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Seeing Through Adorno's Prism

Adorno, Negative Dialectics, and the 'Creative City'

ABSTRACT: The cultural and creative industries have become a vibrant field of research in recent years. Increasing their contributions to GDP and encompassing a growing share of the labour market, cultural and creative industries have become a common feature in many areas of policy and research, and, especially in urban contexts, have become associated with significant spatial transformations. While the origin of the concept of 'culture industry' in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer is often acknowledged, contemporary scholarship in the field of cultural and creative industries has typically paid very little attention to the theoretical work – specifically Adorno's critique of 'identity thinking' and the importance of contradiction and the preponderance of the object which formed the basis of his negative dialectics – which underpinned his arguments concerning the commodification and standardization of cultural products. Consequently, important insights in Adorno's work are frequently overlooked in contemporary accounts of cultural and creative industries. This article situates Adorno's arguments on the culture industry within his negative dialectics, and by applying his 'logic of disintegration' – or 'prism' – to the 'creative city', makes an argument for how Adorno's ideas continue provide important insights into the geographies of cultural and creative industries in postindustrial society.

Keywords: Adorno, negative dialectics, cultural and creative industries, creative cities

1. Introduction

The cultural and creative industries (hereafter CCIs) have become a significant field of study in recent years, and have attracted attention and commentary from a range of fields not limited to geography, sociology, urban studies, urban planning and local governance. Their economic significance has been celebrated for some time, and since the 1990s they have achieved greater prominence in regional, national, and international development policies, especially in Europe and North America, but increasingly on the global stage. More significantly than a proportion of GDP or share of the labour market, CCIs have been seen to be deeply implicated in the emergence of postindustrial society. Typically considered trailblazers of the new economy (Florida 2014; Leadbetter/Oakley 1999), as pioneers of gentrification and urban (re)development (Ley 2003; Mathews 2010), or a new and exploited urban precariat (Bain/McLean 2012; Raunig et al. 2011), people working in CCIs are often positioned at the forefront of change in the postindustrial economy, and seen as indicative of work in the new cultural 'gig economy', in

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which culture and personal fulfilment are no longer 'out of place' in the world of work, but are increasingly inseparable from it. What several commentators are now viewing as an obsession with creativity (Raunig et al. 2011; Reckwitz 2017; Mould 2018) is, in many ways becoming a defining feature of postindustrial society, placing what Osborne (2003) has described as a 'moral imperative' on people, organizations, and places to *be creative*. In short, CCIs often stand as indicators for the new cultural economy: heralding the direction not only of what jobs exist but the character of those jobs and their relationships to other aspects of life in postindustrial society. Amongst other things, this throws questions about the economic and social value of cultural and artistic work and cultural products and those who produce them into the limelight.

Geographical research suggests CCIs have particular implications for spatial transformations, particularly in relation to the social and spatial impacts of culture-led urban regeneration (Miles/Paddison 2005), gentrification (Hamnett/Whitelegg 2017; Whiting/Hannam 2017), and urban branding (Bookman, 2014; Gospodini 2006). The apotheosis of which is the 'creative city' agenda, in which, largely following the works of Charles Landry (2000) and Richard Florida (2005; 2014) cities around the world are increasingly seeking to alter their material and cultural landscapes in ways which foster cultural and creative work with the aim of marketing themselves as 'creative' in order to attract the highly educated, mobile, and culturally-discerning 'creative class' of artists, creators, and cultural intelligentsia who – according to the Floridian narrative – are ultimately responsible for the future prosperity of postindustrial urban economies.

Given the significance afforded CCIs and the role of culture – and specifically its relationship to the economy – it is surprising that the work of Adorno, in whose work the concept of the 'culture industry' first appeared, is often overlooked in contemporary geographical explorations. As will be explored below, a significant element of Adorno's argument concerns the relationship between the general and the particular, which is not an uncommon theme in theoretical work exploring the relationship between culture and individuality in late-modern or postindustrial society (e. g. Bauman 2000; Bourdieu 1996). Reckwitz (2017; 2020) has recently reinvigorated these discussions with his account of a society of singularities characterized by a 'logic of the particular' in large part deriving from the late-modern cultural economy.

Since the last decades of the 20th century there has been something of a revival of interest in Adorno's aesthetic theory (e. g. Hullot-Kentor 1989), as well as a number of other works that have argued for the contemporary relevance of Adorno's work in relation to, for instance, feminist social theory (O'Neill 1999), social philosophy (Zuidervaat 2007), and musicology (Witkin 1998). While these all have relevance for studies of CCIs and their geographies, they are rarely picked up in contemporary discussions of CCIs, and so these arguments, and by extension Adorno's own, are frequently overlooked (although see O'Connor 2010 and Raunig et al. 2011 for notable exceptions).

The conceptual history of CCIs and their political mobilization is well documented (see, for instance, Hesmondhalgh 2018; O'Connor 2010) and does not need repeating. Nor is it my intention here to offer an alternative conceptual history. Instead, this article offers to (re)present Adorno's arguments by reasserting the crucial connection between

Adorno's understanding of the culture industry and his philosophical programme of negative dialectics.

