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Book Review:

Persistent Creativity: Making the Case for Art, Culture and the Creative Industries by Peter Campbell, Palgrave Macmillan.

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Summary:

Peter Campbell's publication explores the origins and persistence of the 'Creativity Agenda' and raises concerns about its enduring positive narrative of economic and social impact.

Abstract:

Campbell's book explores the persistence of creativity as a driver in cultural policy and planning. It considers its deployment in the case-making for arts, culture and creative industries in the UK and exposes definitional ambiguities and contradictions surrounding the term 'creative'. Within this argument, the author raises concerns about the boundaries of sector statistics and the role of programmes such as cities of culture in promoting and reinforcing this mythological and enduring narrative of social and economic impact.

Key words: Creative industries policy; Creativity Agenda; Cultural Policy.

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A striking feature of authorial voice is the impression with some books that the writer is sitting beside you telling you the story of their work. With *Persistent Creativity: Making the Case for Art, Culture and the Creative Industries* (Campbell, 2019), the feeling instead is of being led by a rather excellent gallery guide, who navigates you through key points, histories and themes, pointing out a detail in one place and another, and delicately stringing together all these elements until you arrive at the end of your journey with a whole and nuanced picture.

The book sets out to explore the conceptions of creativity as they are applied over time in UK cultural policies and related policies, and in political rhetoric; and its persistent labelling of creative occupations, creative industries, creative cities and cultural regeneration. Throughout the text, the persistence is established in two ways. On one hand, it is a 'simplifying narrative' (as Campbell borrows from (Oakley and O'Connor, 2015) of the assertions of the success of creativity as a social and economic driver, ignoring issues of causality. On the other hand, Campbell unpacks this as the persistence of a wider, more complex set of underlying values, interpretations and the annexation of 'proof' of the social and economic benefits of such endeavours without necessarily a correlation to actual evidence.

The text, in eight chapters including an epilogue, is a steady circling of how the term 'creativity' has been defined and enacted over time, demonstrating how what Campbell defines as the 'Creativity Agenda' emerges and proves remarkably durable in policy and political thinking prior to, and alongside, the emergence of the creative industries in the 1990s. Additionally, as the title suggests, this book is concerned with how this persistence becomes intrinsically linked to the 'evidence' of social and economic benefit and, with some fluidity of how creativity and the sector being measured are defined, how this evidence is put to service in the 'case for arts and culture'. In this way, he raises questions for the study and policy practice of the creative and

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cultural industries and adds new thoughts to the continuing discussion of what constitutes evidence, value, impact and the relative verifiable or imagined 'success' of a range of creative initiatives. In this way, it can be seen as an intelligent cautionary note that tempers many of the policy claims of the 'power of creativity' (p.275).

Chapters 1 and 2 offer a useful analysis of how creativity was defined and enacted first in the period from the 1990s to the 2010s and then stepping back to the period, as Campbell (p.10) puts it, 'Before Creativity' emerges as a policy concept in the 1990s. This glance backward is rightfully in the early part of the book. The route navigated here gives some understanding of how we get to the present and the evolution of a creativity rhetoric as other instrumentalising forces emerge in UK economic, cultural and social policies. In the second instance, the distinctions Campbell makes in these chapters forms the underpinning argument present throughout: that the ways in which we evolve the language of creativity and its relationship to other concepts of art and culture rest on older earlier enactments and are critical to all the ways in which it is subsequently justified and measured.

Moving to Chapter 3, Campbell turns this scrutiny of definitions to examine the growth of the Creativity Agenda to global dominance in the early part of the 21st century. The persistence of policies and policy transfer is emphasised and he singles out the notions of creative city, creative class and occupations, and creative industries as specifically durable. Here, for me is where I feel the book begins to turn you round to look at the previous chapters, offering a new vantage point. He dissects some of the evolution of labels such as creative or cultural industries and creative occupations and points to how the ambiguous interpretation of these terms masks contradictions inherent in the policies surrounding them. Again too, he emphasises the underlying presentation of arts and culture as central to these new forms of creativity yet when subjected

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to greater scrutiny, the creativity is not so new and arts and culture neither so central nor indeed a proven driver of other creative industries.

