *critical* leisure—the working classes and the Romantics. First, Florida is dismissive of what he terms 'blue-collar' leisure practices (identified as television watching, packaged holidays, spectator sports such as baseball and football), since they fail to provide the sense of individuality and autonomy that creative workers intrinsically crave. Put bluntly, Florida sees working-class leisure as intellectually and morally inferior since it is reactive, requires no original thought, and is not directly productive.⁽³⁾ Thus, while middle-class creatives are judged as discerning, self-reflexive, and active, the working classes are portrayed as passive and as cultural dupes. The possibility that mass practices may underwrite the formation of a collective consciousness, enhance solidarity, or promulgate social critique is therefore not considered. Secondly, according to Florida's analysis, the idea of Romantic and, indeed, hedonistic, leisure is now firmly rejected by the creative class. Creatives apparently eschew alcohol, drug taking (apart from high-grade coffee), nightclubbing, partying, and other excessive behaviours since, as one of Florida's respondents offered, they "can't afford the recovery time" (2002, page 166)—they need to be back to work the next morning, toiling hard. There is more than an element of puritan zeal in Florida's ruminations on the creative-class worker, a fetishization of pure, 'fit' bodies engaged in healthy creative practices and a deliberate refusal of the idea that more traditionally 'bohemian' work identities may persist in the new economy—indeed, Florida claims that the creative class have rejected the term 'bohemian' as pejorative, since it appears to suggest irrationality, alterity, and a lack of serious (economic) purpose.⁽⁴⁾

Finally, the idea that creative-class workers are no longer controlled by 'systems' or exploited by managers runs centrally through Florida's work. The creative class make their own rules, exerting considerable latitude over the intensity and pace of their

⁽³⁾ Again, like Bourdieu's (1984) socially aspirant new petit bourgeoisie, the creative class similarly eschew the 'mass' and aspire to sports and leisure practices that emphasize individuality, but also disregard direct competition in favour of either self-competition (testing out one's own body, evaluating it, measuring its limits) or competing against nature. Indeed, Bourdieu detects in the preference for what he prefers to call the 'Californian sports' (running, boating, trailing, and trekking) a desire to distance oneself both from 'vulgar crowds' (with associated collectivized performances) and the unseemly demands of base competition—choices echoed in creative-class preferences for 'extreme' and 'active' sports.

⁽⁴⁾ Florida's assessment contrasts markedly with Ross's (2003) account of new media workers in New York's Silicon Alley, with Nixon's (2003) study of London's advertising workers, and with McRobbie's (2002) more generic readings of the fashion, new media, and other cultural/creative industries, where drinking, partying, nightclubbing, and a hedonistic (albeit strongly masculine and exclusive) ethic of 'play' help cement what is a highly 'clubbable' (McRobbie, 2002) set of social relations.

work—and so work-induced alienation appears to be a condition of the past. From a left-critical viewpoint, the apparent intensification of instrumental, work-oriented leisure—and the apparent willingness of workers to embrace it—is disturbing because, whereas leisure has long been the target of administration, workers have traditionally shown a reliably capricious and wilful disregard for its officially prescribed forms—often resisting the efforts of managers to regulate their nonwork conduct. Yet, rather worryingly, now, amongst this reputed creative class, we find no evidence of such resistance. Indeed, if evidence from Florida's data is accepted, we can identify a much clearer homology between the logic of capital and the structures of contemporary 'creative' leisure, as creative-class subjects appear to be actively *choosing* (rather than being forced into) workful leisure—since this appears to enable them to 'validate their creative identities' and to obtain the social prestige and rewards that increasingly appear available only to those who are active and self-governing.

If Florida's claims are true, what are the implications? Most prominent is the likely demise of 'disinterested' leisure amongst the ranks of the creative class. Indeed, it appears that the purpose and instrument of leisure have now become so closely entwined with economic rationality that the hitherto enduring belief that leisure should serve some intrinsic, radical, or noninstrumental values now appears to be on the wane—a significant reversal, in my view, for the possibility of autonomous social critique.⁽⁵⁾ Florida, however, would doubtless claim that a progressive and liberating convergence of work and leisure has at least overcome the traditional problems of work (alienation, disharmony, and conflict), obviating the need for an externally located critique, and rendering redundant the desire for a life beyond the parameters and demands of work.