The unpopularity of Adorno's work (by which it's hard not to imagine him being wryly amused) is at least in part due to the central arguments in Adorno and Horkheimer's infamous chapter 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* being taken as straightforward criticism of how cultural objects are produced rather than in the context of Adorno's broader arguments regarding negative dialectics and the critique of what he calls 'identity thinking' in relation to the promise of reason inherent in the project of enlightenment. In this article I offer a contribution to ongoing debates concerning CCIs and 'creative cities' by exploring Adorno's arguments concerning the culture industry in relation to the principles of his negative dialectics, the object-focused analysis of culture, and importance of challenging identity thinking through the contradictions cultural objects reveal. Specifically, by viewing 'creative cities' as culture industry products and exploring their contradictions through the 'prism' (Adorno 1997) of Adorno's negative dialectics, I suggest that Adorno's insights remain valuable for understanding CCIs and the role of culture in contemporary society.

In the following sections I outline the foundations of Adorno's negative dialectics before moving on to explore these points in relation to Adorno's arguments concerning the culture industry. I then consider these points in relation to the geographical consequences of contemporary thinking concerning CCIs by turning Adorno's prism on the phenomenon of the 'creative city', and, in doing so, make a case for how Adorno's arguments can continue to provide critical insight.

2. Negative Dialectics, Nonidentity, and a Logic of Disintegration

Adorno, more than his colleagues at the Frankfurt Institute, saw himself as a philosopher and artist, albeit one steadfastly committed to philosophy that had real-world implications, more than a social scientist (Buck-Morss 1979, 65). A cornerstone of Adorno's philosophical concern was the possibility of human development under the conditions provided by enlightenment, and with the ability of reason to provide knowledge of the world – concerns which were at the centre of German Idealism and the effort, in responding to Kant's separation of knowing subject and (un)knowable object, to re-establish the primacy of human reason in gaining knowledge of the world of material objects. This reached new heights with Hegel, for whom the search for the Absolute was also the inevitable unfolding of history. The inexorable movement toward synthesis, toward the Absolute, that resulted from the resolution of dialectical conflict, and which manifested as the mastery of reason over nature, was ultimately the unity of thought with its object; or the achievement of *identity* between subject and object.

Adorno's negative dialectics was concerned with returning the fundamental ideas of tension, mediation, and contradiction to dialectical thinking (Sherman 2016). Unlike the dialectics of either Hegel or Marx, Adorno's project rejects the ideas of totality,

synthesis, positivity, and the Absolute as the goal or endpoint of either the dialectical process of reason or of history itself (whether as Reason or the World-Spirit, as in Hegel, or in socialism as in Marx). Adorno's project instead "sets out to be a dialectics not of identity, but of *non-identity*" (Adorno 2008, 6, original emphasis). At its core, this refers to the non-identity between objects themselves and the subjective concepts by which those objects are perceived. Objects, both 'natural' and the products of human labour, have a reality which is always in some sense beyond the ability of reason to make sense of and conceptualize: that is to say, they are *non-conceptual*. Accordingly, all concepts fall short of explaining their object in its entirety. Concepts thus stand in a double contradiction (Thompson 2017, 351): the concept "is always less than what is subsumed under it" (Adorno 2008, 7), and no actually existing object *is everything* indicated by its concept. No concept can ever be *identical* to the object it seeks to describe: "objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder" (Adorno 1973, 5).

Adorno charges previous philosophy with denying this contradiction and consequently with reducing the inherent complex particularity of given reality to the purely logical exercises of human consciousness (Adorno 1973; 1977; Sherman 2016); forcing our understanding of the world into clearly determinate categories and accepting the illusion "that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real" (Adorno 1977, 120). This error – which Adorno refers to as *identity thinking* – is not merely philosophical hubris. Despite his philosophical approach, Adorno's concerns are never truly abstract, but inextricably rooted in a project of understanding and dealing with the material concerns of life. The "unsuccessful attempt to use philosophical concepts for coping with all that is heterogeneous to those concepts" (1973, 4) effectively denies the independent existence of material reality (Thomson 2017, 348); subsuming that which is objective within a 'constitutive subjectivity', whereby thoughts, meanings, and concepts come to eclipse and ultimately replace the objects which they purportedly describe. While similar ideas can be found in various forms of philosophical realism (e. g. Archer et al. 1998; Harman 2018), unlike negative dialectics, these do not generally approach the contradiction as a dialectic, or emphasize its social consequences. For Adorno, "thought and societal existence are interrelated processes" (O'Neill 1999, 24); and the abstraction from the world of objects and the material conditions of life into reified concepts is symptomatic of a society which seeks equivalence (derived from the principle of exchange contained in the commodity form) between particular objects and an abstract, universalizing conceptual system. As Bernstein (2001, 10) put it: "Adorno believes ... that for all intents and purposes it is the *same* conceptions of reason and rationality that govern scientific rationality and societal rationalization". Specifically, Adorno draws a parallel between philosophical identity thinking and the principle of equivalence inherent in the barter system and fundamental to capitalism and a market economy. The principle of identity by which particular objects are subsumed within their concept, he argues, is essentially the same kind of abstraction as that – which Marx described in terms of 'use value' and 'exchange value' – through which different forms of particular objects are reckoned to be equal to one another and exchangeable (Sherman 2016). "It is through barter," Adorno (1973, 146) suggests, "that nonidentical individuals and per-

formances become commensurable and identical. The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total.”

