

ROUTLEDGE CRITICAL STUDIES IN URBANISM AND THE CITY

Urban Subversion and the Creative City

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Prologue

The man upon a wire

On 7 of August 1974, at around 7.15 a.m. Eastern Standard Time in New York City, Phillipe Petit stepped off the roof of the South Tower of the World Trade Center and onto a wire no more than three quarters of an inch in width. The wire was suspended between the two towers, a distance of 140 feet, and 1,368 feet above street level (Lichtenstein 1974). For approximately 45 minutes, Petit, a French circus performer specialising in tightrope walking, made his way between the two towers, performing his circus tricks along the way. He lay down on the wire, waved to the gathering crowds below, stood one legged, and even jumped from one foot to the other. He went back and forth eight times in total and even had the temerity to taunt the awaiting police officers on the roof. It was only the threat of an approaching helicopter that caused him to eventually give himself up to the police back on the roof of the South Tower.

The 'Man on Wire', as he became known, spent years planning this act. Along with his lifelong friend Jean-Louis Blondeau, they schemed, planned and meticulously plotted their 'attack' on the towers. Petit had already tightrope walked between the twin towers of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and the pylons of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, but the World Trade Center in New York City presented for Petit his ultimate challenge. In the months leading up to the event, he assembled a group of like-minded individuals from within New York and as a group they infiltrated the towers in inventive, audacious and subversive ways. They pretended to be French journalists in order to walk around the towers beforehand, photographing the intricate details of the building. They produced fabricated identification cards for a fake utilities company in order to gain access to the building with all their necessary equipment. They even secured the help of an insider. On the night before the stunt, Petit and Jean-Louis along with two other accomplices spend hours hiding from security guards in some of the most painful and uncomfortable positions imaginable. Atop the building, without any sleep, they somehow manage to achieve their objective of suspending the wire between the two buildings using nothing but a bow and arrow and their own naked bodies to feel for the wire in the darkness. In managing to pull off this incredible urban stunt completely covertly, Petit secured worldwide infamy (Petit 2008).

The enormity of the preparation and the spectacle of the act itself are documented in the film *Man on Wire* (2008) and accompanying book. In the film, the

still images of Petit performing his high-wire act cannot fail to induce awe at how courageous and brazenly death-defying his actions were. However, what is also apparent from the film and the monumental efforts that went into, not only the act itself, but also the preparation, is the functional malleability of the buildings themselves. By performing a spectacular stunt atop two skyscrapers designed for nothing of the sort, Petit reappropriated them into a space of performance, of play, of circus-like dramaturgy. From that point on, even after their tragic demolition in 2001, New York City's Twin Towers will forever have an association with his daring act. What is more, Petit claims that the pursuit of his goal with such alacrity and veracity (to the point of accusations by his friends of insanity) was not to achieve the aforementioned reappropriation of the heart of one of the world's prominent financial centres into a space of subversive performance. Instead, he claims that he simply had a desire to do it because of his very nature as a high-wire performer – he had a desire to produce this performance. Moreover, he instantly saw those two towers as designed for him:

Then I lean over the edge, ready to climb down the inclined columns to the six-inch ledge 11 feet below that connects the 110th floor with the 1,350 feet of verticality, so I can look straight down. I do not. Because that's when it strikes me: teeth clenched, eyes half closed, in horror, in delight, I manage to whisper my first thought (whisper, so the demons won't hear): 'I know it's impossible. But I know I'll do it!' At that instant, *the towers became 'my towers'*. (Petit 2008: 17, my emphasis)

This anecdote illustrates how creative engagement with the city can transform the built environment. There are countless events, perhaps not as spectacular as Petit's but no less transformative, happening day by day in cities all over the world. People are using their city and the built environment within them innovatively, playfully and creatively. Petit's act is the ultimate urban subversion of modern times (although the pair of urban explorers who scaled and 'dangled off' the unfinished Shanghai Tower in February 2014 come close for sheer visual spectacle (Metcalfe 2014)). Yet his purpose was not to subvert the urban environment. It was not a political act of defiance against financial greed. It was not an infiltration or tactical manoeuvre against the prevailing official urban agenda. It was an act of pure *desire*. His act may have been politicised by the myriad of subsequent deconstructionism texts (see Mackay 2011). However, for approximately 45 minutes on 7 August 1974, the World Trade Center became more than an office building in Manhattan, it became a high-wire performance, not through the sanctioned legitimisation of a corporate entity but by the pure will and desire of one man and his group of friends to perform this act.

1 Introduction

Sitting in a cafe on King Street, Newton in Sydney, I spy a postcard holder affixed to the opposite wall (see [Figure 1.1](#)). The holder's header reads, 'What creative life do you want for Sydney?' Within the holder sit a number of postcards and flyers advertising art galleries, operas and theatre productions throughout Sydney, all of which were either sponsored, publicised or hosted by the City of Sydney, the city's governing body. As can be seen in [Figure 1.1](#), next to the esoteric question 'What creative life do you want for Sydney?' is the orange circular logo for the council and the 'Creative City Sydney' brand.

The brand is an initiative set up by the City of Sydney to use the 'ongoing commitment to culture and creativity' in order to, among other things, 'affirm the centrality of the arts and creativity' to the lives and economies of the city and 'revitalize the Oxford Street Prescient [one of the main commercial streets in inner-city Sydney]' (City of Sydney 2013a: n.p.). By deliberately enacting a number of policies aimed at encouraging artistic practice and creative industry activity and beautifying public spaces, the City Council has redeveloped a number of derelict buildings, fostered creative enterprise and staged citywide events celebrating the vibrant arts and cultural activity of the city. All these have been done as targeted activities that fall under the rubric of 'Creative Sydney', a suite of governmental actions specifically designed to aid urban development through the notion of 'creativity'. Sydney then, like a multitude of metropolitan areas all over the world, is very much a Creative City, with a capital 'C'.

Do you live in one of these Creative Cities? You may not be aware of it, but given the popularity of the 'Creative City' idea, there is a high probability that your current home city or town has enacted or has been developing policies designed to encourage primarily economic growth, but also social cohesion and cultural participation through the premise of 'creativity'. Since the turn of the new millennium, many urban and regional governments from all over the world, from Sydney to Sheffield, from Manila to Madison, have been enabling strategies of development purporting to stimulate creativity among its inhabitants and, perhaps more predominantly, to bring in talented, educated and creative people from elsewhere in the hope of benefiting from their economic growth potential. Moreover, gargantuan financial sums have been spent on these endeavours. Large-scale creative economy infrastructural developments have

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Figure 1.1 Postcard holder in Newtown, Sydney.

Source: Author's photo, April 2013.

been commissioned; many, many cultural institutions have been built; artistic events have been staged and sponsored; urban infrastructure has been upgraded and beautified; financial incentives have been offered for the relocation of creative individuals, projects and firms; marketing and branding offensives have been launched; research and development exercises have been given the green light; promotional campaigns have been initiated – all in the name making a city more ‘creative’. Indeed, the term ‘Creative City’ is now firmly entrenched in the parlance of urban politics. This is because, in the era where cities are run, managed and operated like corporations, they are engaging in competition with each other for the global flows of capital and, increasingly, for footloose talented and creative people. By effectuating a creative persona through a suite of policies, cities are looking to gain that vital competitive edge that will capture the people, creativity and, importantly, the economic rewards that they promise. Moreover, cities encourage these policies in the belief that the economic stimulus that comes from the presence of creativity diffuses throughout the city. By being ‘creative’, the city is more productive and innovative, thereby stimulating further economic rewards and creating a more attractive place for businesses and tourists to come to. In addition, being a Creative City (with a capital ‘C’) is purported to encourage social inclusion, cultural participation, poverty alleviation and housing stock renewal and generally creates a better place to

live. The prosperous utopian idyll of a Creative City is indeed an intoxicating vision for many urban governments.

