Struggling with the Creative Class

JAMIE PECK

Creative class, rising

'Be creative — or die' is how *Salon* writer Christopher Dreher summarized the new urban imperative: 'cities must attract the new "creative class" with hip neighborhoods, an arts scene and a gay-friendly atmosphere — or they'll go the way of Detroit' (2002: 1). The occasion was an interview with Richard Florida, whose newly-released book, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And how it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* was already on the way to becoming both an international bestseller and a public-policy phenomenon. The book's thesis — that urban fortunes increasingly turn on the capacity to attract, retain and even pamper a mobile and finicky class of 'creatives', whose aggregate efforts have become the primary drivers of economic development — has proved to be a hugely seductive one for civic leaders around the world, competition amongst whom has subsequently worked to inflate Florida's speaking fees well into the five-figure range. From Singapore to London, Dublin to Auckland, Memphis to Amsterdam; indeed, all the way to Providence, RI and Green Bay, WI, cities have paid handsomely to hear about the new credo of creativity, to learn how to attract and nurture creative workers, and to evaluate the latest 'hipsterization strategies' of established creative capitals like Austin, TX or wannabes like Tampa Bay, FL: 'civic leaders are seizing on the argument that they need to compete not with the plain old tax breaks and redevelopment schemes, but on the playing fields of what Florida calls "the three T's [of] Technology, Talent, and Tolerance" ' (Shea, 2004: D1). According to this increasingly pervasive urban-development script, the dawn of a 'new kind of capitalism based on human creativity' calls for funky forms of supply-side intervention, since cities now find themselves in a high-stakes 'war for talent', one that can only be won by developing the kind of 'people climates' valued by creatives — urban environments that are open, diverse, dynamic and cool (Florida, 2003c: 27).

Hailed in many quarters as a cool-cities guru, assailed in others as a new-economy huckster, Florida has made real waves in the brackish backwaters of urban economic-development policy. As the conservative critic Steven Malanga (2004: 36) has observed, the 'notion that cities must become trendy, happening places in order to compete in the twenty-first century economy is sweeping urban America . . . A generation of leftish policy-makers and urban planners is rushing to implement Florida's vision [just as] an admiring host of uncritical journalists touts it'. In the field of urban policy, which has hardly been cluttered with new and innovative ideas lately, creativity strategies have quickly become the policies of choice, since they license both a discursively distinctive and an ostensibly deliverable development agenda. No less significantly, though, they also work quietly with the grain of extant 'neoliberal' development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place-

marketing — quietly, in the sense that the banal nature of urban creativity strategies *in practice* is drowned out by the hyperbolic and overstated character of Florida's sales pitch, in which the arrival of the Creative Age takes the form of an unstoppable social revolution. These claims are large and loud, and they have undeniably enlivened urban-policy debates. *The Rise of the Creative Class* has been described as 'the most popular book on regional economies in the past decade' (Glaeser, 2004: 1), having garnered awards and acclaim from sources as varied as the *Washington Monthly*, *Harvard Business Review*, the Modesto *Bee*, Entrepreneur.com, *Money* magazine, the Phoenix *New Times,* and actress Cybill Sheppard. 'Although the idea of a professor of regional development being a celebrity', Dreher knowingly observes, 'seems like a contradiction in terms . . . Richard Florida is managing that feat' (2001: 1).

Somewhat implausibly, the architect of this feat claims not to have seen this coming. Apparently, some confluence of the deep currents of historical destiny and the froth of happenstance placed this particular surfer atop the wave of creativity, one who purports to be 'amazed by how quickly city and regional leaders began to use my measures and indicators to shape their development strategies' (Florida 2002: x). The critiques and attacks were also ostensibly unanticipated. Pointed, sarcastic, and in some cases plain nasty criticisms have come from the right, from economically conservative bastions like the Manhattan Institute and from a tawdry band of anti-immigrant and homophobic groups, who variously construct Florida's thesis as an attack on (big) business-oriented development strategies and suburban lifestyles, if not a frontal assault on 'family values'. Responses from the left have been more patchy but in some respects just as vigorous, ranging from skeptical screeds in the Democratic Leadership Council's *Blueprint* magazine to snide cultural critique in *The Baffler*. Innocent, aloof, or tactically perching on the fence, Florida maintains that:

> Such heated rhetoric puzzles me; I harbor no hidden agendas. I am a political independent, fiscal conservative, social liberal, and believer in vigorous international competition and free trade. Over the course of a twenty-year academic career, I have voted for and served under Democrats and Republicans. Today, I work closely with mayors, governors, business, political, and civic leaders from both sides of the aisle on economic development issues, and a good deal of the time, I cannot even tell who is Republican and who is a Democrat (2004b: ii).

This ambiguity is echoed in the politically ambivalent arguments contained in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, which mixes cosmopolitan elitism and pop universalism, hedonism and responsibility, cultural radicalism and economic conservatism, casual and causal inference, and social libertarianism and business realism. The irreverent, informal, sometimes preachy, but business-friendly style is in many ways a familiar one, echoing as it does the lifestyle guides, entrepreneurial manuals, and pop sociologies of the new-economy era (see Frank, 2000; Maliszewski, 2004). As one of Florida's former teachers, Peter Marcuse (2003: 40), said of the book: 'Well written in an almost chatty style, it reads like a series of well-crafted after-dinner speeches at various chamber of commerce dinners'. Recall also that the new-economy discourse of the late 1990s, epitomized by magazines like *Fast Company*, was replete with paeans to the creativity, if not artistry, of its casually-dressed entrepreneurial heroes (Cox, 1999; Thrift, 2001). The vast how-to literature that sought to 'manualize' the associated techniques and habits of mind, so as to meet and make a market for creative aspirants, often did so, moreover, by proclaiming the productive virtues of heterodox association, of *mixing* heterogeneous ideas, actors, processes and things (see Osborne, 2003). Florida's street-level analog of such attempts to 'harness' creativity comes in the form of a celebration of the buzzing, trendy neighborhood, a place where everyday innovation occurs through spontaneous interaction, a place literally 'seething with the interplay of cultures and ideas; a place where outsiders can quickly become insiders' (2002: 227). For Florida, such places are the very fonts of creativity, essentially because they attract creative *people*. Ensuring that creatives are 'welcomed', by extension, becomes the new task for cities. 'Thus, the old mode of people moving to follow jobs is turned on its head', Baris

(2003: 42) writes, as in order to compete in the new race for talent, cities 'must restructure themselves for the Creative Class's needs much as companies have already done'.

Even as *The Rise of the Creative Class* retreads some familiar ground, deploying some established discursive routines, it also does some very distinctive work of its own. While clearly tapping into many of the same 'cultural circuits of capitalism' as its new-economy predecessors (see Thrift, 2001) — *Fast Company*, for example, is featured on Florida's bulging and bright www.creativeclass.org web site as one of 'our allies' — the book opens up new territory by yoking these new managerial orthodoxies to a specific, and in many translations strikingly concrete, urban development agenda. While the new business knowledges of the 1990s helped *make* new kinds of managers, establishing novel ways of ordering, reading and acting in the world, and establishing a 'kind of grammar of business imperatives' (Thrift, 2001: 416), the creative-cities script has found, constituted and enrolled a widened civic audience for projects of new-age urban revitalization, anointing favored strategies and privileged actors, determining what must be done, with whom, how and where. And the tone is appropriately declarative and direct: 'I like to tell city leaders that finding ways to help support a local music scene can be just as important as investing in high-tech business and far more effective than building a downtown mall' (Florida, 2002: 229). This is a script that gives urban actors significant new roles, while prodding them with talk of new competitive threats, and on recent evidence they have been extremely keen to get in on the act. A strikingly large number of cities have willingly entrained themselves to Florida's creative vision.

Notwithstanding the issue of the intrinsic value of Florida's insights, a perhaps more pertinent question concerns why they have struck such a chord amongst urban elites. Where, in other words, did the *audience* for Florida's arguments come from? Apart from his obvious promotional and presentational skills, what made him 'the toast of city conferences from Toronto to Auckland' (Steigerwald, 2004: 1)? Why was the mayor of Denver moved to buy multiple copies of the book, distributing them as bedtime reading for his senior staff, while initiating a strategy to rebrand the city as a creative center (Shea, 2004)? Why was the Government of Singapore moved to relax its absurd restrictions on homosexuality, and for that matter busking and bungee-jumping, in the name of spurring urban-economic innovation (*Economist*, 2004)? Why was the Governor of Michigan so profoundly taken by Florida's arguments that she posed in fashionable shades when launching a 'Cool Cities' program across the state, in order to attract and retain those 'urban pioneers and young knowledge workers who are a driving force for economic development and growth' (Michigan, 2004a: 1)? Why did a large group of chosen ones embark on a creative pilgrimage to Memphis, TN in order to appoint themselves as 'the Creative 100', issuing a *Memphis Manifesto* (see Figure 1), and publicly committing its principles of 'helping communities realize the full potential of creative ideas' (Creative 100: 2003: 2)? What, in other words, motivates the disciples of the new-found cult of urban creativity? What does the demand side of the creative-cities phenomenon look like? As Gibson and Klocker (2004: 431) point out, for all the rapid international diffusion of Florida's prescriptions, 'little critical attention [has been] paid to the structures and networks that support, sustain and profit from [their] circulation'. These are the questions addressed here. The first step, though, must be to get a fuller sense of the vulgate itself. Welcome to the Creative Age . . .

Creative juices

Florida's argument in *The Rise of the Creative Class* is, at the same time, straightforward and rather elusive. Its gist is that we have entered an age of creativity, comprehended as a new and distinctive phase of capitalist development, in which the

The Creative 100 are dedicated to helping communities realize the full potential of creative ideas by encouraging these principles:

1) Cultivate and reward creativity. Everyone is part of the value chain of creativity. Creativity can happen at anytime, anywhere, and it's happening in your community right now. Pay attention.

2) Invest in the creative ecosystem. The creative ecosystem can include arts and culture, nightlife, the music scene, restaurants, artists and designers, innovators, entrepreneurs, affordable spaces, lively neighborhoods, spirituality, education, density, public spaces and third places.

3) Embrace diversity. It gives birth to creativity, innovation and positive economic impact. People of different backgrounds and experiences contribute a diversity of ideas, expressions, talents and perspectives that enrich communities. This is how ideas flourish and build vital communities.

4) Nurture the creatives. Support the connectors. Collaborate to compete in a new way and get everyone in the game.

5) Value risk-taking. Convert a "no" climate into a "yes" climate. Invest in opportunity-making, not just problem-solving. Tap into the creative talent, technology and energy for your community. Challenge conventional wisdom.

6) Be authentic. Identify the value you add and focus on those assets where you can be unique. Dare to be different, not simply the look-alike of another community. Resist monoculture and homogeneity. Every community can be the right community.

7) Invest in and build on quality of place. While inherited features such as climate, natural resources and population are important, other critical features such as arts and culture, open and green spaces, vibrant downtowns, and centers of learning can be built and strengthened. This will make communities more competitive than ever because it will create more opportunities than ever for ideas to have an impact.

8) Remove barriers to creativity, such as mediocrity, intolerance, disconnectedness, sprawl, poverty, bad schools, exclusivity, and social and environmental degradation.

9) Take responsibility for change in your community. Improvise. Make things happen. Development is a "do it yourself" enterprise.

10) Ensure that every person, especially children, has the right to creativity. The highest quality lifelong education is critical to developing and retaining creative individuals as a resource for communities.

Figure 1 The Memphis Manifesto (*source*: www.memphismanifesto.com)

driving forces of economic development are not simply technological and organizational, but *human*. In essence, the book seeks to describe a *new* new economy, in which human creativity has become the 'defining feature of economic life . . . [It] has come to be valued — and systems have evolved to encourage and harness it — because new technologies, new industries, new wealth and all other good economic things flow from it' (Florida, 2002: 21). Creative types have always been critical to capitalist growth, of course, but in the past few decades, so the argument here goes, they have grown both in number and influence, such that they now account for some 38 million US workers (or about 30% of the workforce), and therefore justify proper-noun status — 'the Creative Class has become the dominant class in society' (Florida, 2002: ix). This discovery having been made, the challenge is to understand what makes the members of this class tick, how they like to spend their money and their (precious) time, what they *want*. As the source, apparently, of all good economic things, the Creative Class must be nurtured and nourished, its talents must be harnessed and channeled. And the stakes here could hardly be higher: in addition to getting the technological basics right, companies and cities must make purposive efforts to establish the right 'people climate' for the favored class of creatives, 'or they will wither and die' (Florida, 2002: 13).