That identity thinking strives inevitably towards totality is crucial for Adorno, and is what separates his approach from other accounts of the tension between the general and the particular. He describes it (and the reversal of the Hegelian principle of identity as progress is clear here) as a form of mastery:

“the principle of mastery, the mastery of nature, which spreads its influence, which continues in the mastery of men by other men and which finds its mental reflex in the principle of identity ... the intrinsic aspiration of all mind to turn every alterity that is introduced to it or that it encounters into something like itself and in this way to draw it into its sphere of influence” (2008, 9).

Because they are not, and cannot be, truly equivalent, and so cannot be reconciled, concept and object cannot approach one another on equal terms (Adorno 1973). To seek their identity is inevitably to seek to subsume nonidentical particularity within its concept, and to assume away those differences that make the particular object what it is. To conceptualize, in this sense, is to attempt to force an impossible identity: to integrate the nonidentical object with a totalizing concept. Again, this is not merely a philosophical problem. Adorno, as Ray (2011) has argued, saw a direct parallel between the totalizing logic of identity thinking and the administration of totalitarianism. The mastery of the nonidentical by the concept has its parallels in the alienation of humanity through the commodified relations of capitalism and the integration of the individual into the social whole. The assuming away of objective remainders under the totalizing logic of concept are part of tendencies within the development of society under enlightenment rationality; tendencies which “do not stop short before the physical reduction and liquidation of actual subjects” (Ray 2011, 177). “Genocide,” Adorno (1973, 362) remarked, “is the ultimate integration.”

Recognising that “the conceptual totality is mere appearance,” and that our ability to conceive of the world is inevitably shaped by this conceptual totality – interwoven as it is not only with the conditions of society but with the capacity of thought itself – Adorno’s solution is “to break immanently, in its own measure, through the appearance of total identity” (Adorno 1973, 5): to oppose totality “by convicting it of nonidentity with itself — of the nonidentity it denies” (Adorno 1973, 147). Adorno’s negative dialectics, then, is a logic of disintegration: “a disintegration of the prepared and objectified form of the concepts which the cognitive subject faces, primarily and directly” (Adorno 1973, 145), in order that the non-identity of subject and object, and their fundamental irreducibility and irreconcilability can be maintained. A logic which “indicates the untruth of identity” (Adorno 1973, 5), and which “holds together differences – of object from concept, nature from subject, myth from enlightenment – letting them remain different, juxtaposed as such, without subsuming them under any unifying structure” (Stone 2014, 1131); allowing them to coexist as differences. Negative dialectics is therefore a response to the character of the world of objects: “It is the matter, not the organizing drive of thought,” Adorno maintains, “that brings us to dialectics” (1973, 144); and therefore,

it is in objects themselves (and their real material conditions) that we must concentrate our investigations.

The challenge which Adorno sets, then, is to find a way to break out of identity thinking. A dialectical approach that does not seek identity and reconciliation, but nonidentity, and which maintains the distinction between concept and nonconceptual, and so maintains the independent reality of the object. That Adorno's project is fundamentally object-focused is crucial, but it would be a mistake to see in this a rejection either of the importance of concepts and of reason, or the role of socially-situated agency and individuality involved in the creation of knowledge. Truth may be a property of the nonidentical object, but it is not simply apparent to us: "contradictoriness is a category of reflection, the cogitative confrontation of concept and thing" (Adorno 1973, 144–5). Rather, "the constructive moment occurs when the mind strives to know it in thought" (O'Neill 1999, 24). Consequently, the juxtaposition of inadequate concept and nonidentical object shows up not only the limits of concept, of knowledge, but also creates the possibility of knowledge. "Non-identity thinking confronts the partial truth of an object with its potential truth. In this way criticism can advance the interests of the truth by identifying the false" (O'Neill 1999, 25) – a constructive as well as destructive moment (Buck-Morss 1979). Only "by tarrying with the revealed antagonisms immanent to concept and thing (the truth of their nonidentity) can the interstice between them ... be sustained" (Thomson 2017, 350). Consequently, "[t]o proceed dialectically means to think in contradictions" (Adorno 1973, 145), and it is in this way that Adorno's account of the culture industry should be approached.

Adorno achieves this by proposing a constellation of concepts: a way of using, deploying, or arranging concepts through which their interconnected, dialectical relationship both to each other and to their objects can be held in mind, and their reification resisted. Viewed in this way – as through a prism, refracting its object and allowing it to be seen differently; variegated rather than unified – concepts can be used not to designate objects strictly, but to show the incompleteness of the picture provided by any single concept or antinomy. Before considering the implications of this for the concept of the 'creative city', it is necessary to revisit the Adorno's arguments regarding the culture industry in light of the preceding discussion of negative dialectics.