However, what does it mean to be 'Creative'? How do we define creativity in this context? Moreover, how do you relate such an innate human affective quality to a city? How can an entire urban environment actually be creative? These questions are often at the forefront of academic (and to a lesser extent political) debates about the 'Creative City' as a paradigm, yet cities continue to adopt such policies and agendas without any definitive and rigorously obtained answers. In the race to become a Creative City and benefit from all that which 'creativity' can bring, cities are actually far from stimulating the productivity and innovative capacity of their inhabitants (as the lexicon would suggest), they are distancing themselves from realising such a vision. Rather than fermenting a ubiquitous upscaling of the quality of urban life, the Creative City in all its various guises has engendered and crystallised long-standing and existing urban conditions of economic inequality, social exclusion, cultural desertification and disengagement, and in some case, social and political unrest. As such, there are many dissenting voices regarding the Creative City paradigm, and how it is being enacted in contemporary cities. Accused of fuelling the gentrification process, many of the schemes that are formulated under the rubric of 'making a city more creative' are criticised for being just a policy 'fad' – simply the latest justification for an already ongoing process of economic urbanisation characterised by a privately led investment ethos that prioritises financial reward over any other social or cultural mandate. The associated creativity paradigms of the creative class, the creative economy and the creative industries, which contribute to the economically deterministic qualities of the Creative City paradigm, have also received similar critical rebuttal, given their political, economic and therefore systemic inextricability from the Creative City ideology. The political mobility and inherent 'ease' of applying this ideology means that it spreads from city to city, copying the perceived successful political and economic 'model' rather than engaging with the different set of localities, histories, cultures and social issues.

As such, the major *problem* of many of the policies embroiled within the Creative City rhetoric is that they have a deleterious effect on the social fabric and cultural diversity of cities, and have very little to do with affecting creativity in individuals at all. Moreover, such policies are designed to be replicable, to be globally mobile and reproduce homogenous urban spaces internationally. Put bluntly, they are actually the *antithesis* of creativity. The Creative City evangelists have hijacked the *idea* of creativity and turned it into an economically deterministic pastiche of what it means to be creative, packaged it and sold it to the world. Furthermore, embroiled within this process is the total *reconceptualisation* of 'true' urban creative practices – those of reappropriation, transgression, interventionism, subversion, resistance, activism and experimentation – into oppositional activities to be resisted or capitalised upon. The Creative City paradigm therefore, while being the latest iteration of an continual, politically systemic, gentrifying, capitalistic and urbanising policy discourse, is also (re)producing alternative creative practices (with a small 'c') as 'the other'. These practices of

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urban subversion (as I have come to call them) have an iterative history, but are proliferating and becoming more ‘creative’ in reaction to (and between the cracks of), rather than in conjunction with, the contemporary Creative City ideology. These modern-day creative practices (that have a long, political and social urban history) can be identified and perhaps most accessibly articulated as creative urban subcultures, the more recognisable including parkour, street art, graffiti, skateboarding, urban exploration, yarn-bombing, buildering and flashmobbing, each with their own internal and interdisciplinary tensions. Yet, beyond such subcultures (or identifiable grouping of ‘subversive’ cultural and creative practices), there is a less teleological and more fluid, rhizomatic and experimental universe of everyday urban practices, where people are simply reconfiguring the city around them to express their cultures, beliefs, anxieties, frustrations, happiness and a whole range of other affective and emotional occurrences. The homeless ex-serviceman who chalked anti-war and biblical scenes on the Camden Town pavement on which he slept; the man who bought a tank and used it to voice his discontent at the local council; the little girl who decides to ignore the ‘do not climb’ sign to play on public art; the disabled man who built his own ramp to the Municipal Health Building in Juína as he was dismayed at a lack of ‘official’ action; and as the prologue recounted, the Frenchman who tightrope-walked across the Twin Towers in New York – all these instances are of people changing the city around them for their own desires (albeit with some more spectacular results than others). They are being *creative*. They are not led by economic and/or urban development requirements or by state-level political motivations (although, as will become apparent in this book, these may be subsequently inferred in the contextualisation and representation of their practices). They are inherently part of an affective, non-representational urban fabric of creative sociality. They are fundamentally being active urban citizens rather than passive consumers of a spoon-fed ‘Creative’ urbanism. However, within this broad idea of urban subversion, their resistance to, or indeed their inclusion in, the Creative City paradigm is a highly contested and fluid dialectic. This is because Creative City policies themselves are looking to such activities in order to maintain the uniqueness and innovative image that propels economic competitiveness, in other words to maintain their brand. Therefore we see commercialised forms of parkour and skateboarding, urban exploration tours of peri-legal sites, community-led planning interventions being sponsored by city governments and so on. But in so doing, the Creative City, despite rhetoric and ‘spin’ to the contrary, is ultimately reducing such activities to economically determined instruments of urban development and politically, conceptually and linguistically whitewashing any transgressional, subversive or resistive characteristics in favour of more putative urban and economic development aims that can be homogenised and replicated. And thus, returning to the original *problem* – the Creative City as the antithesis of urban creativity.

This book outlines how we can begin to disrupt this process. Because *being* creative is a critical attribute to *being* a city, so the notion is worth rescuing from the problems that plague it. Hence, through a vehement excavation of the Creative

City paradigm and its various political vernaculars (namely the creative industries, the creative economy, the creative class and associated and incumbent lexicon), this book will analyse how the idea relates to the growth of urban entrepreneurialism more broadly and its associated deleterious impact upon the social and cultural fabric of cities and desire for homogenous urbanity. More than this though (as such critiques have been well-rehearsed in the last decade or so of critical urban studies literature), the book will theoretically explore how urban subversion has proliferated contemporaneously with(in) the Creative City, and detail the complex interaction between these idioms which are at the same time contested and related, present and absent, near and far, dichotomous and intermeshed, democratic and hegemonic, major and minor. By highlighting the economic instrumentalism inherent in the Creative City and positing it against an urban creative social fabric that is simply the *desire* to reconfigure the urban environment by active citizens, this book exposes the current Creative City idea to be too instrumental and formulaic and damaging to certain factions of urban life. The Creative City (with a capital 'C') therefore will be used as shorthand for the capitalistic, paradigmatic (bordering on dogmatic) and meta-narrative view of how creativity can be used to economically stimulate and develop the city (an argument developed further in [Part I](#)). In reaction to this, the book will champion a different kind of city (in [Part II](#)). This is not an attempt to go 'beyond' the Creative City by furthering its economic determinism, such as arguing for the use of cognitive-cultural capitalism instead (Scott 2014). Such an argument, however valid from an economic geography perspective, only serves to replicate the existing problem of the Creative City. Nor is it an attempt to replace an economic view of creativity with one that focuses on a creative ecology of public-private initiatives, social engineering and place-making (Landry 2011). Such a view broadens the actors involved but creates similar outcomes. Nor it is an attempt to argue that the Creative City should re-engage with the notion of culture and publics (Vickery 2015). Rather, this book will champion the creative city (with a small 'c'). Such a city embraces experimental and creative social interaction, and broadens our usage of urban functions, not constricts them, producing more heterogeneous and less homogeneous urban spaces – a city where skateboarders who reappropriate the 'dead space' of the undercroft area of the South Bank in London are not removed because the landlord wants to build more coffee shops, restaurants and other homogenous retail outlets; a city where squatters who have occupied a derelict area of Copenhagen and fostered an artistic community that serves local residents are not the focus of an eviction campaign; a city where recreational trespassers who are caught on top of a New York skyscraper are not arrested and charged; a city where the removal of inappropriate corporate advertising material by local residents is not criminalised; a city where if people want to shoot a short film on an under-used privately-owned plaza do not need to submit written notification and wait three weeks for a reply; a city where being creative is the very act of citizenship.