Yet while this is an urgent task, it is by no means an easy one, because figuring out what the Creative Class wants means adopting an entirely new analytical and political mindset, and, even then, learning to accept that creatives will not be pushed around, that their behavior will be difficult to predict, and that above all they need space to 'actualize their identities'. The old categories of class analysis are manifestly inadequate to this task, because in this 'post-scarcity, post-material' stage of capitalism, the ownership and control of property in the physical, bricks-and-mortar sense no longer matters, since the only property with any salience is the new überclass's 'creative capacity [which] is an intangible because it is literally in their heads' (Florida, 2002: 68). Such is the radical nature of this challenge to extant systems of social and economic order, which Florida equates to the transition from feudalism to factory capitalism, that the rules of the game have forever changed. Modestly, Florida claims no unique insight into these new realities, but instead presents his argument as a voyage of discovery (2005a: 1). The voyage began in 1999, somewhat inauspiciously, with a series of focus groups with Carnegie Mellon management students, assembled with a view to answering the innocuous question, 'How do you choose a place to live and work?' From here came what Florida describes as the 'initial hunches' concerning the rise of the Creative Class (quoted in Dreher, 2002: 2). This group of aspiring professionals, it transpired, were not simply motivated by material rewards, like salaries and stock options and suburban security, but instead wanted to live exhilarating lives in interesting places, to be challenged and stimulated 24/7. Particular jobs would come and go — such is the nature of the new, creative economy. What really mattered, the as yet unnamed creative class revealed, were these magnetic 'qualities of place'. As Florida explained of this revelation, his focus-group respondents had precise demands to match their precocious talents, wanting their city 'to be creative, we want it to be exciting, we want all kinds of amenities, we want to have outdoor sports, extreme sports, rollerblading, cycling, art scene, music scene' (quoted in Dreher, 2002: 2–3). The creatives, apparently, wanted it all, but this should not be confused with some shallow expression of cultural hedonism or conspicuous recreation, about which so much was made in the new-economy era of the late 1990s. The fateful events that were soon to pass — the tech bust and 9/11 — would underscore the profound nature of this incipient social transformation:

> Economic shifts are . . . altering the structure of everyday life. The rise and decline of the New Economy did not cause these changes, though it did help push them to the surface and make them more noticeable. In a deeper and more pervasive way, the September 11, 2001, tragedy and subsequent terrorist threats have caused Americans, *particularly those in the Creative Class*, to ask sobering questions about what really matters in our lives. What we are witnessing in America and across the world extends far beyond high-tech industry or any so-called New Economy: It is the emergence of a new society and a new culture — indeed a whole new way of life. It is these shifts that will prove to be the most enduring developments of our time. And they thrust hard questions upon us. For now that forces have been unleashed that allow us to pursue our desires, the question for each of us becomes: *What do we really want?* (Florida, 2002: 12, emphasis added).

If the NASDAQ crash exposed the lie that technology alone would secure the economic future, 9/11 sent the Creative Class on a search for its calling. Florida himself was so shaken by these events that he canceled his speaking engagements for a time, and watched TV.

It is this shared awakening of an incipient Creative-Class consciousness that Florida sets out both to chronicle and to enable, typically adopting a second-person mode of communication, while weaving often excruciating details of his own biography, lifestyle and consumption habits into a new-age narrative of individual freedom, economic destiny and slowly-dawning social responsibility. Not infrequently, these less-than-analytical musings descend into self-indulgent forms of amateur microsociology and

cross celebrations of hipster embourgeoisement.[1] By implication, the choices made by Richard and his Creative Class, which right down to the selection of kitchen utensils and hairstyles are minutely documented in the book, are validated because they are being made by the Chosen Ones. And play and consumption really matter here because creatives confront the unique challenge of fitting these in around their demanding work schedules,[2] squeezing in a quick bike ride or latte at the art gallery before starting the second shift. While many members of this class are understandably absorbed in the tasks of nurturing their own creativity through work and play — the fusion of which Florida terms the 'Big Morph' — they also bear an (as yet unrealized) responsibility, a responsibility to *lead*. Florida (2002: 315, 326) informs his fellow creatives that they 'need to see that their economic function makes them the natural — indeed the only possible — leaders of twenty-first century society . . . [W]e must harness all of our intelligence, our energy and most important our awareness. The task of building a truly creative society is not a game of solitaire. This game, we play as a team'.

Glimpses of the kind of society the creatives might build are to be found, we learn, in the distinctive locational decision-making of the talented, whose revealed preferences are quite unambiguous. The Creative Class seek out tolerant, diverse and open communities, rich in the kind of amenities that allow them precariously to maintain a work-life balance, together with experiential intensity, in the context of those demanding work schedules. Uniquely suffering from a relentless 'time warp', creatives gravitate towards 'plug and play' communities, where social entry barriers are low, where heterogeneity is actively embraced, where loose ties prevail, where there are lots of other creatives to mingle with, where they can 'validate their identities' (Florida, 2002: 304). One of the primary indicators of these diagnostically critical conditions — of openness and tolerance — is the conspicuous presence of gays and lesbians, characterized here as the 'canaries of the creative economy', because of the way in which they signal a 'diverse, progressive environment', thereby serving as 'harbingers of redevelopment and gentrification in distressed urban neighborhoods' (Florida and Gates, 2005: 131). Should these avant-garde economic indicators somehow be overlooked, more concrete clues — which have not been lost on urban planners and consultants — include 'authentic' historical buildings, converted lofts, walkable streets, plenty of coffeeshops, art and live-music spaces, 'organic and indigenous street culture', and a range of other typical features of gentrifying, mixed-use, inner-urban neighborhoods.[3] Creatives want edgy cities, not edge cities. They contemptuously reject suburbia, the 'generica' of chain stores and malls, and places that are oriented to children or churches. Indeed, many of the mundane and time-consuming tasks of social reproduction are also spurned by creatives, amongst whom 'marriage is often deferred and divorce more common'; they

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1 'The person who cuts my hair', Florida (2002: 76) informs us, 'is a very creative stylist . . . and drives a new BMW. The woman who cleans my house is a gem [who will] suggest ideas for redecorating; she takes on these things in an entrepreneurial manner. Her husband drives a Porsche'. Meanwhile, bicycling is hailed as a '*de rigueur* social skill' for creatives, who can't get enough of the experiential thrills associated with 'the up-and-down pumping of the legs', since 'to climb onto a bicycle and become the engine is a truly transformative experience – a creative experience' (Florida, 2002: 174, 181-2). Chris Lehmann (2003: 167) responds that, 'the bicycle supplies an apt metaphor for the kind of commentary we get in an intellectual world that grows steadily more indifferent to questions of economic fairness and narrowing social opportunity. Its inhabitants find themselves speaking confidently on behalf of recombined new elites and entire economic orders. They are pleased to see their consumer choices ratified by history, and their own taste preferences elevated as models for new networks of production, urban geographies, and, indeed, for the sprawling new complex of global democracy. Their minds race and their hearts beat faster. But they ignore the ground speeding by beneath their feet'.

2 'Creative Class people literally live in a different kind of time from the rest of the nation' (Florida, 2002: 144).

3 For a fuller description of the geographies of 'cool' that attach to such conspicuously, but often fleetingly, funky neighborhoods, see *The Economist*'s (2000) casual observations on the locational characteristics of the London scene.

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prefer more spontaneous associations in localized 'mating markets' (Florida, 2002: 177). Meanwhile, the 'absence of a support spouse crunches time' even further (Florida, 2002: 151), inducing yet greater reliance on a wide range of local services and 'amenities'. *Homo creativus* is an atomized subject, apparently, with a preference for intense but shallow and noncommittal relationships, mostly played out in the sphere of consumption and on the street.

Much of *The Rise of the Creative Class* is given over to celebratory descriptions of the work, play and consumption habits of the Creative Class — which Marcuse (2003: 41) curtly summarizes as an 'engaging account of the lifestyle preferences of yuppies' — occasionally punctuated by finger-wagging over the negative externalities of these forms of free-market self-actualization. At various points, Florida concedes that the crowding of creatives into gentrifying neighborhoods might generate inflationary housing-market pressures, that not only run the risk of eroding the diversity that the Class craves but, worse still, could smother the fragile ecology of creativity itself. He reminds his readers that they depend on an army of service workers trapped in 'low-end jobs that pay poorly because they are not creative jobs' (2002: 322), while pointing soberly to the fact that the most creative places tend also to exhibit the most extensive forms of socio-economic inequality (Catalytix and Richard Florida Creativity Group, 2003b; Florida, 2005b). Ultimately, though, since it is the creatives' destiny to inherit the earth, it is they who must figure out how to solve these problems, in their own time and in their own way, as part of what Florida characterizes as their 'growing up'. The uncreative population, one assumes, should merely look on, and learn. Certainly, there is no space here for 'obsolete' forms of politics, like unions or class-aligned political parties, all of which are breezily dismissed; what matters is the capacity of the Creative Class to generate 'new forms of civic involvement appropriate to our times', based on a 'shared vision' of universal and humanistic creativity (2002: 316–17).[4]

Biscotti and circuses

Cities loom significantly in Florida's account of the Creative Class, as settings for the most salient social processes, as the germinal sites of new cultural and economic imperatives, and as reconstituted places of culturally inflected political agency. On the analytical side of this account the argument goes that all three T's — technology, talent and tolerance — are necessary to ignite the economic sparks of creativity. Technological capacity is a prerequisite, but on its own is manifestly insufficient — just look, we are told, at the bleak social landscapes of the suburban nerdistans. Flows of talented individuals, the second T, are essential and necessary, since this restless-but-critical factor of production has become the carrier of creativity. But the third T, tolerance, is the crucial magnet, the supply-side foundation upon which creative clusters are built. Florida's principal method is to rank cities according to multiple direct and stand-in measures of these phenomena, both in isolation and combination — a transparently calculated but also highly effective means of popularizing the creative cities thesis. Urban regions are ranked on everything from the number of patents per head to the density of bohemians and gays, on their respective shares of immigrants, credentialized knowledge-workers, and even 'fit versus fat' residents,[5] the endlessly manipulated

4 Most twentieth-century forms of progressive politics − the civil rights, women's, peace and labor movements − are written off as relics of a defunct, preCreative era, the achievements of which apparently pale into insignificance alongside the transformative power of creativity (Florida, 2002: 203).

5 Florida also correlates his rankings with those from a series of popular publications, such as *Wired*, *Places Rated Almanac*, *Yahoo! Internet Life*, *Forbes*, *The Walking Magazine*, *Money* magazine and *Men's Fitness*. The latter is his source for a surely spurious correlation between creativity and body weight, since 'the fittest cities were those that scored highly on my Creativity Index' (Florida, 2002:

combinatorial outcome of which is Florida's 'Creativity Index'. The declared winners in the big-city race are San Francisco, followed by Austin, TX, Boston, and San Diego; atop the midsize cities category are Albuquerque, NM, Albany, NY, and Tucson, AZ; and at the next level down in the new urban hierarchy come Madison, WI, Des Moines, IA, and Santa Barbara, CA. 'Nothing', Paul Maliszewski (2004: 76) observes, 'can quite guarantee a book national media attention, reviews in local newspapers, and a shot at becoming a best seller than a list like this, declaring authoritatively that some stuff is better than other stuff, but only one is best of all'. The received and, one might say, fairly obvious appeal of cities like Seattle and San Francisco is translated into a new kind of currency in Florida's rankings. Rather than plodding through a complex causal argument, the mobilization and manipulation of extant urban images functions here to great effect. Positive urban images are crudely quantified, then recast as objects of deference — as places to be emulated. As Florida explained to *Money* magazine, 'what makes a place hot' is, well, being hot:

> As a paid consultant, Florida often suggests that cities should look to successful role models like Austin or Seattle at the same time that they nurture their own unique qualities . . . [Florida believes] that buzz and energy are very real factors in a city's popularity (Gertner, 2004: 88–9).