Discussion—'free' subjects and methodological adequacy

While Florida's analysis appears to offer some clear evidence that traditional problems of work and leisure have been overcome (at least for the creative class), we can suggest some good reasons for *not* accepting his somewhat overoptimistic reading. Indeed, in this section, I want to open up discussion on the nature of 'creative' or 'new economy' leisure by examining more critically some of the theoretical, methodological, and normative foundations of his work.

First, as we have seen, Florida identifies the pursuit of adventurous and creative leisure as an uncomplicated expression of the radical individuality inherent to the new economy. Leisure is a primary means by which individuals can define themselves *as*

⁽⁵⁾ We might also note that the significance of this shift is not simply restricted to any local effects on the minds and bodies of creative occupational groups, but has a more significant impact insofar as cities and regions are now actively seeking to accommodate in regeneration plans creative-class demands for their own distinctive leisure and lifestyle amenities. The *necessary* provision of what Florida terms creative-class "lifestyle amenities"—typically realized in publicly and privately financed entertainment and leisure complexes, including upmarket bars, restaurants, urban gyms, climbing walls, road and mountain bike trails, jogging paths, dry-ski slopes, and so on—is now a crucial element of any self-respecting 'creative city' strategy, for it is only through such provision (in conjunction with other vital elements such as middle-class 'professional' and 'executive' housing, arts provision, and distinctive and upmarket shopping opportunities) that the all-important creative classes can be attracted into the city. Indeed, it is arguable that in urban renewal strategies the specific demands of the creative class (or those comparably identified) are now being serviced above all others. Arguments that such 'culture-led' or 'creative' regeneration strategies cater only for elite or wealthy publics, and (often deliberately) exclude poor and otherwise marginalized social groups (see, for example, Harvey, 1989; Peck, 2005; Zukin, 1996) are often skilfully elided through claims that such strategies are now part of the mainstream 'toolkit' for creative city renewal (see, for example, Landry, 2000).

individual—and is thus coterminous with freedom. Yet there is, of course, a whole range of ways in which critical social science might view this 'free' leisure in less Panglossian terms. For example, for critical theorists such as Adorno, leisure and ostensible 'free time' were never anything more than "the shadowy continuation of labour" (2007, page 194), with workers being trained into modes of behaviour demanded by, and conducive to, the prevailing work process. The work-oriented leisure practices of the creative class might now be seen as simply reflecting and upholding the particular demands of postindustrial capitalism for a total commitment to the logic of production, both inside and outside the workplace. From another perspective, the ostensibly radical and individual character of creative leisure would doubtless be challenged by Bourdieu (1984), who alerted us to the ways in which seemingly distinctive and individualized consumption and leisure practices tend to betray their class origins and conformist impulses. Indeed, leisure choices tend to reflect the shaping powers of the class 'habitus', and while the choices and dispositions of creative cultural workers appear to extol the virtues of autonomy and creative self-expression, in their regularity and predictability they may produce only conformity and a reproduction of historically ascribed social roles. More recently, Edensor (2000) has specifically identified how even 'adventurous' leisure comes with its own formulas, props, and practices which help regulate this apparently autonomous and untamed form of expression.

In addition, as a further contrast to Florida's reading, the cultivation of a self-expressive and individualized identity has now been identified by neo-Foucauldian theorists of government, such as Barratt (2004), Du Gay (1996; 1997), Lemke (2001), and Rose (1999), as central to the *administration* of modern workplace life. If viewed from this governmentality perspective, Florida's account reveals creative selves who are not necessarily ruled 'from above' (in his book, there is an obvious absence of subjugation by powerful corporations, firms, or managers), nor reluctantly subjected to forced domination, but appear (as 'freelancers' and 'creatives') provided with a certain freedom to act and self-regulate their conduct—but only in relation to an overarching set of norms and values that provide guidance for appropriate (work-based or work-enhancing) creative action. Thus the creative economy promotes leisure pursuits that rely upon practitioners to "set their own pace and create their own rules" (Florida, 2002, page 175), ones that now (just happen to) reinforce and enhance new-economy formulas for commodity production and accumulation. Indeed, while creative work and leisure appear to offer a seductive world of free choice, it seems, at the same time, that workers' *specific* leisure choices (distinctive, purposeful, or extreme activities—Bourdieu's 'Californian sports') and discursive expressions of choice (the way choice is framed, articulated, and understood: that is, everyone must be 'individual', 'self-determining', and 'active') have become somewhat standardized and predictable, and so actually appear to close down the creative *possibilities* of selfhood. Seen critically, we might even suggest the creative-class worker appears to be a victim of the 'organized self-realization' that Honneth (2004) identifies as characteristics of late-modern societies, where 'freedom' can be obtained—but only through socially prescribed and discursively regimented means. Of course, while we might also challenge these critiques for their apparently abject view of human agency, we should recognize that they provide a vital corrective to the kind of upbeat and unreflexive euphoria characteristic of Florida's analysis—where the exercise of personal choice is judged to be intrinsic, liberating, and wholly unrestrained.