Methodologically, the book uses data gathered from over six years of travelling to cities around the world. Primarily, the book will draw on visual qualitative

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data from over 25 cities in ten countries on four continents (a collection of over 3,000 images and 200 videos), but also from a plethora of items gathered including promotional pamphlets, community papers, glossy magazines, discarded artistic artefacts and essentially anything that alludes to the creative practice of urbanites (official and illicit). Formal and informal interviews were carried out with people who instigate Creative City policies such as government officials, private companies and creative industry workers, as well as subcultural practitioners, cultural consumers and activists. Enlivened by vignettes, stories and explorations, this book weaves these together into a comprehensive 'lived' ethnography of urban experiences. In a 'flânerie' way, I encountered creative industry practitioners, policy-makers, academics, urban managers, architects, planners, subcultural participants and generally creative citizens, and registered (visually, textually and emotionally) their activities and engagements as they were performed across various spaces and places in many city that have been visited and lived in (see Kramer and Short (2011) for a more detailed explanation of this urban methodological practice). In some cases as an observer and in others as a fully fledged participant, I have witnessed first hand acts of urban creativity (subcultural, subversive, capitalistic and otherwise), experienced directly the Creative City paradigm in action (and in some cases contributed to it) and personally explored the urban environment that it effects. For example, I conducted parkour (irregularly) for a period of nine months in 2008, I have undertaken a number of urban explorations with practised participants and been involved heavily in campaigns to save subcultural spaces from 'development'. Conversely, I have also worked for policy units that aimed to bring about certain factions of Creative City policy; I did internships in creative economy firms in Sydney for a period in 2005, and have consulted for specific municipal governments of creative strategies (namely Sydney, Tel Aviv and London). Combining these experiences makes for a holistic view of creative practices, both those that have contributed to economic development as well as those that try to resist it. All these data then will be used to exemplify the arguments put forward throughout the book and colour the debate with contemporary case studies relevant to the theory being discussed. While using vignettes from cities such as Seoul, Leicester, Shanghai, Bristol and others, there are a few key cities that stand out for special scrutiny. Given my intense study of Sydney's Creative City policies and my interaction with them (as well as the amount of information that it produces), it was a suitable city to linger on. Also, London is used overtly as a city of study because of the amount of time spent there, but also because it is a city at the 'forefront' of economic globalisation (and all the problems therein entailed). For similar reasons, New York is used frequently. Also, given my work, experience and situ in the United Kingdom's national political landscape, many of the UK's Creativity-related policies will be analysed and utilised to further the arguments of the book.

Such geographical eclecticism could lead to accusations of empirical superficiality; however, it must be stressed that this book is a theoretical exploration of what the Creative City is, how it purports to help but ends up hindering and

3 The Creative Class(ification) of Cities

The Stokes Croft area of Bristol is the city's cultural and creative hub. The People's Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC) are a grouping of local Bristolians who have championed the alternative, anti-hegemonic milieu of the area. It is primarily a residential area, but the main road of Stokes Croft itself has many shops, cafes, pubs, boutique galleries and artist studios, some of which could be considered to be an 'alternative' form of cultural provision, something that the PRSC are keen to promote and maintain. Below is an excerpt from their mission statement:

PRSC will seek to promote creativity and activity in the local environment, thereby generating prosperity, both financial and spiritual.

PRSC will work in all ways to enhance the reputation of Stokes Croft as a globally renowned Centre for Excellence in the Arts, both in its own actions and by encouraging the action of others.

PRSC believes that the strength of the local Community resides in its creativity, tolerance and respect for each other.

(People's Republic of Stokes Croft 2011: n.p.)

As can be seen from this and from other parts of the statement, the PRSC are passionate about maintaining a certain 'vibe' in the area, one of creativity that has 'spiritual' as well as financial elements. Tolerance is also noted as being an important characteristic of a strong community, and a quick navigation through their site highlights a distinct politics of activism and anti-establishment practices. By working with but mostly against city council forces, the PRSC have battled to maintain these principles, but with varying degrees of 'success' (depending of course, on how you qualify that success). For example, the area is (in)famous for, among other things, the large murals and street art on the external and internal walls of the buildings (for example, see [Figure 3.1](#)). These are often political in nature (see [Figure 3.2](#)), but the practice of street art and adorning the facades of local shops and houses with large, brightly coloured murals is tolerated in Stokes Croft far more than it would be in other more 'mainstream' parts of Bristol. These have gained international notoriety and the area is now a popular tourist destination for street art enthusiasts.



Figure 3.1 A piece of street art in Stokes Croft, Bristol.

Source: Author's photo, 22 September 2011.



Figure 3.2 Political street art in Stokes Croft.

Source: Author's photo 22 September 2011.

The founding of the PRSC has been predicated upon the area's history of social unrest and anti-authoritarianism, dating back to the 1980s when there were riots over what residents saw as institutionalised racism in the local police (Clement 2012). However, more recently in 2011, there were nights of rioting triggered by the persistence of a large supermarket chain wanting to open a store in the area. Tesco, as a brand, has become a byword for banality and homogenous urbanisation in the UK. The presence of a Tesco is often characterised (with some justification) as the loss of a place's identity, a barometer of the level of independence or 'authenticity' that a locality has and an indicator of gentrification. Put bluntly, if your area has a Tesco, then it has sold out. As such, given the counter-cultural milieu that has been carefully manicured by the local residents (and the People's Republic) over the years in Stokes Croft, the presence of a Tesco mini-market was viewed as going against the grain of the area's ethos and was fiercely campaigned against (see [Figure 3.3](#)).

Also, Stokes Croft is known for its squats and homeless population. The St James Barton roundabout is often referred to as the Bear Pit and is a common location for homeless people in the city (Kiddey and Schofield 2011). In April 2011, 160 or so riot police raided 'Telepathic Heights' (one of the more 'permanent' squats in the area) on a tip-off that residents were planning to petrol bomb the recently opened Tesco that is located across the road. The sheer scale of the police presence was enough to enrage residents of Stokes Croft and the conflict scaled up that night with looting of the Tesco and other corporate institutions and rioting in the wider area of St Pauls (Clement 2012).

Since the riots, however, the area of Stokes Croft has seen no reduction in the process of capitalistic development, with luxury flats erected on the sites of former squats, landlords starting to increase their rents and the slow colonisation



Figure 3.3 Anti-Tesco graffiti in Stokes Croft, Bristol.

Source: Author's photo, 22 September 2011.



Figure 3.4 The gentrification process in Stokes Croft, Bristol.

Source: Author's photo, 22 September 2011.

of informal spaces by formal and commercial institutions. [Figure 3.4](#) neatly exemplifies just such a process: a newly opened commercial coffee shop chain in a landscaped and beautified area, with a sign advertising newly built student and executive flats obscuring one of the squats in the background.

In a paradoxical process, as a direct consequence of the area's alternative ethos, the anti-commercial and subversive activities that thread through the day-to-day rhythms of the locality, Stokes Croft is (unfortunately or not, depending on your point of view and your postcode) gaining the characteristics the very ethos is guarding against. More affluent, bohemian and 'creative' people and professionals are moving in as they see the area as stimulating an alternative cultural milieu, one that is befitting of their lifestyle. This though drives up rents, and landlords begin to see the investment potentials and buy out squats and small art studios that cannot afford to pay the now higher levels of rent. These are then often demolished with executive houses and flats built to accommodate the growing interest in the area – the area is being gentrified. Before going into why this is catalysing the influx of the creative class and contributing to the Creative City paradigm, there is a need in the first instance to contextualise gentrification as part of the ever-changing 'language of urban growth' in city development over the last few decades.

The language of urban growth

On 29 September 2012, Professor Neil Smith of the Graduate Centre of City University of New York died at the age of 58. He had a profound effect on urban geography and his pioneering critical work on the entrepreneurial style of city development (and his tragic untimely death) only served to ossify the vigour of

his many colleagues and like-minded contemporaries in their denouncement of this entrepreneurial form of urban growth. One of Smith's major interventions into the urban geography literature was the unpacking of gentrification and the way in which it is (the urban) part of a wider structural change enforced by the increased uptake of capitalist economic policies. The word 'gentrification' was coined by Ruth Glass in 1964 when she documented the struggles of London's working class against increased house prices, the development of old housing stock, the shifts from rental to ownership and the increasing displacement of the urban poor from where they had built communities (i.e. the city spaces being commandeered by the elitist classes as per the historical situation in rural environments with the landed gentry – *gentrification*). Nearly three decades ago, Smith (1987: 463) built upon this work when he noted that:

The crucial point about gentrification is that it involves not only a social change but also, at the neighbourhood scale, a physical change in the housing stock and an economic change in the land and housing markets. It is this combination of social, physical, and economic change that distinguishes gentrification as an identifiable process or set of processes.