Almost at a stroke, a new dimension of urban competition was constituted by Florida's league tables (which are periodically revised, just to maintain the attention) and the relentless marketing of his supporting thesis. They allow some city leaders to congratulate themselves on a job well done, even if this had been achieved subconsciously, while the rest have something, or somewhere, to aim at. Playing to this newly constituted gallery, Florida confidently asserts that *any* big city, with the right political will, 'can turn it around', and most of the other urban centers can at least have a shot, if they possess the essentials — like a good university, some 'authentic' neighborhoods, a handful of high-tech employers. In fact, there are very few entirely 'hopeless places', like Enid, OK and Youngstown, OH, which languish as technologically backward and tragically unhip locations at the very bottom of the league table. Here, but just about only here, it is not even worth the effort, because these are 'small places with huge working-class backgrounds, or places that are service-class centers that aren't tourist destinations' (quoted in Dreher, 2002: 6). These are, in other words, the wrong kinds of places.

Outside Youngstown and Enid, most cities do have hope, at least once they have recognized the significance of the creativity imperative. These aspirant cities are Florida's audience, and his market. And a large number have been ready, willing and able to join the new market for hipsterization strategies. Those cities seeking a more finely-grained analysis of their creative health can order a standard-format report for just $495 from Catalytix, the organization in the Richard Florida Creativity Group with proprietary rights over the Creative Class database (www.catalytix.biz). The next step might be, as the web site suggests, 'having Richard Florida come to your city or region to speak', usually at a price tag well into the five-figure range. This provides an opportunity for the mayor and other civic leaders to appear on platforms, invariably in appropriately bohemian locations, with local creative entrepreneurs and arts activists. And typically there will be several hundred in the audience, including the local press, and as many people with purple hair as gray. Florida evidently attends scores of such events every year, in major cities across the United States and (increasingly) overseas, as well as in plenty of less exotic would-be hlpstervilles. The market here can extend as far down the urban hierarchy as Green Bay, WI, which trailed in at number 45 in the original ranking of 124 small cities, and which was suddenly induced to set its sights

177). The direction of the causality between talentlessness and tubbiness, however, Florida will not be drawn on, though he remarks that 'the body [has become] an arena for creative expression', while finding it irresistible to recycle the 'pernicious stereotype [that] an in-shape person is often perceived to be more reliable and more presentable to the public than someone who is, say, overweight' (2002: 177-9).
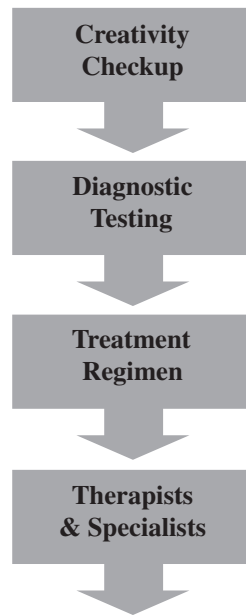
Figure 2 The creativity treatment (*source*: www.catalytix.biz)

on a newly visible set of creative competitors, like La Crosse, WI, Lubbock, TX, and Fargo, ND. The letter of gratitude from the Green Bay organizer, posted on the Creative Class web page, characterized Florida's appearance at the Northeast Wisconsin Creative Future Event as:

> an invigorating and eye-opening experience . . . [O]ur lives have been changed for the better. We are in a period of incredible growth and excitement in our region as the concepts you brought to light are being shared, embraced, and built upon on a daily basis. My phone has been ringing off the hook since the day you left . . . I knew we were paying for professionalism and knowledge when we made the decision to invest in your visit to our region, but what I had not expected was the passion and purpose you showed for helping us to shape our future. You practice what you preach — it *is* all about people. Rather than a flashy trend, you have brought to us insights and language which will serve us well as we explore new directions for successful economic and community development . . . [Y]our work with us [has been] a true catalyst for infusing creativity into our workplaces, communities and individual lives.[6]

Cities that want to go one step further might recruit Catalytix, or for that matter any one of a countless number of urban-development consultants that have become suddenly active in the creativity business, to provide customized analysis and advice, and to help fashion local strategies. Many of these efforts involve increasingly elaborate benchmarking — a long-established urban consultancy activity that has been rejuvenated by the challenge of developing new metrics for fields like the arts — together with comparative evaluations of peer-city strategies. Increasingly, creativity strategies exude a distinctly off-the-shelf quality, their production now being subject to largely routinized methodology. Even the 'treatment regimen' of the market leader, Catalytix, resembles a combination of a trip to the repair shop and a course of new-age psychoanalysis (see Figure 2).

6 Letter from the Executive Director of the Employers Workforce Development Network, Inc., Green Bay WI, 21 October 2003 (www.creativeclass.org/inquotes.shtml, accessed 5 January 2005).

In a fashion that recalls the way in which a few 'turnaround' entrepreneurial cities, like Cleveland and Baltimore, were celebrated during the 1980s for pioneering property-led and partnership-facilitated downtown revitalization (see Hall and Hubbard, 1998), a new set of extant and aspirant creative cities has quickly risen to prominence on the back of the work of Florida and his followers. Cities like San Francisco and Austin are continuously invoked, and are subject to instrumental practices of 'case study', since these are the places that define the new urban genre. Typical of such emulative efforts was the response of Memphis, TN. Spurred into action by its near-bottom location on the Creativity Index, the chamber of commerce and several local-government agencies commissioned a study of the city's image amongst 'young urban knowledge workers', benchmarking themselves against 'high-performing' creative cities, and dissecting Austin's experience in order to identify 'hopeful signs of what happens when a city actively fosters creativity' (Memphis Talent Magnet Project and Coletta & Company, 2003: 8). Similarly, Portland, OR has also been promoted as a 'compelling case study' of urban creativity, the replication-friendly lessons for other cities from which include: identifying creative leaders; building new systems of communication within the local community; enabling artists and other creatives to build sweat equity in emerging creative neighborhoods; promoting the adaptive reuse of buildings; supporting festivals and other street-level events; and, above all, being 'authentic' (see Bulick *et al.*, 2003).

But rhetorically and practically more important, in many ways, are the earnest efforts of creative strivers, since these experiences suggestively place the goal of creative transformation within reach, even for 'ordinary' places. They also help concretize the creativity script, through its performative enactment in the domain of everyday urban policy. So, Providence, RI, for example, is (perhaps prematurely) celebrated for 'emerging as one of the nation's and the world's leading Creative Hubs', apparently on the basis of the city's 'commitment to a creativity-driven economic development strategy', the efficacy of which will surely be reflected in 'move[ment] steadily upward in the rankings' (Catalytix and Richard Florida Creativity Group, 2003c: 1). Currently, the city sits in an underwhelming 36th position amongst 61 cities with a million-plus population, a ranking that it hopes to improve — quite reasonably, one assumes — having enlisted the support of Catalytix in fashioning a local strategy. Amongst other things, this has involved the creative development of consultancy products, such as surgically precise benchmarking techniques, measuring the city's balance of trade in talented people according to a newly developed Brain drain/gain index (Catalytix and Richard Florida Creativity Group, 2003a). Such comparative metrics are accompanied by concerted processes of symbolic (and financial) revalorization of extant creative and 'people-climate' assets, such as the well-established example of local event art, *WaterFire*, which involves floating bonfires down the town's three rivers, now revalidated as a 'community-building event', and local performance and project spaces like AS220 (which has been active for more than a decade): 'When Richard Florida visited Providence in late 2002, young African-American hip-hop poets performed their work in the main venue space [of AS220]' (Catalytix and Richard Florida Creativity Group, 2003c: 2). Notwithstanding the presentational benefits of linking contemporary art and culture to economic development efforts, the awkward question is what is meaningfully deliverable from a public-policy standpoint. Investments in the 'soft infrastructure' of the arts and culture are easy to make, and need not be especially costly, so the creativity script easily translates into certain forms of municipal action. Whether or not this will stimulate creative economic growth, however, is quite another matter. Florida's confident message, of course, is that the treatment will work, and the long list of cities that have signed up for the treatment only reinforces this message. Increased public subsidies for the arts, street-level spectacles, and improved urban façades, with expected 'returns' in the form of gentrification and tourist income, run the self-evident risk that such faux-funky attractions might lapse into their own kind of 'generica'. The creatives' restless search for authentic experiences may, of course, lead them to spurn such places. As Florida's critics frequently point out, the production of authentic

Arching Strategy 1: Position Providence as the Authentic Creative Hub in the Southern New England Region
Tell the Providence story of creativity, open-mindedness and its unique status as an authentic, quirky place – featuring design, biomedical science, technology, and arts and culture.
    Project for 2003: Make the creative hub the unifying vision, driving city design, planning and economic development. Execute a marketing campaign . . .

Arching Strategy 2: Build a Creative Community That Attracts and Retains Creative People
Foster a culture of creativity, diversity, art and science for all people. Foster creativity-based education in high school and college; reduce brain drain and attract new talent.
    Projects for 2003: Establish an Office of Cultural Affairs in city government, open to all creators, serving as a resource and broker for artists, an "aggregator" of projects . . . Do a cultural audit and provide a common calendar of events . . . Turn pioneers into owners by providing the technical and financial assistance to develop more artists-owned work/live spaces, including artist co-ops, artist trusts, mixed income and mixed use spaces . . . Reduce the brain drain by connecting young people to creative companies and authentic neighborhoods through credit-bearing internships . . . Invest in emerging creators through a program of creativity grants . . .

Arching Strategy 3: Grow the Creative Economy with Emphasis on the Design and Business Innovation and Biomedical Research Clusters
Help diverse types of entrepreneurs to build companies of different scales in the core and other neighborhoods throughout the city, targeting design in the core and biomedical research in the Jewelry District.
    Projects for 2003: Grow the biomedical industry . . . Take advantage of what colleges and hospitals provide the creative economy . . .

Arching Strategy 4: Build an Integrated Infrastructure to support Economic Development and foster an Entrepreneurial Climate
Ensure that the city's economic development function and network supports the growth of the creative economy. Foster an entrepreneurial climate composed of diverse investors, entrepreneurs and innovative business-building practices.
    Projects for 2003: Create a Providence Office of Economic Development that supports the growth of the creative economy . . . Increase support for venture formation . . . Explore the feasibility of hosting a best practice conference in Providence for other cities in the country building creative economies.

Arching Strategy 5: Build Quality and Authentic Places for Creative People
Connect creative people to the sense of place in neighborhoods as a way of retaining our authenticity and minimizing displacement.
    Projects for 2003: Grow Downcity as a creative neighborhood and place. Implement the Business Improvement District (BID) for downtown . . . Revitalize neighborhood centers. Identify and amplify organically evolving nodes of creative energy . . . Connect creative people to the outdoors. Develop the city's bikeway system to the next level.

Figure 3 Providence's call to action (*source*: Providence Foundation, New Commons, Inc., and Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, 2003)

neighborhood cultures through deliberate public-policy interventions is a daunting, if not infeasible, task.[7]

   This may not be the biggest challenge for Providence, however, since its weakest T is perhaps the most expensive one: 'Technology is frankly the region's weakspot' (Catalytix and Richard Florida Creativity Group, 2003c: 2), the irrefutable evidence of which is to be found in its sorry, bottom-half position in the national 'Tech-pole' league table. While Catalytix can talk up the 'strong local universities', these are apparently not strong enough when it comes to Florida's own measures like the rate of registration of patents, while mere 'proximity to the Cambridge-Boston intelligence complex' sounds like a point-stretching attempt to ride someone else's creative coattails. However,

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7   Those predisposed to be skeptical of public-policy capacities, in particular, have a field day with this issue: 'Not only does [Florida] believe that marginal attractions like an idiosyncratic arts scene can build economic power, but he thinks that government officials and policymakers like himself can produce those things artificially. He doesn't seem to recognize that the cultural attributes of cities he most admires are not a product of government planning but have been a spontaneous development, financed by private-sector wealth' (Malanga, 2004: 45).

there remains important work for Providence's dons to do, in their unrealized role as agents of gentrification — creating 'a whole new model of university-community redevelopment', universities can play a leading role in the 'adaptive reuse of older urban facilities, renovating the downtown core and surrounding areas as a seamless work-live-learn-play environment' (Catalytix and Richard Florida Creativity Group, 2003c: 2). This initiative is embedded within a strategic framework for the city, which combines creative exhortation with the prioritization of a series of 'doable' projects (see Figure 3). In addition to plucking some low fruit — like using creativity as a keyword in marketing and promotion campaigns, establishing new offices of cultural affairs and (creative) economic development in City Hall, and fixing up the bike paths — Providence also pledges, in a much more bold but unspecified way, to 'grow the biomedical industry'.