3. Culture and Industry Revisited

Cities are cultural products. Creative cities, by definition, are cultural products in a different, more intentional, explicit sense; but it is something more than this to suggest, as I do here, that creative cities are culture industry products. To make this case it is necessary to revisit Adorno's understanding of the culture industry and its negative dialectic.

The central arguments made by Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) and reinforced in Adorno's later writings on the culture industry (e.g. 2001a, 2001b, 2001c) are well known: under conditions of capitalism, cultural works, and especially the products of mass consumer culture, become increasingly commodified and standardized. Forced by

the demands of the culture industry toward ever more derivative production, art is denied its autonomy, its true creativity, and 'serious art' is replaced by formulaic, predictable and ideological cultural commodities, which are readily consumed by an audience made compliant by capital. Read on this level alone the familiar accusations of cultural pessimism and elitism have some traction, but such a reading ignores the substance of Adorno's arguments, and crucially fails to appreciate the (negative) dialectic within Adorno's understanding of the culture industry and with which his argument is primarily concerned. That is, to read Adorno as arguing one-sidedly that a monolithic culture industry devours 'serious' art sidesteps the essential *contradiction* concerning the idea of 'culture' and the cultural objects that constitute and mediate that idea or concept, and the relationship between art and economy which characterize this contradiction under capitalism.

Adorno's approach does not originate in a *l'art pour l'art* separation of culture from its practical, even economic conditions and consequences. The Romantic, idealist underpinnings of such a position are entirely incongruous to Adorno's insistence on materiality. Rather, Adorno sees the competing influences of culture and economy intertwined in an irreconcilable negative dialectic. This contradiction is stated outright in the paradoxical arrangement of the words 'culture' and 'industry'. For Adorno, the uncomfortable juxtaposition of these words represented the equivalent attempt to reconcile those aspects of life concerned with meaning, beauty, and individual growth and development with that which is concerned with the (re)production of the material conditions of life, the relations of production, and their administration (Adorno, 2001c). Hullot-Kentor (2008) has drawn attention to the absence of the contentious – even scandalous – and contradictory character of the concept in the ubiquitous and matter-of-fact way it is employed in contemporary use (both in everyday and 'technical' contexts). When *culture industry* is 'heard' in the same way as 'hospitality industry', for example (and this is, of course, the understanding of CCIs inscribed in creative industry and creative city policy), the uncomfortable disharmony the concept represented for Adorno has vanished within the very "coerced unity of the uncombinable" (Hullot-Kentor 2008, 141) he was trying to point out.

That this contradiction is Adorno's true target is evident when his dissection of the culture industry is read as an application of his negative dialectical prism, but also as the argument is situated within *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and as an expression of the contradiction Adorno saw as inherent to enlightenment: that the promise of freedom and individual flourishing and fulfilment is undermined by the very developments in thought and in society that seek to make it possible. Fundamental to this contradiction is the need to subsume nonidentical things within their concept and thereby make them capable of equivalence. "That is the verdict," Adorno and Horkheimer (1997, 12) noted, "which critically determines the limits of possible experience. The identity of everything with everything else is paid for in that nothing may at the same time be identical with itself". This manifests as the 'sameness' of culture industry products. The claim that the culture industry is "infecting everything with sameness" (Adorno/Horkheimer 1997, 94) is not merely to suggest that cultural industry products in important ways

are the same as one another, but also suggests that *sameness* (or equivalence) itself, as a quality and as a concept, is spread throughout culture and throughout society. Culture is not simply commodified, but pressed into the service of administration; it “no longer impotently drags its despised opponent behind it, but is taking it under its direction” (Adorno 2005, 147).

This equivalence, or attempt to reconcile culture with administration, Adorno is clear, is an expression of the contradiction which negative dialectics seeks to illuminate:

“The demand made by administration upon culture is essentially heteronomous: culture – no matter what form it takes – is to be measured by norms not inherent to it and which have nothing to do with the quality of the object, but rather with some type of abstract standards imposed from without, while at the same time the administrative instance – according to its own prescriptions and nature – must for the most part refuse to become involved in questions of immanent quality which regard the truth of the thing itself or its objective bases in general” (Adorno 2001c, 113)

The point is not that cultural objects are commodified, for they have always been so, but rather that they are carriers of the principle of equivalence – of identity thinking.

Adorno's concern that negative dialectics not fall into the trap of constitutive subjectivity, but maintains the independent nonidentical character of the object, necessarily directs his analysis of culture – his prism – toward cultural objects and their dialectical relationship to the social conditions in which they are produced. It follows that Adorno's approach is, in part, a formal logic: situating aesthetic value (again, in part) in the formal properties of works of art and the technique used in their execution. Unlike the cultural commodities of the culture industry, which Adorno argues, “are governed ... by the principle of their realization as value, and not by their own specific content and harmonious function” (Adorno 2001b, 99), the “principle that governs autonomous works of art is not the totality of their effects but their own inherent structure. They are knowledge as nonconceptual objects” (Adorno 2007, 193), developing according to their own ‘inherent structure’, and compelled by their own autonomous drive rather than in order to conform with an external totality.