Over the intervening years, gentrification has become systemic to the way in which cities have developed as a part of the neoliberal assemblage. The increased intensity of urban entrepreneurialism has the gentrification process enmeshed within its very fabric. As Slater notes (2011: 572) 'gentrification commonly occurs in urban areas where prior disinvestment in the urban infrastructure creates opportunities for profitable redevelopment'. This is something Smith outlined with the Rent Gap theory (Smith 1987), which is (simply put) the financial difference between what an area of land is worth pitted against what it *could* be worth were it to be built upon. Private interests looking to maximise profit from development then look for the largest possible gap between the acquisition of the land and the final sale price once they have built upon it. As such, urban governance strategies are always engaging with sites that are in (perceived) decline, states of financial and social depression or with a dilapidated housing stock, looking to develop them into economically functional (and hence profitable) parts of the city. If this process occurs in places where people live and then are subsequently displaced, then this is the social detriment of gentrification, but is often viewed by the instigators and investors as merely an unfortunate by-product. As Slater (2011: 572) again argues, gentrification occurs 'where the needs and concerns of business and policy elites are met at the expense of urban residents affected by work instability, unemployment, and stigmatisation'. This diminution of existing communities and societies is a clear disadvantage of such developments, one that the instigators do not seek to avoid (as that would mean a drop in profit), but seek to make 'invisible' through the contortion of the rhetoric and the everyday lexicon of urban growth.

To exemplify this with perhaps one of the most brazen and outlandish developments of recent years in the UK, one only has to look at the recent Liverpool

Waters development. In March 2013, the project was given the green light by the UK government without going to public inquiry (Smith 2013). Eric Pickles, the then Communities and Local Government Minister, ‘waved through’ the project citing the intense need for income into the area, which has stagnated due to the current prevailing financial difficulties. And perhaps more tellingly, Peel Holdings (the investors of the project, who also financed, manage and own MediaCityUK in Salford, of which more detail will be given in the next chapter) threatened to pull out if a public inquiry was to go ahead, citing that it would incur unnecessary expenses and a delay to the project (Harrison 2014). The current austerity programme of the UK government has seen drastic reductions in finance available for housing and social services, and so when private investors offer (in this case) £5.5bn of investment it is unsurprising to see the UK and Liverpool city government welcome such an investment and even bypass public inquiries to do so, such is the influence of Peel Holdings. Albeit on a larger scale, this kind of development project is typical across cities around the world, with private investment prioritised over social and cultural issues, made all the more ‘invisible’ by the language of the rhetoric that is put forward by the developers. For example, the following is taken from the website for Liverpool Waters:

The Liverpool Waters vision involves regenerating a 60 hectare historic dockland site to create a world-class, high-quality, mixed use waterfront quarter in central Liverpool. The scheme ... will create a unique sense of place, taking advantage of the sites’ cultural heritage and integrating it with exciting and sustainable new development. (Peel, n.d.: n.p.)

As is typical with the rhetoric of such developments, the language is one of revitalisation and regeneration, negating the gentrifying properties of the project. Liverpool Waters will be built mainly upon ‘derelict’ dock land, but closer scrutiny of the plans and the current usage show that there are businesses located in the docks that will be compulsorily purchased, as well as inner-city housing stock that will be hugely effected by the development. These may be seen as inconsequential to the larger development, but the fact that the aesthetics of the Liverpool Waters project has seriously jeopardised the UNESCO heritage status of Liverpool’s waterfront is a major point of contention for the project’s opposition. Counter-arguments from the local business community (and of course from Peel themselves) note that the heritage laws that are designed to preserve the architectural aesthetics of Liverpool’s waterfront are archaic and block progress. The dualistic argument of ‘adapt or die’ is put forward as a way of justifying such a massive change to the city (Brown 2012). However, such an argument belies the broader issues of the Right to the City (Harvey 2003; Marcuse 2009) as they forgo current and future civic, urban and social engagement for short-term financial reward and developmental lexicon. The genuflection of state officialdom to the financial might of private investors creates an urban environment that is solely representative of a political and financial elite, with little room for compromise. For Liverpool Waters, this is shown by the refusal of Peel and the wider

supportive urban governance system to change the plans in light of the damning critique by UNESCO, instead holding fast to the desire to mould the urban form in the image of their own choosing (Harrison 2014). The argument about Liverpool Waters will continue long into this century (not least as Peel have indicated that it will take 50 years to complete) and it is foolhardy to assume any peremptory assessment at this early stage. However, in terms of exemplifying the gentrification process, it highlights how the urban is the physical manifestation of a power struggle, in which the financial powers play with the language of ‘development’ in order to circumnavigate and ‘hide’ the inevitable gentrifying properties of their schemes.

So far in this book, for shorthand ease (and for want of a better phrase) I have been using the word ‘development’ to characterise the growth and general change to cities. The *redevelopment* of cities then logically refers to how particular spaces that once had a particular use but have now declined are being changed once more. This parlance though has a subtle yet profound mechanistic quality of rendering the process politically and geographically neutral. Other terms have also begun to enter the policy realm, such as ‘urban renaissance’, ‘regeneration’ and ‘revitalisation’ (Lees 2003b). As has been argued, how could you not want to be part of an ‘urban renaissance’? Also, the subtle use of the re- (*revitalise*, *regenerate*, etc.) implies a state of dereliction that requires addressing. For example, to ‘revitalise’ implies that the area was not vital in the first instance. To ‘regenerate’ infers that the area is in a decomposed state that needs to be nurtured back to a state of acceptance once more. In some cases, these are sites of industrial dereliction, where the landscape is popularly characterised by general ruin, inactivity and economic stagnation. In others, the area has a low-income housing stock, characterised as blighted, anti-social and a drain on resources. In either scenario, the message and vernacular from the developers and investors is one of ‘upscaling’, of creating a better and more vibrant place to live and/or work, and hence is prime for investment and subsequent *redevelopment*. The vehement critiques of the gentrification process point to the way in which the needs of the local communities (residential, business, environmental and cultural) are often removed from the political process. Public consultation laws being overridden or public inquiries not being granted are justified because they would hold up or stop altogether the (much-needed) financial rewards that comes from the private investors. Such debates are played out throughout the urban geographical literature, and while inherently critical to the contextualisation of the infrastructural policies of the Creative City, cannot be rehearsed here. But as has been noted so far, the whole Creative City ideology stems from the need for an alternative policy ‘fix’ (Peck 2005), one that encapsulates the ‘new’ knowledge-based economic parlance, one that can continue to justify urban development within such a linguistic framework and one that also plays into the political and economic putative (and increasingly dogmatic) ‘creativity’ paradigm. In touching upon the gentrification arguments (and the change in language that is enacted to attempt to circumnavigate the social and cultural issues), it is clear that the Creative City very much incorporates this gentrification process as part of its

political economy as it is seen as creating desirable places for the creative class to live, work and play. But who, or perhaps more accurately what, is the creative class?

Creative Class

Stokes Croft has experienced an influx of what have been deemed the ‘creative class’ (something which Liverpool Waters will no doubt experience too). To understand what this term means and how it has become so critical to, and linguistically allied with, the notion of the Creative City, there is really a need to visit the work of only one man, Richard Florida. His seminal text *The Rise of the Creative Class* has been the subject of a multitude of debates, discussions, critiques and counter-critiques since its publication in 2002 (which was comprehensively revised a decade after in 2012 with *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited*). It seems that no urban geography publication has caused more controversy in recent times given the plethora of newspaper articles, podcasts, blogs, webzines, journal articles, academic conferences, monographs, edited collections and even parody Twitter accounts set up in light of the themes of the book. In it, Florida sets out his thesis of the ‘creative class’, who he defines thusly:

The distinguishing features of the Creative Class is that its members engage in work whose function is to create ‘meaningful new forms.’ I define the Creative Class by the occupations that people have, and I divide it into two components. What I call the *Super-Creative Core* of the Creative Class includes scientists and engineers, university professors, poets and novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers and architects, as well as the thought leadership of modern society: nonfiction writers, editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts and other opinion makers ... Beyond this core group, the Creative Class also includes ‘creative professionals’ who work in a wide range of knowledge-intensive industries, such as high-tech, financial services, the legal and health care professionals, and business management. (Florida 2012a: 38–9, original emphasis)

These people, Florida argues, are fuelling the ‘new’ economy. The political conceptualisation of the creative industries outlined in the previous chapter, catalysed by think-tank-infused governance structures, put ‘creativity’ firmly on political horizons, and Florida’s thesis delivered a way in which to epistemologically rationalise creativity as a human but more importantly financially viable trait. The creative class are the people whose economic actions are contributing most to growth as ‘creativity has come to be the most highly prized commodity in our economy’ (ibid.: 6). These specific groups of economic actors are therefore critical to the development and economic growth of a country, a region or a city. Moreover, the (seemingly American-centric) creative class are highly mobile and ‘tend to move around different parts of the country; they many not be “natives” of the place they live, even if they were American-born’ (ibid.: 58).