Now, while such strategies may have some limitations, certainly if measured against Schumpeterian-cum-Kontratievian rates of technological productivity and economic growth, the delivery of most of their modest supply-side components is at least feasible within the parameters of local electoral horizons and fiscal constraints. They also have an apple-pie quality, which has the dual effect of generating a certain degree of warm-and-fuzzy support, while disarming local opposition. This said, there is often a rather large credibility gap between the means and ends of creativity strategies. Consider Michigan's Cool Cities program, which seeks to reverse the state's 'alarming' negative balance of trade in young 'knowledge workers' on the basis of an 'economic development strategy that puts "creative people" first' (Michigan, 2003: 3). Governor Granholm, despite having recently enacted the largest spending cuts in state history — 'twisting the wet towel of government tight, to wring out ounce after ounce of inefficiency' (including limiting cell-phone usage and out-of-state travel, turning off lights and canceling subscriptions) — was nevertheless able to eke out funds for the Cool Cities program, a central component of the state's strategy for economic and social revitalization:

> Michigan's greatest economic successes have always been tied to the creative and productive power of our cities. From the Furniture City to the Motor City to the Cereal City — the fates of our industries and cities have been intertwined from their beginnings. [W]e will grow . . . by spurring strong regional economies anchored by cool cities . . . [T]his is a bottom-up movement in which nearly 80 of our communities have local commissions on cool that are uncorking the bottle of creativity and unleashing the genie of possibility — planning everything from bike paths to bookstores to attract more people and new businesses. I applaud the creativity and enthusiasm of these cities from Calumet to Kalamazoo from Saginaw to Saugatuck.[8]

The mechanism for achieving this feat is a series of $100,000 'catalyst' grants, awarded to cities that have demonstrated some measure of faith by establishing a Local Cool Cities Advisory Group, to be spent along with funds from the state's 'Resource Toolbox' (a package of 113 preexisting funding measures, modestly retasked around cool-cities goals). These grants are expected to achieve measurable results within one year in neighborhoods that are (*already*, to an identifiable extent) 'vibrant, mixed-use [and] happening' (Michigan, 2004b: 2). Neighborhoods that are not experiencing at least early-stage creative gentrification, in other words, need not apply. A more concrete sense of what it takes to meet the criterion of 'neighborhoods with potential' is provided by the following indicative list of characteristics, the specification of which implies the targeting of public resources not to socio-economic need, but creative *potential*:

• Mixed-income housing opportunities
• Pedestrian-friendly environment

8 Governor Jennifer M. Granholm (2004) 'Our determination, our destination: a 21st Century economy', State of the state address, 22 January (www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168-23442_21981-84911--,00.html, accessed 25 January 2005).

- Commercial retail (basic goods and services, as well as entertainment venues)
- Championing neighborhood/organizing mechanisms . . .
- Higher density
- Clean/cared for public and private space
- Food venue options (restaurants, grocery stores, etc.)
- Historic districts . . .
- Recreation opportunities/parks
- Arts — galleries, shops, venues
- Accessibility (Michigan, 2004b: 2).

Eligible activities within the Cool Cities program include rehabilitation or new construction of buildings (specifically, theaters, galleries, mixed-use housing), physical infrastructure development, farmers' markets, streetscaping and public art, façade improvements, outdoor recreation facilities, greenspace, parks, pavilions and demolition ('where viable historic resources are not damaged').[9] Spending on ephemeral items — like festivals, cultural events, or consultancy — is, however, expressly prohibited. Even though the creative-cities thesis rests precariously on a series of elusive 'intangibles — excitement, attitude, open-mindedness, buzz' (Gertner, 2004: 88), its translation into urban-development practice, in states like Michigan, entails both literal and metaphorical forms of concretization.

In Michigan, the creative awakening was an abrupt one. Within a few weeks of the Cool Cities program announcement, some 129 communities across that state had been mobilized for action, and just a few weeks later 20 had developed full proposals for funding, nearly all of which rather unimaginatively parroted the State Government's guidelines — most were for mixed-used, pedestrian-friendly initiatives, leveraging public and private resources to revalorize historic districts through the construction of lofts, bike paths, riverwalks and other street-level cultural amenities.

In their specifics, each of these proposals recycled a rather narrow repertoire of newly legitimized regeneration strategies. The recurrent themes are unmistakable, and they are already on the way to being routinized. With apologies for repetition, for this is really the point: the City of Saugatuck proposed to convert a dilapidated pie factory into an arts center; Flint's Uptown Reinvestment Corporation sought assistance in converting a historic bank building into a 16-unit loft development; turning a parking lot into an ice-rink and performance space was the priority project for the City of Marquette; Detroit Jefferson East Business Association called on the State to subsidize desirable business clients — in the technology and entertainment sectors — for a mixed-use complex containing 28 lofts, a TV studio, an ice cream parlor, 'an upscale bar, an art gallery . . . and a coffee shop that will double as a music production and education café'; a heritage riverwalk was the centerpiece of the proposal from the City of Alpena; Grand Rapids proposed streetscaping and public art installations around a 35-unit loft complex; the City of Ypsilanti sought help to make its historic downtown neighborhood 'more intriguing', ostensibly by turning a vacant office building into a retail gallery and overflow space for the nearby Riverside Arts Center; the City of Warren, along with General Motors Corporation, sought help with the construction of a new city square, part of a $75 million downtown plan, which also includes 96 newbuild brownstones and a few public facilities in order to 'provide an environment necessary to help businesses like GM attract the most talented young professionals [to its Warren Technical Center]'; and in practically the only proposal that did not tout its pedestrian-friendliness, the Southwest Detroit Business Association sought subsidies for the renovation of a historic building to house a 'Neighborhood that built the car' cultural-tourism center.[10]

9 Michigan State Housing Development Authority (2004: 3).
10 Michigan Cool Cities Pilot Program, project summaries (www.michigan.gov/mshda, accessed 31 December 2004).

While such bricks-and-mortar methods have become increasingly commonplace in the competitive race to attract talent workers, other cities have focused on 'softer' strategies to build and sustain their communities of talent. Creative TampaBay, for example, which was established in the wake of Richard Florida's visit to the city in the Spring of 2003 and which boasts four signatories of the Memphis Manifesto, focuses its energies on events, social activities and information-sharing, including 'regular discussion salons and cultural encounters'. And in another widely emulated strategy, the city's cultural pioneers like to recharge their creative batteries by getting together regularly for early-evening walks. The Creative TampaBay web site[11] mixes yuppie futurology with an undercurrent of urban entrepreneurialism — so alongside the universalizing statements to the effect that '[c]reativity resides in everyone, everywhere', and that 'building a community of ideas means empowering all people with the ability to express and use the genius of their own creativity', come sobering revelations that 'a demographic wave is sweeping across our nation'. This will be 'a decisive force in shaping the economic destiny of Tampa Bay [because as] cities move increasingly into a knowledge-based economy, the kind of talented people each attracts will determine whether it wins or loses in the campaign for future prosperity'. The spur for action in this case is the yet-more-sobering fact that Tampa Bay has been on the losing side of the interurban war for talent — the area being ranked almost bottom of 50 metro regions in terms of its attractiveness to the 'young and restless' population of 25–34 year-olds (Impresa and Coletta & Company, 2004). The formation of Creative TampaBay, which rushed to host the first creative cities 'summit' in September, 2004, represents a response to this newly appreciated strategic deficit. While describing itself as a 'grassroots organization', Creative TampaBay also has the backing of a number of local institutions, including Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, Tampa Bay Partnership, the Pinellas and Hillsborough Arts Councils, Tampa Downtown Partnership, Tampa Bay Technology Forum, and the Florida High Tech Corridor. The region's civic leaders have begun to focus on the vexing question of how to reproduce a 'San Francisco or Austin or Boston or Florida's gulf coast [albeit] with a uniquely Tampa Bay flavor' (Trigaux, 2003: 1E). However, the consultants hired to probe the hopes and desires of the young and restless reported that Tampa Bay has a long way to go to realize this goal. Genuflecting before focus groups of young creatives, and earnestly reporting their lifestyle preferences as indicators of some new cultural reality, has become a modus operandi for this form of creative consultancy. So, the faltering public-school system is not simply a social and public-policy problem in its own right, but worse still, it is producing an insufficient supply of 'equally educated partners' for the rising class. The city's creative leaders were also informed that the radio stations must be improved and that the nightlife-deficient downtown just 'sucks' (Impresa and Coletta & Company, 2004: 17). Potential remedies were, however, conveniently at hand in the form of a 'Toolkit for Cities', which is illustrative of the kind of new consultancy products that are being developed to serve the new market for (ostensibly authentic and homegrown) creativity strategies:

- Deliver an 'appealing reality', because 'young people are very savvy in assessing cities'
- Put values on display, *demonstrating* how the city 'welcomes newcomers and new ideas'
- Keep in touch with former residents, and find ways to have them 'return to your city'
- Create opportunities for civic involvement, deliberately seeking out the opinions of young people
- Use internships to connect with young adults
- Survey young adults regularly, including 'exit interviews'
- Celebrate young entrepreneurs and civic contributors
- Communicate development plans to young adults

11 www.creativetampabay.com, accessed 21 January 2005.

- Promote your city: 'place marketing works best when it is based on authentic stories that people are willing to tell about their cities'
- Promote a young adult lifestyle, particularly 'active nightlife', and do not be fearful that this might 'scare off the soccer moms' (Impresa and Coletta & Company, 2004: 64–65).

For his part, Florida (2002: 294) also emphasizes that 'an environment attractive to young people *must* be part of the mix' for contemporary cities. In some cases, following this advice has led cities to endorse targeted promotional campaigns as a substitute for, or low-cost complement to, orthodox urban-regeneration policies. Another Florida-inspired, though also ostensibly 'grassroots' group, Cincinnati Tomorrow, has produced a strategy that focuses almost exclusively on redefining the city's battered image, proposing that marketing brochures should hitherto feature fewer 'cityscape photos' and more 'shots of busy streets in the urban core'. It is advisable, moreover, that neighborhoods should have 'more pronounced identities', in order that the 'creative class can better find the area that best suits their needs', the Creative City Plan suggesting that marketing consultants be brought in to help with this pressing task, while a new website will help employers and realtors 'locate new residents that fit the broad "creative class" profile' (Cincinnati Tomorrow, 2003: 8, 16). As public and private agencies are mobilized around these goals — which the Mayor was prepared to endorse, if for no other reason than 'Our image sucks' (quoted in Trapp, 2003: 2) — they are also reminded of the 'demanding' nature of the creatives' lifestyle requirements: 'Creative class members are looking for experiences, not commitments. Their busy schedules and tangential approach to life constrain them from joining organizations or taking on new responsibilities. Instead, they seek out activities . . . where they can make quick, temporary, and stringless attachments' (Cincinnati Tomorrow, 2003: 15). This insight is presented next to an image of a group of well-dressed young women, drinking.

While Florida has voiced concerns about how 'some cities have oversimplified his ideas',[12] at the same time, he lambastes those places that 'just don't get it,' since these cities are clearly 'trapped by their past', suffering as they do from a form of 'institutional sclerosis' that blinds them to the emergence of new social and economic norms, norms that he finds dazzling (2002: 302–303). The city that defines this negative condition, for Florida, is Pittsburgh: 'Trapped in the culture of a bygone era, it has great difficulty opening up the social space in which members of the Creative Class can validate their identities' (2002: 305). As if to prove his own theory, Florida left Pittsburgh, his home for 17 years, in 2004, taking time before his departure to inform the local newspaper, the *Tribune-Review*, that the city needed to get rid of both its Mayor and its '1950s country club' culture (quoted in Steigerwald, 2004). His relocation to Washington, DC clearly represented an upward move — from 36th to 8th place on the Creativity Index.