It is the loss of this internal, autonomous logic that is the result of the standardization of culture industry products (Adorno, 2001b), and, with it, any meaningful appreciation of their character as nonidentical objects. To like a culture industry product, Adorno (2001a, 30) maintains, “is almost the same thing as to recognize it”; our familiarity with the recognizable is, by extension, a recognition of ourselves in relation to that culture, and the totality of the system with which it is aligned.

A telling example of this might be the two versions of George Sluizer's film *The Vanishing*. The 1988 Dutch original is driven by at times disconnected flashbacks and leads through a challenging and unsettling exposition of the protagonists and development of the narrative to a compelling, if troubling, conclusion. In contrast, its 1993 Hollywood remake (by the same director, but under different contractual constraints), tells a more unambiguous version of the same tale, using more conventional cinematography, concluding with a *satisfying*, but wholly anodyne, predictable, and *familiar* ending in which

the hero conquers adversity and rights the wrongs raised throughout the film. While the original, through its challenging internal logic, amounts to a compelling portrait of human instability and the uncertainty, perhaps even ambiguity, of life and morality, with the power to unsettle its audience, the culture industry remake confidently reassures us that ultimately, even if not all is right with the world, our expectations are borne out: the world is still familiar and justice will prevail.

The culture industry, for Adorno, is a contradiction: a dialectic between culture and industry, particular and general, individual and society. The culture industry can be recognised as an attempt to reconcile those dialectical elements through a forced equivalence, and is then an expression of the identity thinking Adorno reveals and seeks to challenge with his negative dialectics. Insofar as they are nonidentical, aesthetic objects retain those particular qualities which are lost when objects are subsumed within the abstract system of concepts. Their character as *aesthetic* allows them to stand apart, to be seen as other than everyday 'natural' objects, or commodities. They therefore have the capacity within them to present an alternative (aesthetic) logic to the totalizing, instrumental logic of the concept. Art, in other words, by appealing to and engaging human emotion, imagination, even notions of beauty, the sublime, and utopia (things which are generally excluded from the instrumental logic of the commodity form), points to all that stands outside of both instrumental rationality and the relations of capitalism (Morris 2014).

It is the temporal, developmental character of music that informs Adorno's insight into the relationship between the form of the cultural object and the social relations it reveals (Buck-Morss 1979). When music is able to develop according to its particular, internal logic (and not, as is the case with culture industry products, determined by external constraints),

"the basic elements ... undergo development through being repeated, varied, and juxtaposed, and contribute to the development of the composition as a whole" (Witkin 2000, 150),

rather than being determined, or administered by it. Like the interplay between soloist and orchestra in a concerto, both being elevated by the other without ever becoming the same, the dialectic between particular and the general can be maintained. There is, therefore, a 'homology', as Witkin (2000) has it, between the formal characteristics of music (or other cultural products) and the character of society as structured by identity thinking. Such art provided moments where the system broke down; where the certainty of resolution was shaken. Like musical dissonance, which denied the controlled, predictable logic of repetition and development, creating the possibility of alternative trajectories. In the way that

"all successive events following a dissonant chord are – at least in theory – equally possible, dissonance negates its own logical continuity, leaving it open to shocks" (Barry 2009, 84).

Art objects whose formal arrangements contained the possibility of that which was beyond the system were capable of acknowledging the same dissonance in social systems; acting as

“a mirror, which at times reflected back, and at times anticipated, cracks in the civilised face of the external world” (Barry 2009, 82).

When this capacity is taken away, when, as in the Hollywood remake of *The Vanishing*, they are forced to confine themselves within the prescribed, delimited, predictable logic of the commodity form, they lose the ability to present any alternative to the form which has determined their creation: the

“draining of dialectical process from the work of art ... herald[s] the loss of all power of aesthetic praxis to hold sufficient distance from the world – to be an organ of criticism” (Witkin 2000, 151).

They become essentially ideological: incapable of presenting an alternative image to that contained within the concept, and therefore unable to confront the concept with its own impossibility.

At the same time that the cultural industry standardizes cultural objects it imbues them with an entirely false individuality, and thus “perpetually cheats its consumers” (Adorno/Horkheimer 1997, 139), by forever promising the particularity which it has destroyed. This is all the more fundamental a criticism when considered alongside Reckwitz's (2020) assertion that value, indeed *meaning*, corresponds to the perceived singularity of objects. As each culture industry product “affects an individual air”, the promise of individual fulfilment, which inheres in the nonidentical character of culture, is turned on itself: “individuality itself serves to reinforce ideology” (Adorno 2001b, 101), extending a “ruthless unity” over individuals through the illusory individuality of standardized cultural objects (Adorno/Horkheimer 1997, 123).