They are therefore more footloose than workers in other less creative professions, and as such are attracted to particular places and cities that offer a certain lifestyle that is befitting of their creativity, rather than choosing where to live based on the location of their job. As a result, one of the central tenants of neoclassical economic growth theory Florida turned on its head – instead of people following jobs, employers and the job opportunities they represent are now beginning to follow the people. Also, more than identifying the drivers of contemporary capitalism and challenging the traditional notions of regional and urban development, Florida argues that for particular places to succeed in the new economic landscape of creativity, to be attractive to the creative class, they need what he labels ‘the three Ts’ – technology, tolerance and talent. Technology refers to the level of high-tech industry prevalent in a particular place or city and other instrumental devices such as broadband provisioning. Tolerance, Florida argued, could be quantitatively conceptualised through indexes of the number of bohemians and gays in a particular city. He argues, ‘a significant body of independent research confirms that openness to gays and lesbians is associated with higher levels of regional as well as national economic performance’ (Florida 2012a: 274), and as such tolerant cities attract the creative class and hence perform better economically. As well as gays, bohemians are also a good indicator of a tolerant community, a group which Florida defines as authors, designers, musicians and composers, actors and directors, craft-artists, painters, sculptors and artist printmakers, photographers, dancers and artists, performers and related workers (Florida 2005). And another variable that is correlated with the tolerance of an area is the ethnic mix, or what is called the ‘melting pot index’. Finally, the talent is needed. It is measured as the percentage of residents with a higher educational and/or bachelor degree. As the ‘carriers of creativity’, talented people attract the high-end jobs, economic restructuring toward the new, knowledge-intensive industrial output and, with it, urban prosperity. Having the three Ts in equal measure is a sure-fire way to attract the creative class, and therefore economic regional and urban success.

Stokes Croft in Bristol, given the edgy, bohemian, alternative and creative milieu that the PRSC have engendered so precisely is very typical of the kind of environment that Florida sees as attractive to the creative class, hence why in recent years, the area has seen the subtle shifts in the urban aesthetics toward those that are indicative of the ‘settling’ of the creative class (see [Figure 3.4](#) for example). It is experiencing creative *classification*. Academic literature, political documentation, media commentary, journalistic articles and online ‘op-ed’ pieces are all awash with other examples of cities and urban neighbourhoods that have experienced similar creative *classification*. Moreover, there are stratospherically large amounts of literature that attempt to measure the creative class of this city or that region. Florida’s thesis gained gargantuan political traction in the subsequent years after 2002, with countless cities and national governments across the globe hurrying to book Florida for speaking engagements in which he would highlight just how cities can succeed in the new economy through harnessing creativity, focusing on the three Ts and attracting the creative class. Armed with

this new paradigm of growth that was based on academic work, new entrepreneurial urban governments focused on creating a globally competitive image that championed their culture and creativity assets. We have already seen in [Chapter 2](#) how cities have used creativity as a means to promote themselves internationally, and with the uptake of the creative class thesis as a way of justifying such a promotional strategy, the creativity lexicon had become the most important urban policy tool of the twenty-first century.

However, there are as many (if not more) journal articles, books, blog posts, op-eds, newspaper and online pieces that counter Florida's arguments as there are that valorise the creative class as an urban development tool. The critiques are multifaceted, but their excavation and exploration are important so as to highlight how the Creative City is predicated upon a notion that has numerous and substantial problems. Such narratives question the calculative nature of the thesis itself, including the evidence it is based upon, debating whether the creative class really does stimulate economic growth or if their in-migration is a consequence of it, or indeed if the creative class really 'exists' at all but is rather a collection of occupations without any collectivised politics. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the Global City paradigm embellished an urban entrepreneurialism that has characterised contemporary urban governance. Similarly and no doubt relatedly, the uptake of the creative class theory is equally mechanistic of a shift to urban entrepreneurial and corporatised strategies. Therefore the following section will detail the critiques step by step, highlighting the problematic application of the creative class within urban politics.

Critiques of the Creative Class

Given the popularity of the creative class as a concept in urban politics, it was always bound to come under scrutiny, as is typical with many other theoretical and/or academic ideas that garner popularity beyond their immediate disciplinary and academic realms. However, the stratospherically rapid uptake of the ideas within city governance networks (city councils, private contractors, think tanks and the like) meant that these ideas were being mobilised and realised at an incredible rate, with tangible outcomes affecting not only the aesthetic, cultural, economic and political landscape of cities all over the world, but there was also a profound social impact upon the people living in those cities. As Gibson and Kong (2005: 551) noted, 'the desires of academics to become figureheads for certain concepts and to be heard beyond the confines of academia' is a 'noble enough sentiment'. Indeed, academia has often been derided for not being applicable to the modern world, and so when academic ideas are transferred into mainstream policy, the efforts need to be applauded. However, the major problems with the creative class concept has been (and continues to be) that not only is it critiqued for being based on shaky empirical foundations, it is also, perhaps more importantly, the catalyst for the increased economisation of culture within the urban context and has contributed to the deleterious effects that urban entrepreneurialism has on the social and cultural fabric of cities. It would be impertinent

to suggest that there is a set ‘typology’ of critiques to the creative class, but given the vast literature devoted to it, and the desire to account for it all thematically, there is perhaps some utility to be gained in categorising the main strands – *definitions*, *empirics* and *politics* – and then extrapolating from there how these critiques offer an insight into just why the creative class theory can be problematised within an urban theoretical framework.

The, creative, class. Three loaded words conceptually which, when unpacked, cut to the heart of the definitional problems. Starting with *class*, the term has a complicated and protracted etymology within the social sciences. Fredrich Engels penned *Condition of the Working Class* in 1844 about his short time in Manchester working at his father’s cotton mill. Witnessing the dire living conditions and increased mortality rates of the factory workers, he argued that the industrialisation and urbanisation processes of the time that came to characterise the Industrial Revolution was the main causal factor. In a damning narrative of the industrial-city complex of the then sprawling Manchester, Engels surmised that capitalist production necessitated a dualistic urban structure that ‘condemned workers to a social suffering on an epic scale’ (Slater 2013: 371) while the factory owners profited from such conditions. This tale of the social problems associated with the rapid industrialisation of Manchester provided the backdrop to Engels’ famous collaboration with Marx, and from that the class system became part of the everyday parlance within social science inquiry. ‘Class’ therefore, denotes a certain socio-economic characterisation, political (im) mobility and a way of life that draws together the social disempowerment of the urbanisation process, the economic development of a capitalist system and the rapid growth of urban inequalities. The term has immense etymological and academic baggage that is difficult to extricate without risking generalisation or, worse, committing some sort of theoretical chicanery. The use of the word ‘class’ to describe a collection of occupations then, on the face of it, is in keeping with the capitalist production narrative of class. Moreover, Engels and Marx’s notion of class analysis implies a common mode of production, and again with the creative class there is a sense these people could share a common productive ethos. However, there is an arbitrariness to the creative class categorisation that belies any common socio-economic goal, or indeed any ontological history. Pratt (2008: 110) argues that ‘in Florida’s work, class is reduced to taxonomy; moreover, one whose boundaries are not clearly defined ... Florida’s occupational list is eclectic to say the least.’ The grouping therefore of a seemingly random set of occupations (much like the randomness of the creative industry subsectors) is an artificial construct of a perceived set of consumption patterns aligned with a bohemian lifestyle. Krätke (2010) continues this line of argument by suggesting that the creative class follows a ‘superficial’ definition of class structure, one that is based on a ‘mainstream sociological concept of class’ (ibid.: 836) and not on the more tortured political economic reading that includes the hegemonic powers and the systemic social inequalities inherent within. As Anderson (1974: 76) noted, ‘the study of social class must be based on social inequality’.