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12 National Public Radio, *Morning Edition*, 7 September 2004. Alternatively, for an 'authorized' form of trivialization, see the creative-city quiz developed by Florida in association with *Fast Company*, the readers of which are invited to assess whether their 'city is on the cutting edge . . . or just on the edge'. Multiple-choice questions enable readers to assess their cities according to whether gays and immigrants 'are prominent amongst our business and civic leaders', or 'try to avoid suspicion by driving pickup trucks with American flags'; just as it pointedly asks if 'bike lanes and footpaths are everywhere' and 'local firms have started a fund to support the grassroots music scene', or if instead the city is blighted by 'new stadiums, a convention center, and a downtown mall with a Hard Rock Café'. The quiz also gently, though perhaps a little recklessly, pokes fun at Florida's prime constituency, those 'earnest good-government types launching initiatives to fund biotech incubators, wire coffee houses, and outfit the public parks with rock-climbing walls'. And what do locals, in the creative capitals, make of a quiz like this? 'The mayor thinks it's a hoot [and the] newspapers reported our high scores' (www.fastcompany.com/articles/2002/07/cityquiz.html, accessed 22 January 2005).

Florida recount

One of the primary objectives of *The Rise of the Creative Class* was to show 'cities how to operate within the new paradigm', in the form of a 'smart, energetic "how to" manual, loaded with supporting statistics and examples' (Cronheim, 2004: 934). The foundation for this policy advocacy is a sweeping theoretical assertion. 'With little in the way of academic studies or literature to guide me', Florida (2002: 223) reports, he street-tested his homegrown theory in interviews and focus groups,[13] later turning to regression analyses for verification, before confidently concluding that 'regional economic growth is driven by the locational choices of creative people — the holders of creative capital — who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas'. The basis of this argument, that urban growth is a function of a privileged set of supply-side, human-capital attributes, has some support in the orthodox urban economics literature (see Glaeser, 2000). What is distinctive in Florida's thesis is the more specific claim that bohemian places function as 'talent magnets', and the urban-policy prescriptions that are derived from this assertion.[14]

Edward Glaeser, while conceding the point that human capital (broadly defined) has become a principal determinant of urban fortunes, risked an alliterative brawl by insisting that the fundamental forces at work were not Florida's three T's but, instead, the three S's of 'skills, sun, and sprawl' (quoted in Shea, 2004: D1): 'Most [creative people] like what most well-off people like — big suburban lots with easy commutes by automobile and safe streets and good schools and low taxes' (Glaeser, 2004: 2). Running his own regressions against Florida's data, Glaeser concludes that human-capital endowments basically explain US urban population growth in the 1990s, with little or no evidence of an independent 'Bohemian effect'. In the service of a much more critical, conservative critique of Florida's thesis, Malanga (2004) contends that the best-performing cities on measures like employment and population growth, or the rate of formation of high-growth companies, are not creative capitals like San Francisco or New York, but low-tax, business-friendly cities like Las Vegas and Memphis, ostensibly the 'creative losers'. Demonstrating, if nothing else, the ease with which urban league tables can be manipulated, Malanga mischievously suggests that Florida constructed his measures in such a way as to elevate a predetermined set of favored liberal-leaning cities, linked to the 1990s technology boom. In a classic circular fashion, certain conspicuous features of these cities are then ascribed causal significance as foundations of economic creativity. But the arguments are scrambled. Street-level cultural innovation and conspicuous consumption may just as easily be consequences of economic growth, rather than causes of it. And loose correlations between economic development and certain cultural traits may be no more than contingent, or easily challenged by counterfactual cases. This is the Las Vegas critique: high growth, lousy culture, *how come*? For their part, right-wing critics will use such arguments, but rather than taking issue with the eccentric economics, they seem more offended by the liberal cultural politics and exhortations to urban intervention that they see all over the Florida thesis:

> Yes, you can create needed revenue-generating jobs without having to take the unpalatable measures — shrinking government and cutting taxes — that appeal to old-economy

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13 Many of the claims in *The Rise of the Creative Class* are, in fact, very loosely attributed to focus-group discussions and unspecified 'interviews', which irritated Peter Marcuse (2003) so much that he started to count these references to unattributed sources, reaching a total of 43.

14 To his credit, Florida has taken the argument directly to social conservatives, editorializing against the policies of the Republican Right in locations like *USA Today* and beltway publications like the *Washington Monthly* (Florida, 2003a; 2003b); though whether reactionary social policies are most effectively opposed on the grounds of their supposed economic inefficiency, rather than on human-rights or other progressive principles, remains (highly) debatable.

businessmen (sic), the kind with starched shirts and lodge pins in their lapels. You can bypass all that and go straight to the new economy, where the future is happening now. You can draw in Mr. Florida's creative-class capitalists — ponytails, jeans, rock music and all — by liberal, big-government means: diversity celebrations, 'progressive' social legislation and government spending on cultural amenities. Put another way, Mr. Florida's ideas are breathing new life into an old argument: that taxes, incentives and business-friendly policies are less important in attracting jobs than social legislation and government-provided amenities . . . Not only does he believe that marginal attractions like an idiosyncratic arts scene can build economic power, but he thinks that government officials and policy makers like himself can figure out how to produce those things artificially . . . Concerned with inessentials, cities under Mr. Florida's thrall can easily overlook what residents really want (Malanga, 2004: 40, 45).

Writing in the New Democrats' *Blueprint* magazine, Kotkin and Siegel (2004: 16) also take issue with both the analysis and the policy prescription in what they dismissively characterize as a 'creativity craze'. Like Malanga, they contend that in the aftermath of the dot.com bubble, growth has been shifting to 'less fashionable but more livable locales' like Riverside, CA and Rockland County, NY. Such 'family-values' places are the locus points for a still-suburbanizing economy, Kotkin (2003: 34, 33) argues, dominated as they are by far-from-trendy characteristics like 'single-family homes, churches, satellite dishes, and malls', all of which are held to add up to the kind of 'cultures attractive to ordinary families'. The deliberately marked contrast here is to Florida's favored population of 'homosexuals, sophistos, and trendoids'. After all, if the geography of economic growth does not align with the spatial distribution of this population, then the basis of Florida's argument — which rests on correlation rather than causality — is undermined.

The Rise of the Creative Class has also attracted criticism for its relative neglect of issues of intraurban inequality and working poverty. A swelling contingent economy of underlaborers may, in fact, be a necessary side-effect of the creatives' lust for self-validation, 24/7 engagement, and designer coffee. Baris (2003: 44) observes that the 'overall tone [of the book] is unequivocally celebratory', the possibility that there might be serious downsides to unrestrained workforce and lifestyle flexibilization strategies warranting no more than a passing — if moralizing — mention. *The Rise of the Creative Class* both glorifies and naturalizes the contracted-out, 'free-agent' economy, discursively validating the liberties it generates, and the lifestyles it facilitates, for the favored class of creatives. Florida is inclined to revel in the juvenile freedoms of the idealized no-collar workplaces in this flexibilizing economy,[15] while paying practically no attention to the divisions of labor within which such employment practices are embedded. There is little regard for those who are on the thin end of Florida's 'thick labor markets', beyond the forlorn hope that, one day, they too might be lifted — presumably acts of sheer creative will — into the new overclass.[16] There is certainly no

15 'Pittsburgh and Detroit were still trapped in that Protestant-ethic/bohemian-ethic split, where people were saying, "You can't have fun!" or "What do you mean play in a rock band? Cut your hair and go to work, son. That's what's important". Well, Austin was saying, "No, no, no, you're a creative. You want to play in a rock band at night and do semiconductor work in the day? C'mon! And if you want to come in at 10 the next morning and you're a little hung over or you're smoking dope, that's cool"' (quoted in Dreher, 2002: 6).

16 Baris (2003: 44) notes that Florida's assessment of labor-market flexibility is positive and one-sided – his argument focusing narrowly on the consequences for creativity, business efficiency and middle-class consumption – while there is scant regard for those 'unwilling "free agents" – temps and day laborers, who are forced into flexible work patterns'. In fact, when Florida visited Tampa Bay – which has the dubious distinction of being the most 'temped' urban labor market in the United States (Theodore and Peck, 2002) – he was 'schmoozed at a private gathering . . . at the headquarters of the Tampa staffing company Kforce Inc' (Trigaux, 2003: 2E). Always keen to associate itself with positive messages concerning labor-market contingency, the temporary staffing industry would later anoint Florida 'one of our patron saints' (Grantham and Ware, 2004).

need for unions or large-scale government programs, creativity-stifling institutions that these are held to be, since Florida's vision of a creative meritocracy is essentially a libertarian one (Maliszewski, 2004).

Rather evasively, the creativity credo holds that *everyone* is — at least potentially — creative, that '[t]apping and stoking the creative furnace inside every human being is the great challenge of our time' (Florida, 2005a: 4; see also Shaw, 2003). If only a way could be found, Florida (2005a: 5) muses, to pull the two-thirds of society currently stranded in 'deadening' jobs within the working and service classes into the creative economy, then all might share the fruits of the creative Eden. This, in effect, is a curious form of class analysis, in which there are no meaningfully enduring class *divisions*. Leaving unanswered, then, the nagging question of who will launder the shirts in this creative paradise, Florida exhorts his fellow creatives to show others the path — indeed portraying this as a moral duty. Ultimately, however, the solution seems to be that the working and service classes need to find a way to pull themselves up by their creative bootstraps. So while all people are creative, some are evidently more creative than others, and there are some that simply 'don't get it'.

Creative individuals, in other words, are the drivers, the lumpen two-thirds are merely passengers; the Creative Class generates growth, the rest live off the spoils. In his interview with *Salon*, Florida insists that his 'supercreative core' of scientists, artists and techies 'is really the driving force in economic growth', just as it has become evident that '[w]hat drives a city . . . are good places to live, great neighborhoods, great cafes, night life, places to have fun'; and then comes the moral imperative:

> We have to take responsibility for the society we're driving. If not, the social and political consequences are dire. The creative class has to look beyond itself and offer members of society a vision in which all can participate and benefit from (sic). That's the challenge of our age (quoted in Dreher, 2002: 8).

The frequent resort to such driving metaphors in *The Rise of the Creative Class* not only sends strong signals about who is in the driving seat and the direction of the traffic, at a more implicit level it also suggests causality. So, growth derives from creativity and therefore it is creatives that make growth; growth can only occur if the creatives come, and the creatives will only come if they get what they want; what the creatives want is tolerance and openness, and if they find it, they will come; and if they come, growth will follow. The causal mechanisms themselves, however, are not specified (Marcuse, 2003). Instead, Florida's arguments are largely fashioned on the basis of some suggestive correlations, for example between gays and technology-intensive growth, whereas in the text, 'the arguments for [the] connection' between various stand-in measures of cultural openness and 'the actual processes of regional economic development are virtually nonexistent' (Sawicki, 2003: 90).