Viewed in terms of negative dialectics, the ‘sameness’ that Adorno and Horkheimer mark out in the products of the culture industry, always clearly recognized as the totalizing effect of capital, is revealed as the same process of abstraction which Adorno connects to the constitutive subjectivity inherent in identity-thinking, and the tendency for the particular, the nonidentical, the differences which give art and culture its meaning and potential to be assumed away in a ‘culture industry’ that seeks above all to disguise the contradiction between culture and industry, particular and universal, object and constitutive subjectivity that underlies its existence. These issues, and the deception involved in the promise of individuality and its totalizing effects especially remain relevant for an understanding of the conditions of CCIs in postindustrial 21st century society, and the ‘creative city’ in particular, which I will focus on in the next section.

4. The ‘Creative City’ as Cultural Object

By nature of its principal concern with space – which is inescapably tied to material particularity – geography, more than other social science disciplines, is especially attuned to the importance of empirical particularity for the exposition of the general and the conceptual. While Adorno's interests took him away from an exploration of the prac-

tical, every-day, and spatial manifestations of the contradictions that inhere in identity thinking, he was always anchored by the idea that “philosophical thinking crystallizes in the particular, in that which is defined in space and time” (Adorno 1973, 138). The following discussion considers the geography of these issues by focusing Adorno’s prism on the concept-object of the ‘creative city’, and by thinking through the contradictions which manifest in the object itself and reveal themselves in “the gaps and inconsistencies” (O’Neill 1999, 27) between the concept of the ‘creative city’ and the cities themselves, confront the concept with its object, revealing the untruth of identity (Adorno 1973).

It is no coincidence that some of the most significant contributions to debates regarding CCIs have focused on cities (e.g. Mould 2017; Zukin 1995); or that the seminal texts (viz. Florida 2005; 2014; Landry 2000) which define the ‘creative industries’ narrative are by urbanists who simultaneously set the ‘creative city’ agenda. Culture, in the broadest sense of the word, has been allied to the experience of the urban since antiquity. It was Zukin’s (1995) great insight to recognise that urban space was a distinctly *cultural* product – a commodity through which the cultural value of particular spaces and their representations were traded, and which shaped them as a result. While fostering this kind of cultural value is nothing new, what has changed in recent decades is how the creative industries logic has generated a conscious and deliberate effort on the part of policymakers and urban planners to construct and trade in this cultural value in order to market their cities specifically as ‘creative cities’ – which is to say: explicitly as cultural commodities in what Reckwitz (2020, 107 ff.) terms “cultural singularity markets” where, like other commodities of cultural value, they must “compete to be recognized as valuable goods with unique characteristics”. Moreover, ‘creative cities’ can be understood not only as cultural commodities, but as culture industry products in the manner understood by Adorno: produced, like the most commercial of popular music, repetitive crime thrillers, or predictable reality television, in accordance with a commercial logic, ultimately to the detriment of their cultural content, in order to present an image, or brand, designed to attract consumption, by businesses, tourists, and cultural workers themselves.

Fundamentally, to be a ‘creative city’ is nothing other than to be a place characterized, and shaped, by the logic of the cultural (or creative) economy, and in which CCIs and those who work in them can (apparently) thrive. To market this characteristic (even cynically) is to endorse and promote the fundamental claim of creative industry logic: that culture and industry are reconciled in the creative economy. While for many (cultural workers or otherwise), a profound interrelation between work and personal fulfilment is a deeply-rooted aspect both of a sense of self and the experience of work, this goes further, asserting that work and leisure either are, or *ought to be* one and the same; that a successful and fulfilling career ‘doing what you love’ is available for all (or at least all those who are ‘creative’ – an ephemeral attribute incapable of supporting the weight of this claim either empirically or logically); and that individual expression and humanity are not external to work, but are achieved *through* work. In short, the merger of all that is beyond the reproduction of material subsistence to the service of that reproduction.

The creative city narrative, or concept, like the culture industry logic, is totalizing in the sense that it presents an account of its object which is whole, unproblematic, *identical*, in which the conflicts of previous urban and economic modes can be reconciled. Like typical examples of pop-music, reality television, and Hollywood blockbusters, the creative industries narrative presents a complete and uniform image of social reality; one in which culture and industry are comfortably reconciled. What CCIs promise for work, so the creative city does for space: a city which fosters culture and creativity, with infrastructure designed to suit the gig-economy, that reflects and supports the work and lifestyles of cultural workers – those who, in Florida's (2014, 134) imagery, mix high-flying creative careers with a demand for a lifestyle defined by “more intense, high-quality, multidimensional experiences.”

It is notable that culture, as it is understood in the creative industry/city logic, is not a particular, non-identical thing, but a universal concept, which, so the creative city maintains, can be applied indiscriminately to particular realities and places, with the inherent differences that make those places *places* (which are necessarily specific and particular) in the first instance subsumed within the creative city concept and neutralized. Reckwitz (2017, 197) made this point admirably by suggesting the creative city agenda is above all a “strategic culturalization of the city”, that seeks to create an identity – a brand – by “[picking] up pre-existing elements of the city – its special sights and scenes, its natural landscapes and personalities, and [making] them into an identifiable symbolic marker”.