It is worth noting, however, that such inequality is intimated within the creative class thesis. Florida (2002: 71) argues that the presence of the creative class in any one city also requires the presence of a 'service class':

Members of the creative class, because they are well compensated and work long and unpredictable hours, require a growing pool of low-end service workers to take care of them and do their chores. This [service] class has been created out of necessity because of the way the Creative Economy operates.

Mirroring the critiques of the Global City (Castells and Mollenkopf 1991), Florida's thesis entails that the people who 'do the chores' of the creative class are 'stuck for life in menial jobs' (Florida 2012a: 47), earn significantly less than those in the creative class and account for an increasing percentage of the (American) workforce. However, what the creative class ideology fails to account for is the systemic notion of social inequality within the very economic activities that it engenders. A more nuanced analysis of the notion of class would suggest that the very existence of a class structure is predicated upon the deliberate diminution and depression of those who support it. The creative class then, more than being predicated upon the importance of knowledge and creativity within the new economy, 'exists' in so far as it demands and subsequently exploits a service class. Therefore, more than simply being a response to the 'growing demands of the creative economy' (ibid.: 47), the rise of the service class can be attributed to the broader socio-economic conditions characterised by the neoliberal Global City and Creative City governance. As such, the creative class thesis as it has been presented so far, fails to adequately account for the inherent mechanisms that produce a service class. Moreover, members of the creative class and the service class share work-life attributes unaccounted for in the thesis. Despite occupying polar opposites of the labour market, service workers (particularly those in 'low-end' jobs that seem to be more prevalent in retail, hospitality and tourism) and members of the creative class share the more problematic qualities of precariousness, temporariness and employment insecurities (Ross 2008). Interns, temps, extras, freelancers, sole traders – these all exist within Florida's creative class categorisation yet have very similar problems. During previous ethnographic research I worked as a temp for a Sydney-based television production company. I had the luxury of being financially supported by my institution, yet many of the other workers I came into contact with in that brief period were working for free as they saw it as a way 'into' the creative industries. Living subsistence lifestyles in cramped temporary accommodation, many of these workers believed that continuing to work in such precarious conditions was a necessary step to gaining the all-critical lucrative career in television. The literature on the precariousness of work suggests that such characteristics are apparent in all aspects of the economy, but they appear to be particularly acute in the creative industries (see Bain and McLean 2013; Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hraes 2009; McAuliffe 2012; Ross 2008). Such flexible work (including ad hoc freelancing, zero-hours

contracts, volunteering, unpaid internships and so on) is rife in the Creative City, yet the creative class thesis does not contain any mechanisms to deter or account for such issues.

Florida does offer a more instrumental solution, however; ‘every job can and must be *creativified*’ (Florida 2012a: 388, original emphasis). In other words, the creativity inherent in service jobs needs to be unleashed by ‘tapping into the innovative and creative capabilities of service workers and engaging with them more fully’ and this ‘will ultimately make them more productive’ (ibid.). Paying more for the services they offer will build a ‘stronger middle class, enhance social cohesion, and create the demand that can help drive the economy forward’ (ibid.). In sum, for the service class to work their way up the socio-economic prosperity ladder, they need to be recognised for their creativity. But if we continue to adhere to a creative class thesis, one that valorises the creativity of only a select few occupational groups, how can this ever be done? This leads onto the second problematic word of the definition, *creative*. The creative industries (as was seen in [Chapter 2](#)), the creative class and the creative economy (the nebulous notion that is an ideological coagulation of the two) are all *defined* by a creativity that adheres to a narrow remit – namely an economic one. If we are to celebrate the creativity of the service class, or indeed the creativity that is inherent in everyone (as Florida suggests is the case), then this requires an antithetical ‘letting go’ of a political economic definition of creativity. Krätke (2010) details how creativity within the creative class definition is limited to a set group of occupations with no devolvement into their working practices. Indeed, as Markusen (2006: 1922) has noted, ‘he [Florida] conflates creativity with high levels of education.’ Also, within the creative class definition, ‘creative professionals’ includes an amorphous grouping of consultants, technicians, firm managers, financiers, realtors and as well members of a political elite including public administrators, politicians, ‘thought’ leaders and members of what has recently been labelled in popular discourse as the ‘commiteriat’ or, more disparagingly, policy wonks. This group Krätke (2010) articulates as the ‘dealer’ class (but whether they are indeed a ‘class’ is open to the same debates of course), and far from contributing to economic growth, they are a threat in that they instigate financial crises (as was exemplified in the recent recession). Financial innovations such as subprime mortgage lending and payday loan companies have been highly detrimental to urban economic prosperity and have done a great deal to maintain, if not deepen, urban poverty and a dependence on high-interest loans. Yet within financial industrial rhetoric, they are seen as product innovations, as creative. Also, by including a political class and politically motivated commentators, think tanks and lobbying groups, the creative class ideology neutralises and depoliticises many of these activities. By bundling them in inconspicuously with high-tech innovators, artists and scientists, the politics of their actions are negated. Yes there may be creativity in the way that a think tank produces a report, but the politics of that report may well be such that they reinforce existing urban inequality or lead to policies that suppress economic growth (such as austerity). The question is not whether these activities are creative or not (although this is a line

of argument I shall return to later in the book), but that within the creative class thesis creative practices are not identified.

Also, Florida argues that creativity is a resource found in everyone yet continues to eulogise that it is only economically viable within a certain group of people, i.e. the creative class. Wilson and Keil (2008: 841) have counter-argued that ‘the real creative class in these cities is the poor’, specifically the homeless, unemployed and the underemployed. Some of the most creative activities that people can perform are done in order to just survive in the neoliberal, globally competitive Creative City. Wilson and Keil (2008) offer the example of food banks in North America, where homeless people feign religious interest to obtain food from faith-based organisations – in effect they are acting. In Shanghai, I came across this abode shown in [Figure 3.5](#), which had torn down a nearby promotional poster and used it as a roof.

However, being creative in order to survive (or to keep dry) is not a characteristic that aligns with the notion of the creative class and the Creative City to which it is so readily aligned.

Finally, running through these definitional critiques is the issue of the *the* in the creative class. To imply a unitary, singular, cohesive whole obfuscates the more heterogeneous, multiplicitous and diverse assemblage that is the creative class. There is a danger in collectivising such disparate groups of people and working



Figure 3.5 A makeshift roof in Shanghai.

Source: Author's photo, October 2012.

practices into a mobilised group for the reasons spelt out above; it glosses over political motivations, eradicates social tensions and, perhaps most critical of all, ontologically creates an 'outside', an 'other' – the 'uncreatives' perhaps. Be they the service, manufacturing, agricultural class or any other taxonomy, by valorising a certain group of people, it renders the others inconsequential to urban growth and vitality, simply by not being creative (in the economically tailored version of that word at any rate). Granted there is worth in identification and creating typologies (such as the one I have formulated to explain the critiques), but to do so without acknowledging the porosity and artificiality of the conceptually erected boundaries risks nullifying many critical processes and details.

On Tuesday, 25 October 2005, I travelled to the Manchester Convention Centre for the 'Enterprising and Creative Places' summit. A PhD student at the time, I was keen to hear the keynote by a certain Richard Florida. After a panel of speakers that included the late great Tony Wilson, Richard Florida stood up to deliver the closing keynote speech. He spoke of the importance of the creative class to the 'new knowledge economy' and highlighted how important the three Ts were in attracting these creative people to cities. The keynote concluded with a striking story from Seattle. He spoke of one of the Microsoft co-founders, Paul Allen, who built the Jimi Hendrix Experience Music Project (now the EMP museum) because of the inspiration that he took from Hendrix's music in founding Microsoft, one of the largest tech brands in the world. Suggesting that this valorised how a vibrant culture of bohemian lifestyle, tolerance and openness can bring technological jobs and growth, Florida's incidental vignette exemplified his creative class theories in a concise, striking, popular and 'cool' narrative.