Florida has responded to his critics in a number of ways. Some he has dismissed as 'squelchers [who] divert human creative energy by posing road blocks and saying "no" to new ideas' (2004b: ii), offering offhanded and selective responses, in some cases without even taking the trouble to cite his interlocutors (see Florida, 2005a: 20–5). When challenged on his rankings, Florida has responded by effortlessly requantifying urban economic performance in various ways, thereby restoring the chosen creative cities to the top positions. The clear implication from Florida's responses to the 'squelchers' is that his critics on the right are afflicted by tunnel vision, tinged with social nostalgia, while those on the left seek to restore a lost era, their affliction being economic nostalgia: 'if social conservatives can't turn back the moral clock to a time when every family resembled the Cleavers, neither can the left magically restore a time when forty or fifty percent of the workforce toiled in blue-collar factory jobs', the get-with-the-program conclusion being that: 'The creative

economy is not going away' (Florida, 2004b: vi).[17] Or, as the events page on the Creative Class web site pompously puts it, quoting Victor Hugo, 'You can resist an invading army, but you cannot resist an idea whose time has come'.[18]

As for the argument that creativity and inequality may be mutually dependent, Florida increasingly portrays such negative externalities as a pressing analytical, political, and indeed moral challenge for the Creative Class, not least since his own subsequent researches have confirmed the connection between creativity and polarization (Catalytix and Richard Florida Creativity Group, 2003b), a link that only had the status of a passing observation in *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Having recognized that the creative haves do rely upon, as well as preferring occasionally to mingle with, the creative have-nots, and that this 'massive functional division of human labor produces the bulk of our income divide [and also] threatens our national competitiveness' (Florida, 2003c: 30), Florida is left with little, however, but a series of 'open questions'. Having lauded the creative overclass for its achievements, having accounted for its privileged position as the consequence of intrinsic talent, and having made the case for increased public subsidy for this elite group, Florida's own arguments reduce the uncreative two-thirds to an afterthought, defined largely in terms of its creative deficits. While some members of this majority underclass appear in Florida's account — usually waiting tables or cutting hair — most are absent. In terms of economic growth and development, those who are not dependent on the creative class seem to be little more than deadweight. But if only in response to the looming threat of 'social unrest' (Florida, 2005b: 246), or to realize this untapped reservoir of potential creativity, *something* must be done.

The Creative Class, having become a uniquely restless factor of production, motivated by extrinsic rewards and the 'pursuit of happiness', is apparently sorting itself into like-minded enclaves (see Bishop and Florida, 2003),[19] with little concern for the wider social consequences, maybe little concern for wider society. The creative capitals are actually more unequal than the rest of the United States, an uncomfortable fact that had previously only been acknowledged in terms of soft-focus recognition of urban 'diversity'. If the pop sociologies of the Creative Class are to be trusted, then openness to cultural diversity may indeed be more of a lifestyle choice than a political trait, which might explain why it can coexist with apparent indifference to social inequality. Creatives, fellow traveler Charles Shaw (2003: 5, 7) writes, seem to have little interest in public-sector jobs, neither are they 'big on Solidarity'; they 'don't care much for news or politics, and hold a special contempt for things that they are not directly involved in'. Asking creatives to pay higher taxes is bound to be a 'tough sell', Florida (2003c: 31) warns, because '[h]igh-end creative workers, who often send their kids to private or elite public schools, may have to be persuaded to pay higher taxes for educating children other than their own'. The challenge is to persuade this group of precocious individualists that they should become less self-absorbed and self-oriented, though the main lever that Florida and his followers have is moral exhortation. This may fall on deaf ears, however. As Shaw (2003: 6) observes, the politics of the creative class stem from their self-image as an unruly tribe of independent consultants — 'the *élan vital* of the Creative Class is "take me as I am and facilitate the use of my unique skills, but

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17 'If you look at the critics of my work, look at where they come from, they come from the socially conservative right and they come from the far left . . . I can show you two quotes, one coming from the Democratic Leadership Council's *Blueprint* magazine and the other coming from the (conservative Manhattan Institute's) *City Journal*. Both critiques are political. And both critiques are essentially saying, "Don't let the genie out of the bottle. Don't let these creative people get their way. Let's control, control, control. Let's squelch"' (quoted in Steigerwald, 2004: 3). The task of 'building a . . . prosperous, creative society', Florida (2005b: 245) implausibly counters, is a 'nonpartisan, nonideological issue'.

18 www.creativeclass.org/events.shtml, accessed 24 January 2005.

19 These 'social congealing' processes are contributing to, if not 'driving' the polarizing political geography of the US, since mobile individuals are held to be increasingly moving to cities for cultural reasons, to be amongst their own, rather than merely following jobs (Bishop and Florida, 2003: B5).

don't expect me to buy into some corporate culture that requires me to change who I am" '.

Earnest attempts to graft social inclusion and antipoverty objectives onto the basic creative-cities script — which are clearly evident in the Canadian and British debates, for example (see Cannon *et al.*, 2003; Bradford, 2004b), pay insufficient attention to the script's predication on, and infusion with, the realpolitik of urban inequality. The less creative underclasses have only bit parts in this script. Their role is secondary and contingent, in economic terms, to the driving and determinant acts of creativity. Their needs and aspirations are implicitly portrayed as wrongheaded and anachronistic, their only salvation being to get more creative. And the libertarian politics that envelops the creativity thesis, in as far as it concerns itself with the underclasses at all — for the most part, these are portrayed as servants of the creative class, or the stranded inhabitants of 'hopeless' cities — peddles only voluntaristic and usually moralizing solutions. This, in effect, is a recipe for creative (market) distribution, not social redistribution, one that is entirely compatible with a low-tax, market-oriented polity. For example, Dublin is praised for offering 'tax breaks to culturally creative people', like the members of U2, Liam Neeson and Andrew Lloyd Webber (Florida, 2002: 301).

Skeptical of big government solutions, Florida instead advocates a form of creative trickle-down, with the lumpen classes of noncreatives eventually learning what the overclass has already figured out, that 'there is no corporation or other large institution that will take care of us — that we are truly on our own' (2002: 115). This is familiar neoliberal snake-oil, of course — insecurity as the new freedom.[20] So, it is supposedly reassuring news that waves of layoffs in the millennial slowdown of the US economy produced 'no picket signs, no demonstrations, not a peep from the politicians', because this reveals the essential truth that the now-dominant class of creatives are at one with the flexibilized labor market — 'we simply accept it as the way things are and go about our busy lives' (2002: 115). Once contingent workers and the laboring poor come fully to share this revelation, throwing off their entitlement mindset, then they too may be able to join the creative class. Florida (2003c: 28–9) concedes that while a 'living wage is still essential', what the poor really want to is not so much a 'chance to get rich', but an opportunity to 'reap intrinsic rewards from [their] work', just like the creatives. As he explains of his politics:

> Where I share common ground with some Republicans and libertarians, is that I think that old-style government programs have become a huge impediment to leveraging the creative age and allowing it to emerge. That said, I think there is still a role for government to set up the parameters in which market-based actions take place . . . If you asked me what the problems of our current structure are, I'd say it is oriented toward large-scale political institutions and large companies when it should be oriented to entrepreneurial efforts, small firms and to people's energy. We have to move away from large-scale government programs to community-oriented efforts (quoted in Steigerwald, 2004: 2).

While Florida implores his fellow creatives to 'grow up' (2002: 315), his critics bristle at how the discourse of creativity simply sidesteps many of the concerns of grown-up politics, intractable challenges and distributional questions. From the right, Malanga (2004: 40) characterizes this form of liberal hedonism as 'the equivalent of an eat-all-you-want-and-still-lose-weight-diet', which evades what he sees as the most pressing imperative of cutting taxes and downsizing government. Addressing an audience of New Democrats, Kotkin and Siegel (2004: 17) reveal a lot about where the center of gravity now lies in the American political conversation when they complain that the Memphis Manifesto is 'an urban strategy for a frictionless universe. There is no mention of government or politics or interest groups. There is no recognition of the problems produced by outmoded regulations, runaway public spending, or high taxes'. Yet this

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20 'The old employment contract was group oriented and emphasized job security. The new one is tailored to the needs and desires of the individual' (Florida, 2002: 135).

neoliberalized urban environment is, in fact, the backdrop for Florida's performance. His plea is really for a new kind of urban *liberalism*, framed in this restructured context, and some of the reactions to his work say as much about this context as they do about the thesis itself.

Florida's quite appropriate and entirely understandable skepticism about the value of old-school urban-economic development — based on business subsidies, convention centers, sports stadia and shopping malls — has produced an orthodox cultural recoil in the form of a rejection of his brand of hipster elitism: affordable and safe suburban lives, his critics respond, is what the middle classes *really* want (Kotkin, 2003; Malanga, 2004). And Florida's relatively modest proposals for fostering creative ecosystems — things like small-scale arts subsidies, support for grassroots cultural activities; communitarian creativity strategies, if you like — are derided by fiscal conservatives of the center-left as well as the right. Amongst Republicans, they are hysterically portrayed as a 'kind of aggressive, government-directed economic development (albeit with a New Age spin)' (Malanga, 2004: 45). This exaggerated response also has its echoes on the center-left, where Florida has been accused of offering the false promise of a way around those urban roadblocks that ostensibly *really* deter business — 'schools that fail to improve, despite continuous infusions of money; contentious zoning and regulatory policies; and politically hyperactive public-sector unions and hectoring interest groups that make investment in cities something most entrepreneurs studiously avoid' (Kotkin and Siegel, 2004: 16).

(Over)reactions like these allow Florida to position himself outside the neoliberal mainstream and above the political fray, but they belie the fact that the creative credo is only modestly disruptive of neoliberal models of development. Self-described as fiscally conservative and socially liberal (see Steigerwald, 2004), Florida's proposals ultimately amount to a plea for grassroots agency with a communitarian conscience amongst a privileged class of creatives, lubricated by modest public-sector support for culturally appropriate forms of gentrification and consumption. There is no challenge to the extant 'order' of market-oriented flexibility (see DeFazio, 2002; Lehmann, 2003); indeed, this environment is presented as the natural habitat of the Creative Class. Florida is not asking for a blank check for new government programs, for major concessions to be made to the noncreative underclasses, nor even for regulatory transformation. His calls for creative empowerment can be met in relatively painless ways — by manipulating street-level façades, while gently lubricating the gentrification processes. This, critics justly complain, is cappuccino urban politics, with plenty of froth.

In this sense, Florida's ideas may have traveled so far, not because they are revolutionary, but because they are so modest. Kotkin and Siegel (2004: 17) recognize this in a curious way when they state that, 'mayors, city councils, and urban development officials seem ready to embrace any notion of reform that holds out hope without offending entrenched constituencies that resist real reform'. While Kotkin and Siegel's version of 'entrenched constituencies' evidently does not extend far beyond public-sector unions, big bureaucracies, and social-advocacy groups, the shared enemies of most neoliberals and many third-wayers, the rather more deeply entrenched constituencies of the business community and mainstream city politicians are in practice no less positively inclined towards this low-cost, market-friendly urban placebo. Surely, Florida's notions would not be 'sweeping urban America' (Malanga, 2004: 36) if they fundamentally ran counter to these latter interests? In truth, establishment constituencies have little to fear from conspicuous urban consumption, key-worker attraction strategies, and gentrification-with-public-art. For the average mayor, there are few downsides to making the city safe for the creative class — a creativity strategy can quite easily be bolted on to business-as-usual urban-development policies. Why not, as Mayor Bloomberg of New York has asked, have *artists* step up to the tasks of transforming 'communities that are down on their heels' (quoted in *Next American City*, 2004: 20), rather than bother elected officials with this niggling and somewhat intractable task? Where is the harm in Cincinnati's creativity strategy, which espouses self-organization

and self-help amongst the nascent creative community, assisted only by a low-cost rebranding strategy and modest efforts — like putting together nightlife guides and 'help[ing] young creatives who want to try adventurous food experiences' (Cincinnati Tomorrow, 2003: 39)? The reality is that city leaders from San Diego to Baltimore, from Toronto to Albuquerque, are embracing creativity strategies not as *alternatives* to extant market-, consumption- and property-led development strategies, but as low-cost, feel-good *complements* to them. Creativity plans do not disrupt these established approaches to urban entrepreneurialism and consumption-oriented place promotion, they *extend* them. Florida (2004b: ii, v) perhaps implicitly concedes as much when pointing out, in response to his critics' axe-grinding attacks, that he works with 'civic leaders from both sides of the aisle on economic development issues', disarmingly observing that '[w]hatever pundits might say about our findings, business and civic leadership in city after city has taken them to heart'.