This requires a material and spatial as well as symbolic and discursive construction of unity. In producing a creative city, Landry and Bianchini (1995, 32) suggested, “[u]rban design is essentially about knitting together different parts of the city into a coherent artefact”. The result is an unsurprising homogenization of urban spaces (Bookman 2014; Gospodini 2006). By taking inspiration from the great success stories, creative cities draw on similar iconography, and often even the same international ‘starchitects’ (Knox 2012) in fashioning their landscapes. In order to present a marketable image of a ‘creative’ city as different and unique, the separate and particular elements of urban space must be pressed into the service of a comprehensive and managed ‘designscape’ (Julier 2005). Just as the characters, plot twists, and set-pieces of culture industry cinema serve ultimately to present the cultural object as totality, and the culture industry itself, urban spaces, neighbourhoods, even iconic buildings are coerced into unity with the totality of the creative city brand, or concept.

In order to successfully present a unified and recognizable image of ‘creativity’, cities following the ‘creative city toolkit’ (Landry/Bianchini 1995; Landry 2000) attract the same high-street stores, simultaneously become more and more like one another and displacing those businesses, redeveloping the buildings, and remodelling the landscapes that were particular and distinct in the first place. The paradox is evident: in the effort to fashion a distinct brand identity, urban landscapes are standardized, and particular materialities are drawn into a universalizing brand, or concept, which despite asserting its individuality, does so only inasmuch as it also reassures its consumer that it is recognizable as, and wholly a part of, the totality of the creative industry logic. The formulaic programme for developing a creative city and the self-referential character

of many developments is such that a significant proportion of the cultural landscape of many creative cities could be unproblematically exchanged with those of others. Like the car chase sequence in an action movie, the presence of the 'iconic' building or the conspicuous public art installation serves a more fundamental purpose in reassuring its audience that the city is recognizably a 'creative city' subscribing to and enacting the creative industry logic in general, than it does in identifying a *particular* city.

The unity of the creative city also promises a reconciliation of the previous contradictions of urban space. Creative cities, Florida (2014) suggests, are places of diversity and tolerance; for Landry and Bianchini (1995), equality of participation. The paradigmatic 'Creative City', as Mould (2017, 2–3) has it,

“is purported to encourage social inclusion, cultural participation, poverty alleviation and housing stock renewal and generally creates a better place to live.”

The reality is somewhat different, and creative cities are often marked by spatial conflict and the displacement and erasure of existing communities in favour of regeneration and creative city transformation (Lees/Melhuish 2015; Mould 2017). The perennial example of this is the familiar gentrification of creative cities (typically formerly industrial inner-city areas), which serves to further the image of creativity, while simultaneously often displacing the seedbed of Florida's 'creative core' – the artists and cultural workers themselves (Twickel 2010; Whiting/Hannam 2017), but which also manifests in the spatial and economic displacement of smaller, more 'vernacular' forms of art and cultural work (Hollands 2010) as a result of the emphasis on iconic architecture and centring cultural activity around a small number of high-profile, high-cost (and more often than not 'high-art') institutions and organizations.

The cultural regeneration that gives birth to creative cities and is frequently the site of unfettered gentrification goes hand-in-hand with novel approaches to standardizing and regulating urban space. 'Creative cities' are awash with new forms of spatial privatization (Burgers 2000; Miles 2010), and 'tactical urbanism' (Mould 2014) innovations such as micro-living (Harris/Nowicki 2020) – often celebrated by CCI workers – which can be seen to both support and jeopardize cultural opportunity, and give spatial evidence to the argument that the 'creative cities' narrative is merely a cultural varnish to neoliberal urbanism (Peck et al. 2009).

Culture industry products are endlessly repeatable because they only reference themselves and the culture industry claim to unity and totality (Adorno/Horkheimer 1997). The totalizing self-referential logic of the 'creative city' is such that it becomes difficult to find examples of things which are not turned into references to the creative city, the urban brand, or the creative industry narrative. The first-generation creative city was recognised in terms of flagship institutions (Evans 2003) in the image of the Bilbao Guggenheim or Sydney Opera House; and the culture of the creative city, insofar as it was at all concerned with 'culture', was the institutional culture of the museum, the gallery, the theatre. While these institutions and their iconic presence remains crucial, they are now marketed alongside the Bohemian quarters, the 'creative' expression of graffitied 'edgy' neighbourhoods, and underground music and arts scenes. The contemporary crea-

tive city is incomplete without its extra-institutional, anti-gentrification counterpoise, which serves the dual (and dialectical) purpose of softening the creative city image by making it appear more forgiving of 'alternative' forms of culture, while simultaneously subsuming (or seeking to subsume) that culture within the creative city brand (such as in the evolution of the Edinburgh Fringe). Alternative forms of culture are always subject to *potential* inclusion in the totalizing and sanitizing image of the creative city or its discursive construction; ultimately, to the extent that there becomes little difference between tours of the Uffizi Gallery, Amsterdam's Red-Light District, or the *Trainspotting* Walking Tour of Leith in Edinburgh.