However, even if we were to ignore all the definitional pitfalls articulated in the previous section and assume that there is such a coherent grouping that we can identify as potential growth-catalysers, the very mechanics of that process, the very calculative practices that imply that the creative class causes economic growth, have also been thrown into doubt. In other words, there is an issue with the *empirics*. The central empirical tenet of the creative class thesis is that the presence of creative people stimulates economic growth. This, however, has been questioned by a multitude of scholars, but was put most concisely by Malanga (2004: n.p.) who noted: 'The basic economics behind his ideas don't work.' The assault on the empirical backbone of the creative class thesis has been somewhat relentless, with the majority of the work focusing on how the data used to champion the creative class does not adequately account for the theory it supposedly supports. One of the major contentions first articulated by Glaeser (2004) and furthered by Markusen (2006: 1923) is that the 'regressions showing urban high-tech growth as a function of the presence of the creative class simply capture high human capital as measured by educational attainment'. In other words, the data captures those who are educated rather than creative (which points again to the ill-defined notion of creativity within the thesis). Even if there is a sense that the creative class could be considered anything more than simply those with a higher education degree, the main ideological thrust to the creative class's economic geography is that the jobs follow people – economic growth is a consequence of

the presence of the creative class. However, this has been countered by a growing number of scholars including Storper and Scott (2009), who denote that while it may be partially the case that there is a group of 'creative' (or perhaps just educated?) people who move to certain cities because of the good mix of the 'three Ts', this must always be contextualised with a wider historiography of that city or region. They go on to argue that 'Most migrants ... are unlikely to be able to move in significant numbers from one location to another unless relevant employment opportunities are actually or potentially available' (Storper and Scott 2009: 161). In a study conducted in the US, Hoyman *et al.* (2009) are particularly damning:

The creative class failed consistently across multiple statistical tests to explain either job growth, growth in wages, or absolute levels of wages. Additionally, the individual characteristics of the creative class – talent, technology, and tolerance – were negatively correlated with all our economic measurements. (Hoyman *et al.* 2009: 329)

The overarching critique then from an empirical perspective is that Florida has conflated correlation with causation – a common scientific problem no doubt, but one that nevertheless needs to be addressed and theoretically justified. By highlighting the concentration of creative workers in particular cities and claiming they are responsible for economic growth is a extremely large jump in logic, and one that, according to his critics, Florida does not explain adequately, if at all. In January 2013, Florida penned an article for *CityLab* (an online webzine for which he is the senior editor and which was formally known as *Atlantic Cities*) in which he argued that 'talent clustering provides little in the way of trickle-down benefits' (Florida 2013a: n.p.). This was seized upon by his critics, the most vocal of which (in the online arena at any rate) is Joel Kotkin, who argued that this admission proves that the creative class thesis, and its championing of 'hip and cool' cities is fundamentally flawed (Kotkin 2013). Florida's rebuttal was swift, arguing that he has always been 'aware of the inequality that is a by-product of the unvarnished creative knowledge economy' (Florida 2013b: n.p.). This tit-for-tat argument is indicative of the debates engulfing the creative class thesis, and how the empirical arguments are constantly challenged, questioned and then defended and refined.

Another well-versed and popularised critique was that put forward by Moretti (2012) in his book *The New Geography of Jobs*. In it, he outlines intricately the clustering of firms and the catalytic spurs that this can have on innovation. Drawing on Florida's analysis of Seattle (that he used so emphatically in his keynote address in Manchester), Moretti argues that Seattle is not the exemplar city of the creative class theory that Florida makes it out to be. In the 1980s it was 'gritty and depressing' (ibid.: 189) and was depopulating rapidly. He argues that Florida has got the formula the wrong way round, 'it became a lively cosmopolitan playground for educated professionals *after* it started attracting all the high-tech jobs' (ibid.), echoing earlier work by Storper (2010: 2034) who argued that

'skilled people appear in most cases to precede the creation of amenities, not principally to follow them.' Moretti also uses the example of Berlin stating that it is a cultural, vibrant city, a 'cool' place of edgy, post-communist aesthetics that speak to the kind of environment that the three Ts would epitomise. However, he says that 'there is only one problem with this picture: there are hardly any jobs' (Moretti 2012: 191). The city's high unemployment rate belies its 'creative vibe', which disproves Florida's theory. Again, Florida took to the webpages of *CityLab* to combat this attack. He claimed that Berlin 'is an extreme outlier; a very special case' (Florida 2012b: n.p.). Because of its problematic history many companies left the city and did not return when the Wall came down. He goes on to dismiss the entire 'which came first, the jobs or the people' argument: 'Given that we can't sort out causality, we shouldn't focus on just one side of the equation' (ibid.). The dismissal of causality is curious given the empirical effort that has gone into evidencing causality in his books. Whichever came first, the jobs or the people, and whether indeed causality matters or not, these are all red herrings when it comes to one of the fundamental issues with the empirics. Indeed many of the more general problems of the creative class thesis are repeated by Moretti's analysis. But given that the entire debate has its roots in American cities in the first instance, the theory is inherently centred on a Westernised, neoliberal, free-market approach to urban governance. It is an America-centric theory that has been retrofitted to other cities around the world. It is unreflective precisely because it is something that has been fundamentally designed not to analyse a city's economic ills, but to be adapted and *consumed* by other cities and regions all over the world. Thusly we move onto the *political* critique.

Such empirical critiques, while entirely justified, do not tell the wider story of how the creative class idea is actually having a deleterious effect on urban creativity rather than stimulating it. By engaging with Florida 'on his own terms' (as it were), by talking the same language of economic development and growth, is to not speak to the wider *political* issues that are inherent in using a creative class framework, i.e. one that adheres to a neoliberal ideology. This is because the applied political issues of the creative class are manifold, multiplicitous and ever-changing depending on the situation in which they are being discussed. Each city that the creative class is 'applied to' (or measured in) will have differing histories, cultures and social issues. As such, there are clear characteristics that render it extremely commensurable with a neoliberal paradigm (Peck 2005). Therefore, aligned with the discussion of neoliberalism in the previous chapter, we can borrow from assemblage theory (MacFarlane 2011) to articulate the 'emergent' qualities of the creative class, thus highlighting its ability to be adapted 'on the ground' by local governance structures (Springer 2010). As the creative class can be viewed in itself a part of the neoliberalisation of urban politics, there are a number of durable themes that engender inequalities with the urban realm which the following pages will isolate, unpack and critique. They are the brutality of statistics, glorification of precariousness and international mobility.

The continued justification of the creative class thesis is done so objectively and through the use of statistics, indexes, regressions and quantified variables,

many of which have been countered with alternative sets of statistics (see Hoyman and Faricy 2009, for example). The papers and online articles that are produced to justify the creative class consistently use quantitative empirics to exemplify the main arguments, but in doing so depoliticises the central tenant of the work. In the same way that the language of urban growth uses words like 'redevelopment' and 'revitalisation' to render such processes apolitical, the use of quantified and statistical information performs a similar role. The very act of quantification is to transmogrify tacit subjectivity into an ordered objectivity (Porter 1995), to create functional order out of variegated and complex milieus. From a theoretical perspective, the very act of reducing the observed phenomena to statistical representation is to deny agency to those being studied. It is a reductionist process that strips away subjectivity and presents an objectivity that is calculable, and therefore malleable. It is, hence, a rather brutal, not to mention inherently political, act. Marcus Doel (2001: 555) puts it fairly succinctly when he states, 'I detest every one. No one in particular: just one in general. I prefer not to count on one. For me, number is a horror story. It is the most brutal of levelling devices.' Such brutality comes in the ways in which the perceived statistical objectivity obfuscates multiplicity. By offering up statistical representations of creative agency, the creative class thesis becomes functional in the mechanics of an urban entrepreneurial neoliberal system, a means by which current and future development plans can be justified. Moreover, Florida's work utilises city league tables that echo the listmania that the Global City paradigm sparked. Creative City index rankings litter Florida's work with the various indexes that he identified being coerced into a single 'creative city index'. Such hierarchical analysis further plays into political circles as being above other cities justifies the competitive practices employed. If a city can account for its financial investment by claiming that it directly causes a rise in the league tables, then this is a politically viable, and therefore much sought after strategy. By reducing creativity to an index, it removes any vagueness, ambiguity and subjective reasoning that are the antithesis of political economic strategising. There is of course a deeper politico-philosophical debate about the tyranny of statistics, one that cannot be fleshed out here. But in order to comprehend the political consequences of the formulation of the creative class thesis, the quantitative bedrock on which it is empirically founded is very important to its speed of uptake, international popularity and political longevity.