Secondly, Florida's work contains some significant methodological problems. Not only is the actual *existence* of a discrete and identifiable creative class open to question [see Markusen (2006) for criticisms of Florida's approach to the definition and

measurement of the creative class],⁽⁶⁾ but Florida's own qualitative assessment of it is at best partial, and rendered further superficial by his apparently ad hoc and highly selective approach to the collection, presentation, and analysis of interview data. The size and constitution of his sample are unspecified, and he is too readily inclined to fall back on his own personal experience in order to help scaffold his general argument. Within the sample, the full complexity of possible motives and meanings of creative-class leisure are by no means adequately explored. The upbeat tone of Florida's descriptions of creative-class leisure disavow the possibility that for women, working-class, or ethnic-minority workers, or those with 'unfit', disabled, or nonactive bodies (indeed, anyone outside of Florida's ideal creative-class type), the domain of leisure may well hold other (noninstrumental, work-antithetical, less utopian) meanings.

Thirdly, these methodological weaknesses are compounded by Florida's unreflexive idiom and evangelical tenor—he offers not simply an analysis of changing patterns of work and leisure but a glowing endorsement of them. Indeed, in his heated descriptions of the joys and benefits of creative work and leisure (especially biking), he appears to have fully 'gone native' and lost all sense of perspective on the partiality of his own (particularly classed and gendered) position and the ways in which the opportunities and constraints of leisure are unevenly distributed across society. Indeed, the more vividly Florida describes the lifestyle of the creative-class worker, the less convincing his argument becomes: analysis segues into moral prescription as the social fact and ideal type of creative-class subject is wished into existence. If his data only weakly indicate the apparent existence of a 'rising' class of creative, active, clean-living, and socially motivated subjects (of which he is the perfect personification), then this is used to underpin Florida's strong hope that the creative class will in the future take more seriously the "obligations of leadership that come with our position as the norm-setting class" (2002, page 317) and evolve from being "self-directed, albeit high-achieving, individuals, into a more cohesive, more responsible group" (page 316). Here, then, the creative-class worker is not simply imagined as the harbinger of a new kind of personal and economic freedom, but as a future guarantor of social responsibility, equality, and justice.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to critically examine Florida's popular and influential theory of the 'creative class', challenging specifically his assessment of the 'progressive' effacement of work–leisure boundaries in creative production. While I have identified some problems in his analysis, this does not, of course, discount the possibility that Florida has hit upon some real and significant transformations in the meanings and purpose of work and leisure in postindustrial societies. However, even if we accept that leisure has in some way become harnessed to work in the way which Florida welcomes (and which critical social science would condemn), and that a new vanguard class of creative subjects are, by their own voluntary efforts, leading us to a brave new economic world, there would still be grounds for questioning the extent to which this process is as widespread (and, indeed, acceptable to workers) as Florida claims.