Fast urban policy

More than fifteen years ago, David Harvey (1989) called attention to the rise of 'entrepreneurial' urban strategies, pointing to emergent features of the city-political terrain that have since been, to all intents and purposes, normalized. Describing the responses of deindustrializing cities in the 1980s, where the accelerating retreat of the Fordist economy was compounded by diminished urban fiscal capacity and a political turn against redistributive spending and social programming, Harvey portrayed the rise of interurban competition as a disciplining and coercive force. Confronted by an extremely limited repertoire of politically feasible options, cities threw themselves into a series of zero-sum competitions for mobile public and private investments, thereby inadvertently facilitating (indeed subsidizing) the very forms of capital circulation and revenue competition that were major sources of the problem in the first place. In this climate of beggar-thy-neighbor competition, cities turned to a restrictive suite of supply-side and promotional strategies, which were serially reproduced and emulated in the scramble for mobile investment, jobs and discretionary spending. None of this, of course, increased the aggregate amount of available investment, though it certainly contributed to its increasing rate of circulation.

Recall, though, that the 1980s imperative was not only to attract jobs and mobile corporations, both of which were in short supply, but to reposition cities within the spatial division of *consumption*. 'Above all', Harvey (1989: 9) explained, 'the city has to appear as an innovative, exciting, creative and safe place to live or visit, to play and consume in', as festivals, spectacle and display, cultural events and the arts were increasingly appropriated as 'symbols of [a] dynamic community'. Symptoms of this intensification of urban competition included the overproduction of certain urban forms, resulting in their simultaneous devaluation and — hamster-wheel style — even more aggressive, anxious and ultimately futile competitive behavior. In terms of the built form of cities, these moves were associated with the abandonment of comprehensive planning in favor of the selective and piecemeal development of 'urban fragments', particularly those with some kind of market potential, usually with the aid of gentrification and image makeovers:

> [The] urban terrain is opened for display, fashion, and the 'presentation of self' in a surrounding of spectacle and play. If everyone, from punks to rap artists to the 'yuppies' and the haute bourgeoisie can participate in the production of an urban image through their production of social space, then all can at least feel some sense of belonging to that place (Harvey, 1989: 14).

From these inauspicious origins, it is but a short hop to one of Florida's creative epicenters, where members of the Creative Class today indulge their 'passionate quest

for experience' and expressive consumption amid the throb of 'indigenous street-level culture — a teeming blend of cafes, sidewalk musicians, and small galleries and bistros, where it is hard to draw the line between participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators' (Florida, 2002: 166). This is not simply a matter of learning to live with gentrifying cities, not even merely to accommodate the process; it is to go several steps further, in asserting the ostensibly *productive* nature of creative gentrification within what Florida calls the 'Eminem economy'. Rapping, he discloses, is a creative act, and while it might be unwise to suggest that large numbers of young people can realistically make a living from rapping, 'conceptually, it's in the right ballpark', since the challenges of tapping talent are a 'pretty good starting point for a serious debate on how to keep our economy healthy' (Florida, 2003c: 29).[21] Florida's idea of the 'New Deal for the creative age' turns out to be a pious call for 'investment' in the creativity of all, not just the high-tech entrepreneur, but the would-be hip-hop poet from a disadvantaged neighborhood. This philosophy has been compared less than favorably with the previous New Deal, in which 'society's challenge was to improve the lives of *everyone* in that disadvantaged neighborhood, not to seek out one individual and tap him (sic) with an entrepreneurial wand, making him briefly and unimaginably rich' (Maliszewski, 2004: 78–9).

The ethos of the Creative Age, however, is an anti-entitlement one; it is about nurturing and rewarding creativity, not compensating the creative have-nots. The hard news for civic leaders is that while they can, and must, do whatever is in their power to cultivate creativity, there is no way of knowing where the creative sparks will ignite. As Florida counsels: 'We cannot know in advance who the next Andy Warhol, Billie Holiday, Paul Allen, or Jimi Hendrix will be, or where he or she will come from' (2005a: 5); yet it would appear to be a racing certainty that these as-yet unborn supercreatives will want to live in Austin, TX, or somewhere very much like it. And they will likely ride into town by mountain bike. The duty of civic leaders, in the meantime, is to make sure that a network of bike paths connects the funky neighborhoods and authentic entertainment districts, so that the creatives will feel 'welcomed'. This is another variant of the Papua New Guinean cargo cults, in which airstrips were laid out in the jungle in the forlorn hope of luring a passing aircraft to earth.

The creative cargo cults of today are consequently little more than retreads of some very familiar local strategies. Urban creativity strategies facilitate and extend the 'third generation' forms of gentrification, in which the (local) state assumes an increasingly active role in '[r]etaking the city for the middle classes' (Smith, 2002: 443). Discourses of creative competition, moreover, serve to enroll cities in more far-reaching forms of cultural commodification and artistically inflected place promotion, targeted at a new audience. Pioneers of some of the early rounds of urban entrepreneurialism, like Baltimore, quickly discovered that the allure of 'innovations' like waterfront redevelopment schemes and tourist-retail complexes can quickly fade (see Levine, 1987; Harvey, 1989). The leapfrogging logic of these investments meant that cities could never stand still, but always had to be on the lookout for the next big thing. No surprise, then, that we should find the City of Baltimore unveiling its own strategy for the Florida Age, rather-less-than-creatively entitled *Creative Baltimore*. In Baltimore, where civic leaders joke that they 'should be so lucky to have [the] problem' of gentrification,[22] the scope for actually delivering on creativity-led urban regeneration may be limited, but the costs of trying are not especially high. Mayor O'Malley, doing his part by fronting a Celtic rock band in his spare evenings, clearly has his work cut out — amongst other things, trying to reduce the murder rate, while dealing with a locally racialized AIDS epidemic

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21 Bordering on self-parody, a hip-hop tribute to Florida is featured on the Creative Class web site: 'The Rise of the Creative Class/Thirty eight million and growing fast/Building community and having a blast/When it comes to money rollin' in cash . . .' (quoted in Gibson and Klocker, 2004: 430).

22 Tom Wilcox, President of the Baltimore Community Foundation, quoted in *Next American City* (2004: 21).

— but even in the face of a protracted budget crisis, he has found some additional funding for a creativity strategy. The Mayor's Plan involves the creative retasking of a long list of existing programs (City of Baltimore, 2004a), complemented with a rather shorter set of 'new ideas', including, in addition to the mandatory bike paths . . . establishing a mentoring scheme for creative wannabes; extending liquor licensing hours to 4am; ridding Howard Park of its drug dealers and vagrants, so that it might be made safe for dog-walkers; creating a street performers program; converting unused industrial buildings to art studios and live-work spaces; setting up a city-wide music festival and arts parade; memorializing creative locals like Frank Zappa and Billie Holiday; initiating a duckpin bowling tournament, in which the Mayor's team would take on challengers from the business and cultural communities; welcoming newcomers to the city with a 'fun networking event', including three minutes face time with the Mayor himself; placing chess tables outside City Hall; promoting offbeat and eccentric events that are unique to Baltimore, including the American Dime Museum, John Waters and Edgar Allan Poe, and the Night of 100 Elvises; developing 'stick around stipends' for creatively inclined college students; overcoming residual 'squeamishness', which apparently stretches to 'covert bigotry' in some quarters, around the idea of a strategy for attracting gays, not least because 'Florida makes no bones about [this]' in his advice to the Mayor (City of Baltimore, 2004b). Just in case creatives might inadvertently stray into the wrong neighborhoods, possibly encountering the wrong kind of buzz, the Baltimore plan also proposes an arts shuttle service for secure transit between cultural attractions. For his part, Mayor O'Malley seems to have completely absorbed the creative-cities script:

> Economist Richard Florida, author of *The rise of the creative class*, joined us at our arts town hall this year. His major thesis is that our country's economy is now fueled by the growing creative class, a diverse and expanding class of Americans whose economic and social lives are organized not by employers but by place, by cities . . . Cities that are diverse, cities that nurture creativity, cities that are culturally alive, and cities that preserve their history are cities that thrive — because they create a better quality of life . . . they create new businesses . . . they create living neighborhoods, they retain and they attract members of this growing creative class . . . We make our city welcoming, not with stadiums or by subsidizing corporate relocations from other cities, but by having great parks, and walkable neighborhoods, and authentic buildings, and galleries and music clubs, and restaurants and shops, and by respecting, indeed, treasuring diversity.[23]

Creativity strategies, even as they have promptly become clichés in their own right, are in many ways tragically appropriate for late-entrepreneurial cities like Baltimore, the cities that have already tried practically everything, including, of course, building stadiums and offering corporate inducements. Today, hopes are pinned on 'an increasingly standardized narrative of "creativity-led urban economic development"' (Gibson and Klocker, 2004: 431), one which nevertheless reorganizes the stakes, sites and scales of urban competition — around creative individuals and their favored neighborhood habitats.

Rather than 'civilizing' urban economic development by 'bringing in culture', creativity strategies do the opposite: they commodify the arts and cultural resources, even social tolerance itself, suturing them as putative economic assets to evolving regimes of urban competition. They enlist to this redoubled competitive effort some of the few remaining pools of untapped resources; they enroll previously-marginalized actors for this effort, enabling the formation of new governance structures and local political channels; they constitute new objects of governance and new stakes in interurban competition; and they enable the script of urban competivity to be performed — quite literally — in novel and often eye-catching ways. And they do all of this within

23 Mayor Martin O'Malley, State of the city address, Baltimore, MD, 2 February 2004 (www.baltimorecity.gov/mayor/speeches/sp040202.html, accessed 6 January 2005).

the framework of an inherited complex of new urban 'realities', that variously contextualize, channel and constrain 'creative' urban politics — including the material and social artifacts of gentrification, as a definitionally uneven process of financial and symbolic valorization; a proclivity for 'soft', pliable and task-oriented modes of urban governance, organized around short-term, concrete projects (like funding competitions or development schemes), rather than progressive and programmatic goals (such as poverty alleviation or environmental sustainability); and a substantially neoliberalized urban policy environment, within which a range of competitive and market-oriented metrics, techniques and rule regimes are displacing urban-Keynesian systems, like comprehensive planning, bureaucratic delivery, needs-based approaches, and progressive socio-spatial redistribution. In the short run at least, the discursively privileged actors on this stage are not the (distracted and self-absorbed) members of the Creative Class itself, since these are the ones who must be *catered to*, but those 'regional leaders' with the vision and the will to adopt 'aggressive measures' (Florida, 2005a: 151–2).

Creative-city strategies are predicated on, and designed for, this neoliberalized terrain. Repackaging urban cultural artifacts as competitive assets, they value them (literally) not for their own sake, but in terms of their (supposed) economic utility. In order to be enacted, they presume and work with gentrification, conceived as a positive urban process, while making a virtue of selective and variable outcomes, unique neighborhood by unique neighborhood. And with almost breathtaking circularity, it is now being proposed that these gentrification-friendly strategies should be evaluated, not according to hackneyed metrics like job creation or poverty alleviation, but according to more relevant measures like . . . increased house prices! So Robert Sirota, an advocate of the *Creative Baltimore* plan, enthuses that many of the city's newly constructed downtown housing units 'are leasing for higher than anticipated rents to what we might call Creative Class types' (quoted in *Next American City*, 2004: 20), while Florida himself muses that there may be a need to develop alternative measures of economic growth, like 'house prices [since these] indicate how the market views the "attractiveness" of various places — the real *demand* for place, if you will' (2004a: 5, original emphasis). As if this were not circular enough, it is increasingly common for cities to evaluate the effectiveness of their creativity strategies according to their shifting position in Florida's league tables (Duxbury, 2004).

Both the script and the nascent practices of urban creativity are peculiarly well suited to entrepreneurialized and neoliberalized urban landscapes. They provide a means to intensify and publicly subsidize urban consumption systems for a circulating class of gentrifiers, whose *lack* of commitment to place and whose weak community ties are perversely celebrated. In an echo of the Creative Class's reportedly urgent need to 'validate' their identities and lifestyles, this amounts to a process of public validation for favored forms of consumption and for a privileged class of consumers. In fact, indulging selective forms of elite consumption and social interaction is elevated to the status of a public-policy objective in the creative-cities script. 'The challenge before us', Cincinnati Tomorrow (2003: 15) for example intones, 'is to help young creatives develop ties with each other and connect with the events, places, and experiences they crave'.