Adorno maintained that the outcome of the culture industry was the reduction of culture, and its ability to challenge and critique the conditions of social life, to administration. The culture industry's great deception was that it did this whilst presenting itself as fulfilling the promise of culture within the enlightenment project as a resource for human liberation and fulfilment: by manufacturing an illusory individuality. The need to manufacture uniqueness into creative cities was recognised from the beginning (e. g. in Landry 2000; Florida 2005). Reckwitz notes that the creative city narrative drives cities towards continual refashioning in order to always appear 'creative' and *singular*; the ensuing creative destruction (Peck et al. 2009) not only feeds into the demands of neoliberal urbanism, but can also be seen as the same need to constantly reproduce the same cultural products in superficially altered ways in order to imbue those objects with the illusion of individuality necessary to culture industry products. As Adorno (2001b, 100) remarked, "what parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up, remains the disguise for an eternal sameness," an underlying reality "which has changed just as little as the profit motive": consequently, the new 'tech park', 'cultural quarter' or sleek waterfront development is new, like the next Bond film, only in the temporal sense.

This is especially observable in the increasingly necessary use of self-conscious references to a typically romanticized (usually) industrial past within creative city imagery. Hamburg's HafenCity development, for instance, deploys maritime iconography and historical references to deliberately create a "dialog between old and new" (HafenCity Hamburg 2020, 3), for instance through the conspicuous practice of naming districts of the HafenCity after the old harbour docks they replaced, thereby preserving and valorizing history. The amalgam of heritage and urban branding is epitomized by the iconic *Elbphilharmonie* opera house, designed by renowned architects Herzog and de Meuron, which, with its flowing wave design, sits atop the previously iconic *Kaispeicher A* warehouse in a poignant allegory of the city's cultural significance emerging from its industrial dominance. The fact that the sleek cosmopolitan design of the HafenCity is structurally and symbolically aligned with the adjacent UNESCO World Heritage site of the *Speicherstadt* warehouse district, perfectly reflects Adorno's (2001b, 101) claim that:

"The result for the physiognomy of the culture industry is essentially a mixture of streamlining, photographic hardness and precisions on the one hand, and individualistic residues, sentimentality and an already rationally disposed and adapted romanticism on the other."

Despite the standardizing and totalizing which is evident in creative cities, however, the culture industry and its products can never be total. It is fundamental to Adorno's negative dialectical approach that such a unity, an identity, is impossible. It is the irreconcilable nature of this conflict that characterizes the dialectic of culture and industry. While the creative city narrative may present an image of a seamless unity of industry and culture, it is never possible. Reactions, alternatives, and 'crucial remainders' will always exist and defy the totalizing pressure of the culture industry (Edensor et al. 2010; Hollands 2010; Mould 2017). To apply Adorno's prism is to see through the argument of the creative city; to be aware of its contradictions, its remainders. These remainders defy the harmony of culture and industry – "the doubtful unity of form and content, within and without, of individual and society" (Adorno/Horkheimer 1997, 131) – and resist subsumption within the 'creative' whole. They speak to the nonidentical particularity that reveals the real 'art' within the creative city, which "is to be found in those features in which discrepancy appears: in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity" (ibid.).

5. Conclusion: Seeing Through the Prism

This article aimed to contribute to ongoing debates concerning CCIs, and 'creative cities' in particular, by revisiting the philosophical underpinnings of Adorno (and Horkheimer)'s initial diagnosis of the culture industry in Adorno's negative dialectics. By exploring the implications of negative dialectics for Adorno's arguments concerning the culture industry I have argued that viewing cultural objects through a 'prism' in order to reveal the contradictions that inevitably arise when totalizing concepts – such as the 'creative city' – are imposed upon the necessarily particular, nonconceptual objects of reality with which they seek to achieve identity, and how, by confronting the concept with its nonidentical object, the impossibility of reconciliation – of identity – and the totalizing effect of identity thinking can be made apparent and thereby challenged, Adorno's ideas continue to be prescient in engaging with postindustrial CCIs, and the 'creative cities' logic.

In seeking to explicate the significance of Adorno's negative dialectics for his understanding of the culture industry, I have necessarily engaged with Adorno's arguments on a general level. While a critical voice might quite reasonably object that by doing so I have taken a general rather than a particular object as my focus, the purpose of Adorno's prism was always to give meaning to the particular object by using it to provide a glimpse of the general. Furthermore, in making a general case for the continued relevance of Adorno's prism in exploring the contradictions of the 'creative city', I hope to encourage the use of Adorno's ideas in more specific and detailed empirical research that can engage with the nonidentical particularity of specific 'creative cities' and their geographies.

Adorno's negative dialectics aimed above all to challenge totalizing thought and its real-world conditions and consequences. Consequently, he did not set out to create a

system – much less a method – for critical thinking (Buck-Morss 1979), and his logic of disintegration is more a principle, or an approach to critical investigation, or, as I have chosen to characterize it here, a prism, or a way of seeing. By suggesting that 'creative cities' can be viewed as culture industry products, I hope to address the absence of Adorno's ideas in much contemporary geographical analysis, and demonstrate that Adorno's prism continues to offer a valuable contribution to understandings of 'creative cities', CCIs, and the role of culture and cultural objects in postindustrial society.

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