The obfuscation of evidence and concerns of the purpose of research as evidence-making are the subject of Chapter 4. The history of evidence-making as justification of policy decisions and the growth of evidence-based policy making are drawn together. This chapter ranges through the rise of cultural regeneration as a policy phenomenon and the various policy attachments of arts, culture and creative industries. Time is spent discussing the challenges of policy research, the gaps between advocacy-led measurement and evaluative research, not least the concerns of causality (can there be any way to show links between cultural regeneration and economic/social benefits?), the mismatches between short-term data and long-term outcomes measurement and an over-emphasis on economic impact emerging in the Creativity Agenda. Despite the persistent search for a 'case' to be made, Campbell again circles back to the definitional problems encountered and suggests the problem is in part a lack of clarity of what kind of research is needed, this ambiguity being in part because evidence must be tailored to what is most politically expedient. A point raised throughout and raised again here, is the persistent claims by government ministers and public bodies that it is the tools of measurement that are failing not the inherent value of these activities. Yet Campbell rightly asks the question of why, if the problem of measurement has been known for so long, does this too persist?

Chapters 5 and 6 can be viewed as the illustrative chapters. In these, Campbell first examines how the contradictory and ambiguous definitions of 'creative industries' shape the claims for the sector's economic impact in published statistics; and then scrutinises the evidence-making embedded in the bidding for and winning of the European Capital of Culture programme (examining Liverpool 2008 in particular). We see why the earlier attention to definitions of creativity, creative occupations and industries *matters* in the

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formation of evidence of impact; and how since the 1990s, successive government departments and public bodies have adapted these interpretations to annex or exclude fields and occupations to fit the political arguments of the moment. In doing so, claims of instrumentalised economic or social impact become solidified and indisputable and travel through subsequent reports and advocacy statements.

Chapter 7 largely focuses on the concerns around the social claims of the Creativity Agenda and sets against these the widely acknowledged issues of inequity, inequality, precarity and lack of diversity within the field of creative and cultural work. It might seem as if this book by now is wholly negative in its outlook but Campbell advises this is not a 'counsel of despair' but a call to return to questions of what 'creativity' means, to uncouple some of the 'mythical' assertions of impact and value that have grown around it within the Creativity Agenda and to recognise the social structures in which arts, culture and creative industries are embedded.

Campbell's epilogue traces the ongoing persistence of claims and success narratives as he brings the text up to (almost) present-day. The neat historic detail and statistical scrutiny demonstrated throughout the book are drawn upon and connected to contemporary statements and claims. Drawing on the adherence to numerical evidence without scrutiny in claims by Arts Council England, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (England), and Peter Bazalgette's *Independent Review of the Creative Industries* (2017) among others, he sounds concern at both how economic value comes to dominate all other values in the 'case' for creativity. He also notes how 'creativity' becomes 'a panchreston: an explanation or theory which can be made to fit all cases, being used in such a variety of ways as to become meaningless' (p.282).

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There is much to admire in this book. It offers a single authorial clarity to its argument that builds and evolves with both serious detail and a lightness of writing. It manages this clarity of voice while also drawing on and giving space to a wide range of research. Much of the work on definitional issues is ground already partly covered through other research (all fully acknowledged here). However, what Campbell achieves in this text is fresh examination and scrutiny, revealing a particular and persistent pattern of behaviour within the evidence gathering and claims, and the defining of these processes under a new title, the Creativity Agenda.

As an introduction/overview to topics of creative industries policies, creative cities, creative occupations and cultural regeneration, the text works well. Each chapter with its distinct but connected theme can be seen as a gathering together of, and building from, a complex range of academic scholarship and other relevant materials (grey literature such as bid documents, public statements and investment strategies, etc.). In this way, the text offers not only something of value and relevance to creative industries and cultural policy scholars but can give non-academics, postgraduate and inter-disciplinary researchers a helicopter view of the critical arguments and other voices within the field.

Evident also in this review is an inevitable repetition in the book of certain words: creativity, creative, persistent, durable. This has the effect of making the reader even more aware of on the one hand, the ubiquity and simultaneous ambiguity of the concept of creativity; and on the other, the historic endurance and solidifying of a mythology of creativity's alleged impact. It is worth noting that it is not a critique of arts, culture and creativity. Indeed, Campbell is at pains to point out that the subject is not whether creativity *might* have legitimate claims to social, economic and cultural value. Rather it problematises *how* such claims have emerged and been enacted

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within a range of planning and bidding processes, public statements and so-called 'evidence-based policymaking'.