Firstly, as stated, not all creative-class subjects will identify with (or even recognize) the social role that Florida has laid down for them. Furthermore, it is clear that,

⁽⁶⁾ Markusen, for example, argues that because Florida defines the creative class by agglomerating different occupational codes from the US Census, where classification is based heavily on educational background and attainment, his index does not measure 'creativity' per se—simply the distribution of educational capital in the population. More generally, she avers: "the creative-class and, by extension, creative-city, rubric is impoverished by fuzziness of conception, weakness of evidence, and political silence" (2006, page 1924).

contrary to Florida's rather optimistic reading, relations of exploitation, feelings of alienation, and desires for freedom beyond work have not been made to disappear entirely, even from creative occupations—as analysts of creative labour have continued to emphasise (Banks, 2007; Bourdieu, 1998; McRobbie, 2002; Miller et al, 2003; Ross, 2003). Indeed, the proselytizing tenor that underpins much of Florida's text appears to inure him to the concrete realities of creative work and leisure—a world where workers are involved in myriad and complex struggles to carve out leisure time—space, beyond the grasp of work, and where, even amongst the creative class, there is significant disquiet regarding the decline of disinterested leisure and some deep-felt anxiety regarding the creeping colonization of the self by work and economic rationality. Thus, the creative-class worker—even if we accept that such a category exists—cannot possibly be as homogeneous and standardized as Florida imagines, for there are always other classes and *other leisures*—and significant social variations between and within them.

Further, by suggesting that creative workers may exhibit or express more varied and complex forms of self-identity, we open up the possibility of an alternative model of labour subjectivity which also challenges some of the more abject critical social science readings of the creative worker. Thus, even if workers appear to be dominated by the machinations of the 'culture industry' (as critical theorists might suggest), or governing themselves into subjection (as Foucauldians might argue), the application of top-down managerial power is always liable to be uneven, and even self-administration is part of the "congenitally failing operation" (Rose and Miller, 1992, page 190) of government—one vulnerable to progressive transformation from within by capable social *agents*. Indeed, to adopt a more liberal perspective, we might suggest that through being provided with the capacity to become self-governing in work and leisure, the opportunity for workers to pursue strategies of dissent and resistance is not necessarily eliminated, but may be further *enhanced*. As Foucault himself described, "power relations are only possible in so far as the subject is free" (Foucault, 1997, page 292, cited by Barnett, 1999, page 383), raising the prospect that incitements to self-government can progressively backfire, since being forced to reflect and act constantly upon one's own status or position in society can (arguably) engender a more deliberative and critical attitude towards it (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Lash, 1994).

Thus, amongst creative workers, the realm of disinterested leisure likely remains valued for its potential to provide sensual and erotic freedom, hedonistic escapes, private pleasures, self-gratifications and shared entertainments, downtime, free time, and 'my time'—as well as opportunities for social critique and political organizing. Indeed, today, we see creative-class workers increasingly refusing their casting by critical social science as self-interested, atomized, or wholly 'governed' individuals and, instead, being reenergized by the putatively new arenas of choice opened up in individualized social climates, working to create new 'progressive' work-based identities that vitiate the demands of economic rationality (Banks, 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Berking, 1996). To give only illustrative examples, the political engagements of 'creative' (and of course other) workers through collectivized, critical, leisure movements has become a emergent feature of advanced capitalism, such as the global Critical Mass cycling movement, various free-climbing groups, grassroots and communitarian sports-club developments, urban movements involved in activities such as free running, parkour, not to mention various kinds of critical walkers—all of which explore the possibilities for enhancing freedom through collective, noninstrumentalized, leisure practice (Carlsson, 2002; de Certeau, 1984; Kiewa, 2002; Lewis, 2000; Schofield, 2002). For certain, we should not overestimate or utopianize the social impacts of these developments, but neither should we too rapidly dismiss the prospects for critical

leisure continuing in the new economy—nor the possibility of a politicized element of creative-class professionals becoming involved in it.

However, neither should the expansion of such movements be automatically seen as an endorsement for Florida's utopian conviction that the creative class has now begun to 'grow up' and face up to its social responsibilities. What such initiatives perhaps more convincingly reflect is the fact that capitalism is comprised *already* of an existing panoply and complexity of work identities, critical leisures, and nonwork social solidarities that coexist with the neoliberal hegemony; expressing a rich (but fragile) political diversity in leisure practice and a heterogeneity not yet reflected in the kind of single-minded, work-oriented, creative-class culture that Florida would wish to promote. Yet, while the diversity of leisure practice remains (thus far) reassuringly vital, we should not underestimate how the drive to instantiate a new economic world in which work and leisure are (re)converged in the interest of capital, and personified in the form of the continually active 'total economic body', poses a threat to the terrain of critical and disinterested leisure—the right to a life beyond work cannot be taken for granted and must continually be fought for and won.

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