Moreover, the creative class thesis (in much the same way as the creative industries lexicon was posited) creates a situation whereby to oppose such an idiom is to be uncreative and all the stereotypes that are associated with that. Therefore, in order to sway politicians and urban leaders to allow developmental strategies, one only has to articulate it as 'creative' or attracting creative workers, as who would be able to argue against such a progressive line of reasoning? Peck (2005) articulates just how the 'creativity' language of urban policy has become completely undeniable. The creative class gains immense traction

... by the suggestive mobilization of creativity as a distinctly positive, nebulous-yet-attractive, apple-pie-like phenomenon: like its step-cousin

flexibility, creativity pre-emptively disarms critics and opponents, whose resistance implicitly mobilizes creativity's antonymic others – rigidity, philistinism, narrow mindedness, intolerance, insensitivity, conservatism, not getting it. (Peck 2005: 765)

As Pratt (2008: 113) has similarly argued, 'who wants to be uncreative?' Indeed, this is perhaps the most endearing quality of the entire creativity paradigm from a neoliberal perspective, because it nullifies critiques from an anti-neoliberal body. The creative class context draws on work from Jane Jacobs, whose activism in New York in the 1950s and 1960s was fundamental in abating the Hausmannesque re-zoning of New York by Robert Moses (Gratz 2010). Posthumously, Jacobs has been heralded as the 'champion' of diverse cities. Her polemic work on the multi-ethnic nature of New York's streets has been eulogised as saving the city from homogenous meta-planning. There is of course huge merit in Jacobs' work but in the same way that Florida is lamented for the unreflexive uptake of his work, Jacobs' ideas have been applied uncritically to today's modern cities as some sort of panacea for evils of large-scale urban development techniques. Her analysis concluded that it was the diversity, heterogeneity and complexity of cities that brought about economic growth through the constant combination, decomposition and recombination of ideas and hence creativity and innovation (Jacobs 1970). Such a view transposed to contemporary cities now contains gentrifying undertones, as the economic growth will inevitably create social inequalities and polarisation (Zukin 2010). Jacobs' work, however, is latterly seen untainted by such concerns and is championed when citing calls for more 'liveable' cities. The creative class theory (and the Creative City paradigm more broadly), by yoking to an ideology that is championing community values and street-level creativity, is blindsiding many critics. Those who oppose the financialisation of the city and large-scale, state-led investment attach themselves to the more utopian idyll of street-level development that is 'human-scale', focused on cultural difference and diversity and champions alternative ways of life. Who can refuse such idyllic urban characteristics? This is the genius of the creative class theory and its use by urban officials – it fetishises community-level development, but at the same time uses such aesthetic qualities to engender financial investment, real estate development and ultimately, gentrification.

Florida (2004) even uses the rather ugly and emotive term 'squelchers' (a term borrowed from Jane Jacobs) to denote those who are sceptical or attempt to block attempts at stimulating creativity, drawing further boundaries around those that bring prosperity and a creative utopia, and those that seek to resist it. Wilson and Keil (2008: 844) note this rather more harshly when they argue that the creative class 'flagrantly configures an elitist theme for change that feudal lords and bourgeois captains of industry in the past would have hesitated to do'. It seems that you are either for creativity or against it, there is no middle ground. But what this construction of elitism does is it creates a pedestal for precariousness. Innovation, creativity and flexibility also include precariousness, temporality and job insecurity, but these are not recognised. To be 'creative' within this framework is to be

part of a workforce that, as has already been discussed, is increasingly characterised by short-term and zero-hour contracts, unpaid internships, project-based labour and scarce freelance work. Of course there will be success stories, but this becomes problematic when it is articulated as the norm in lieu of a more measured understanding of the vulnerability such normalisation can engender. As the creative class thesis continues to be adopted and used as a means to formulate urban and economic policy, then it is inevitable that such precariousness is woven into the fabric of the Creative City and we begin to see how creativity (and the glorification of the 'enterprising-self') is so amenable to neoliberal policies.

But perhaps the most neoliberal quality of the creative class are most acutely apparent in its international mobility. The uptake of the creative class thesis by urban governments first in the US, but since then across the world, has been immense. In the years after the publication in 2002 of the original text, Florida himself was booked for speaking events in a whole range of different cities (including the event in which I first heard him speak in Manchester in 2005). In one prominent example, Gibson and Klocker (2004: 430) describe Florida's visit to Sydney:

At a major industry event, co-sponsored by *Men's Style* magazine, he was introduced by the MC as 'our chief inspirer', and was later joined by Sydney's planning elite in a five-star corporate luncheon ... Like a 'rock star' – Florida arrived, performed and left Sydney in a matter of days to continue the whirlwind Australian leg of his 'tROCC (the Rise of the Creative Class) tour.

The blatant branding of the creative class ideology as a 'tour' exemplifies its commoditised and internationally mobile state. Each city that booked Florida to speak, and even those that did not, were including his analysis in their planning documents, calling for investment from national governments and private investors to buy into the creativity agenda. What was missing from this rhetoric, however, was a local reflexivity. Florida would of course pay tribute to the host city (as he did in Manchester with a warm embrace of Tony Wilson when walking on to the stage), but the central message would always be the same. Given that the message was about how that particular locality can prosper, it stands to reason that there should be an integration of the local histories, cultures, societies, economies and idiosyncrasies. The heavily US-centric nature of Florida's work means that before enacting the policies that it entails, it should at least be broken down and tested within a local context. Gibson and Klocker (2004: 432) go on to say:

Such visitors [Florida] continue to be accorded favourable 'star' status and shielded from criticism, even though they are unlikely to know much about local circumstances. Richard Florida was even asked by the New South Wales Deputy Premier Andrew Refshauge, at a corporate luncheon in Sydney, how to 'creatively' deal with poverty and crime afflicting the city's 'problem' Aboriginal community.

This exemplifies just how appealing the creative class theory can be to urban leaders who see it as a panacea for their own local issues and ‘problems’. Peck (2005) has highlighted how the creativity agenda filled a vacuum of urban entrepreneurial strategy: ‘Whatever else it may be, Florida’s creative-city thesis is perfectly framed for this competitive landscape, across which it has travelled at alarming speed’ (Peck 2005: 767). The ‘alarming speed’ of the uptake of the thesis across the cities of the world has continued in the decade since Peck’s paper and speaks to the way in which the creative class theory fitted so neatly with the prevailing urban entrepreneurial infrastructure of the twenty-first century. The timing of the thesis was perfect, the message was undeniable, the empirical backbone was clean and concise. As Peck (2005: 764) has said, ‘both the script and the nascent practices of urban creativity are peculiarly well suited to entrepreneurialized and neoliberalized urban landscapes.’

Florida himself, since the rise (and fall) of the creative class theory has been forced to take to numerous platforms (most vehemently, though, online through *CityLab*) to defend his work, but also to decry the uptake of the idea by various cities. He has quite rightly pointed to the fact that urban governance has cherry-picked from the creative class theory to justify whatever project they are pursuing at the time. Like the Creative City Policy document from the City of Sydney discussed in the previous chapter, the creativity paradigm can be applied to just about any infrastructure project, education programme, event, place-based beautification strategy or business-incentivisation policy. The creative class theory has become something of a feral beast, being used by urban officials, private companies and community leaders as a linguistic toolkit to extol the ‘creative’ virtues of their particular agenda. And therein lies the crux of the matter – the creative class provided the final piece in the jigsaw of neoliberal urbanism of the twenty-first century. The now entrepreneurial urban governance structures that were using the creative industries as an industrial conduit to urbanise and industrialise culture had a functional, defensible and internationally recognised policy vehicle with which to operationalise the spread of neoliberal policies. The Creative City could now take shape. But what is it to *physically* look like? What buildings would be needed? What about housing? The physical infrastructure of the Creative City is absolutely fundamental to the neoliberal institutions as it is where the overwhelming majority of profit is to be made. In this respect, the work of Florida too has great influence. The creative class is critical to prosperity – of this there was no doubt. But to attract them, the theory goes that a city needs certain amenities, certain ‘creative’ infrastructures in which the creative class as well as the creative industries could proliferate. They need places to work, places to live, places to eat, drink and play. It is these physical places, and their imbued social, cultural and economic problems, that are the subjects of the next chapter.