Aside from its contribution to scholarly research, I also take from this book the author's note of caution about the ways in which advocates of arts, culture and the creative industries borrow the evidence and claims of the Creativity Agenda to reinforce the position of these fields within political and policy decisions. Campbell at regular points throughout suggests that the definitional ambiguity reduces important particularities (for example the distinctions of software engineer versus musician in Chapter 5) and obscures actual or potential alternate value forms and evidence in favour of simplified economic rationales and idealised social utopias. This for him, is another facet of persistence that he argues, future arts, culture and creative industry practitioners might come to regret.

The very sticking power of the Creativity Agenda and its transfer into city planning, regeneration and culture and development policies beyond the UK, is precisely why this book holds more value than as a study of a single nation policy and its evidence base. Campbell not only makes this argument in his introduction but provides a neat rationale, drawing on other work that traces this in Chapter 3. While predominantly focused on English rather than national policies, we can recognise many similarities and common policy parlance in Northern Ireland and also see common ground in Irish policy. This suggests a readership on this island has much to gain from this book. The contribution and potential of the creative industries to Ireland's economy has been written about over some period (Bayliss, 2004; Collins et al., 2018) but holds substantially more potential for study. Campbell's work with its cautionary notes, draws closer comparison to Ramsey's more recent work on the under-examination of the alleged impact of Game of Thrones (2019). Drawing on Campbell's definitional detail in Chapter 2, one might wish to look again at Ireland and the title descriptors used in its public bodies in the

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creative field: *Arts Council*, *Culture Ireland*, *Creative Ireland*. One might wish to consider how Creative Ireland will demonstrate its remit to ‘connect people, creativity and wellbeing’ and its subsets of a ‘Creative Nation’ as ‘Creative People’ and ‘Creative Industries’ (Creative Ireland, 2020). In a Northern Irish context, the dissolution of a dedicated Department for *Arts and Culture* into a unit within the Department for *Communities* and the transfer of responsibility for *creative industries* to Invest NI, the principal *business development* agency reporting to the Department for the *Economy* may also be examined afresh with Campbell’s guidance here on the significance of sector boundaries and defined terms.

Campbell’s discussion of cultural regeneration and the persistence of the Creativity Agenda within the bidding process for European Capitals of Culture and wider competitive national city programmes (Chapter 6), also offers talking points to how we look at the justification and legacies of these experiences (Galway 2020, Limerick City of Culture 2014, Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 or a range of UNESCO City bids achieved and underway). Again, while such of these programmes to occur on the island have been subjected to a critical lens (Boland et al., 2019; Doak, 2014; O’Callaghan, 2012; Kinsella et al., 2017), possibly less discussion has arisen about how the creativity rhetoric has become embedded without interrogation in the political enthusiasm for such initiatives.

The announcement of the recent *Paying the Artist* policy by Arts Council Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2020) occurs nearly a decade on from the depressing cross-border report on the *Living and Working Conditions of Artists in Ireland and Northern Ireland* (McAndrew and McKimm, 2011). This and ongoing debate about pay and sustainable careers in the wider arts and cultural sector in Ireland/Northern Ireland demonstrate a contemporary interest in the issue of labour and precarity in the arts, cultural and creative industries, although with rather less scholarly research in an Irish context.

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Chapter 7 of this text situates key arguments and draws on the growing body of UK research on precarious creative labour relative to the creative industries' success narrative. I would note this is not however, a principal focus of this book. It offers, as noted above, an overview of its critical arguments and in so doing, demonstrates how other work has taken up this scrutiny of inequality and social justice. What Campbell makes clear is that these concerns cannot be seen as separate and distinct from the definitional problematisation or the persistent case-making. The indeterminacy of what 'creativity' is creates indeterminacy or precarity of creative labour and the social cohesion the Creativity Agenda claims is unachievable if arts, culture and the creative industries continue to replicate wider social structural inequalities. As with so many circularities to be admired within this book, its efficacy is in showing you enough to reveal the image or concept and then offering another angle to reveal the wider picture.

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Notes

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