Moreover, and no less significantly, the notion of creative cities extends to the urban domain the principles and practices of creative, flexible autonomy that were so powerfully articulated in the libertarian business ideologies of the 1990s (see Frank, 2000; Thrift, 2001), for all the knowing distinctions that creativity advocates ritually draw with their new-economy forebears. As Lehmann (2004; 163–4) notes, 'the core values that Florida charts as the key to the "creative ethos" — individuality, meritocracy, diversity, and openness — are all by now slogans of first resort for the same corporate economy that [he] claims is being displaced by high-tech innovators in no-collar workplaces and edgy neighborhoods'. Discourses of urban creativity seek to normalize flexible labor-market conditions, lionizing a class of workers that can not only cope with, but positively revel in, this environment of persistent insecurity and intense,

atomized competition, just as they enforce modes of creative governmentality based on 'compulsory individualism, compulsory "innovation", compulsory performativity and productiveness, compulsory valorization of the putatively new' (Osborne, 2003: 507). This is achieved, in part, by the suggestive mobilization of creativity as a distinctly positive, nebulous-yet-attractive, apple-pie-like phenomenon: like its stepcousin flexibility, creativity preemptively disarms critics and opponents, whose resistance implicitly mobilizes creativity's antonymic others — rigidity, philistinism, narrow mindedness, intolerance, insensitivity, conservativism, *not getting it*.

The urban creativity script also enables a subtle reworking of the scalar politics of the post-Keynesian era. Reflecting on the way in which Florida's work is being *read* by city leaders, it would seem that there is a predisposition to accept the most controversial steps in his thesis — that creativity is the root cause of growth, and this is borne by a mobile class of elite workers — in order to jump to the chase on the question of how to lure the creatives to town. The cities that grow will be those with cool people in them, and cool people will only go to cool cities. But 'what makes a city cool?' Michigan Governor Granholm rhetorically asks, 'We understood that the best place to look for the answer to this question was at the local level' (quoted in Michigan, 2003: 3). Uncool cities, it seems, have no-one to blame but themselves, while creative places stand to be rewarded both with economic growth and targeted public spending. Thus, the creativity script works seamlessly with the new urban realpolitik, neoliberal-style. Apparently operating on the presumption of a distant, dysfunctional, largely irrelevant, if not terminally hollowed-out national state, creativity discourses privilege the local and bodily scales as the locations both of determinate processes and meaningful social action. Florida insists that creative 'environments cannot be planned from above' (2004b: iii), just as he endows cities with significant degrees of agency: So Austin was not merely fortunate or well placed, according to Florida's account, its civic leaders 'really hustled', reportedly declaring that, 'We're going to make Austin really unique' (quoted in Dreher, 2002: 6; Gertner, 2004: 90). Meanwhile, the problem with 'institutionally sclerotic' cities that have not participated in the creativity explosion, like Detroit and Pittsburgh, is that they still 'just don't get it', or, worse still, 'they don't want to change' (quoted in Dreher, 2002: 6). In this respect, the creative-cities script is a mobilizing discourse: it spells out the nature of the challenge and the necessity for action, framed as a historic *imperative*; then it outlines a simple urban formula for creative turnaround, sternly warning that civic leaders had better take heed, or else. And increasingly, the threat is a global one: the competition for talented workers is no longer simply a domestic one, the next threat on the horizon is an *international* 'flight of the creative class' (Florida, 2005b). As Florida informed the readers of *Money* magazine, the talent war is globalizing and cities in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and Sweden will increasingly be the ones to watch:

> [A] new global order will not pit Boston against Austin for jobs, but Boston against Dublin. 'I believe the US has the most amazing transformative capacity', [Florida] says, and also that we're still the leading country. But those places are beginning to become more open. They are beginning to see that our strength in the US has not been our market size, nor our own intrinsic genius, but that we've been open. We've always been the place that has attracted the tired, hungry and incredibly energetic. And I think these other countries are increasingly pursuing that (Gertner, 2004: 92).

The insidious 'scalar narrative' (Swyngedouw, 1997) of creativity has it that the bodies — or perhaps more accurately, the souls — of creative individuals have become the preeminent carriers of economic-development potential, so the pursuit of economic growth becomes neatly synonymous with the publicly funded seduction of the Creative Class. This is a uniquely mobile factor of production, a supply-side counterpart to the footloose corporation, whose locational reach is wide and therefore whose locational preferences *must* be accommodated. If the business-oriented strategies of yore involved building industrial parks and subsidizing corporate activities, this new variant of the

supply-side catechism has it that creatives will only come to cities that buzz. A premium is therefore placed on the capacity of cities to make their authentic, funky neighborhoods welcoming to monied incomers, whose inherent precociousness must be rewarded with additional gifts like bike paths and street-level entertainment, while the task of the residualized public sector is underwriting and subsidizing these developments with what tax dollars it has left. Florida does not pull his punches when advising city leaders: '[Y]ou need to have [these amenities] because if you don't have them, then people won't come to your city', since the question that creatives are asking, itinerant hedonists that they are, is: 'What kind of location offers me the full bundle of lifestyle choices with the diversity of amenities and options that I desire?' (quoted in Dreher, 2002: 4, 5).

Discursively subjected, in this way, to the soft discipline of creative-capital mobility, cities must quickly figure out how to act. Fortunately, help is on hand, since there is now a well-publicized and purposefully circulated repertoire of strategies that (may) work. Florida's has been but the most conspicuous contribution to this burgeoning business of manualizing local creativity strategies (see Kotkin and Devol, 2000; Landry, 2000; Partners for Livable Communities, 2001; Duxbury, 2004). The snake oil cannot be guaranteed, of course, because the finicky creatives may decide to stay on in Austin. But the allure of Dr Florida's prescription has been sufficient to secure robust domestic sales, and a growing international market. The sobering evidence of this lies in the sheer number of cities that have willingly entrained themselves to his course of treatment, not to mention the unmistakable zeal of its many converts. Particularly high doses of the urban-creativity medicine must be administered if the patient has been suffering from (institutional) sclerosis, or if earlier courses of (entrepreneurial) treatment have failed. Even so, some (probably delusional) patients in rustbelt regions may develop the feeling that they have been slipped another placebo. In a rare moment of reflection, Florida has pondered whether he may have 'inadvertently glorified' some creative urban strategies, which may not even be sustainable in their places of origin (quoted in Gertner, 2004: 90). Meanwhile, the contagion of urban creativity strategies continues to spread, to Europe and beyond (see National Economics, 2002; Bradford, 2004a, 2004b; Florida and Tinagli, 2004; cf. Gibson and Klocker, 2004). Audaciously upscaling his argument, Florida (2005b: 3) has recently asserted that 'the new global competition for talent . . . promises to radically reshape the world in the coming decades'.

The contemporary cult of urban creativity has a clear genealogical history, stretching back at least as far as the entrepreneurial efforts of deindustrialized cities. The script of urban creativity reworks and augments the old methods and arguments of urban entrepreneurialism in politically seductive ways. The emphasis on the mobilization of new regimes of local governance around the aggressive pursuit of growth-focused development agendas is a compelling recurring theme (see Leitner, 1990). The tonic of urban creativity is a remixed version of this cocktail: just pop the same basic ingredients into your new-urbanist blender, add a slug of Schumpeter lite for some new-economy fizz, and finish it off with a pink twist.

The flavor, though, is a distinctive one. Cities, and urban policies, remain substantially constituted by an ideologically amplified deference to 'external' competitive forces and threats, though the struggle to replace working-class jobs is partially superceded by a nouveau-bourgeois war for talent. The indiscriminate pursuit of growth is superseded by a new emphasis on rewarding, good-quality jobs, though these are reserved for the new overclass of interloping creatives. The competitively induced overbuilding of malls and convention centers morphs into the creatively impelled overbuilding of bike paths and artistic venues (as if this could grow the aggregate supply of creativity), the inevitable consequence of which must surely be devaluation, no doubt followed by yet more rounds of leapfrogging creative 'innovation'. The subordination of social-welfare concerns to economic development imperatives (first, secure economic growth, then wait for the wider social benefits to percolate through) gives way to a form of creative trickle-down; elite-focused creativity strategies leave only supporting roles for the two-thirds of the population languishing in the working and service classes, who get nothing apart

from occasional tickets to the circus. A new generation of entrepreneurializing subjects is formed, as the disciplines of creative productionism are extended to every aspect of self and soul, to the spheres of consumption and play, as well as to those of work, while the circumstances of those outside the favored class are rationalized according to a deficit model of creativity. And the strategic emphasis shifts from a narrow focus on the sphere of production to a deeper engagement with the marketizing and commodifying spheres of consumption and reproduction, positions within which become the primary markers of distinction in the creative city.

Finally, there is a question of speed. The extraordinary rate of adoption of urban creativity strategies can in some respects be explained in terms of the enduring legacies of entrepreneurial urbanism. The rapid diffusion and ultimate exhaustion of entrepreneurial-city strategies established a massive potential market for their creatively inflected successors, together with an elaborate infrastructure for cross-jurisdictional policy transfer (see Wacquant, 1999; Peck 2002). *The Rise of the Creative Class*, as a knowingly constructed 'mutable mobile', entered this hypertrophied sphere of circulation at a velocity that revealed less about its intrinsic qualities than it said about, firstly, the profound policy vacuum that characterized the neoliberalized urban realm, and secondly, the now-extensive circuitry of the fast-policy regime that has been constructed around cities. Whatever else it may be, Florida's creative-city thesis is perfectly framed for this competitive landscape, across which it has traveled at alarming speed. Agents and artifacts of fast-policy circulation help realize this process, though in themselves they surely cannot constitute the *demand* for creative fixes. The market for creative policy products is propelled by the endless pursuit of creative urban *advantage*, the (generally negative) distributional consequences of which are variously denied, obfuscated or finessed out of existence in the creativity script and its routinized practices. The creative cities discourse is both saturated in, and superficially oblivious to, the prevailing market ideology, such that the mere suggestion that creative advantage presupposes creative disadvantage, that there must be losers in the Creative Age, borders on the 'heretical' (Bradford, 2004b: 9). *Contra* the self-evident myth that every person and every place can be a creative winner, the creativity script represents a culturally inflected reinscription of these competitive relations.

> In the creative economy, regional advantage comes to places that can quickly mobilize the talent, resources, and capabilities required to turn innovations into new business ideas and commercial products. Leading regions establish competitive advantage through their capabilities. They are vehicles for mobilization that can almost instantaneously bring together the resources required to launch new businesses and turn innovations into successful products. For these reasons, the nexus of competitive advantage shifts to those regions that can generate, retain, and attract the best talent. This is particularly true because creative workers are extremely mobile and the distribution of talent is highly skewed (Florida, 2005a: 49–50).

So packaged, creativity strategies were in a sense preconstituted for this fast policy market. They empower, though only precariously, unstable networks of elite actors, whose strategies represent aspirant attempts to realize in concrete form the seductive 'traveling truths' of the creativity script; they give license to ostensibly portable technocratic routines and replicable policy practices that are easily disembedded and deterritorialized from their centers of production — at least in a shallow, essentialized form — for all the talk of local 'authenticity'; they reconstitute urban-elitist, 'leadership' models of city governance, despite their ritual invocation of grassroots efforts; they foster experimental and mutually referential policy development processes, framed within the tight parameters of urban fiscal capacity, and manifest in the form of the serial reproduction of an increasingly clichéd repertoire of favored policy interventions, the value of which is eroded in the very act of their (over)construction; they legitimate new urban development models and messages, which travel with great speed through interlocal policy networks, facilitated by a sprawling complex of conferences, web sites, consultants and advocates, policy intermediaries and centers of

technocratic translation, the combined function of which is to establish new venues and lubricate new channels for rapid 'policy learning'; and they discursively and institutionally select subnational scales, highlighting in particular gentrifying urban neighborhoods as the preeminent sites for both privileged forms of creative action and necessary modes of political proaction, the places that *can and must* act. As such, creativity strategies subtly canalize and constrain urban-political agency, even as their material payoffs remain extraordinarily elusive. The cult of urban creativity is therefore revealed in its true colors, as a form of soft law/lore for a hypercompetitive age.

Jamie Peck (japeck@wisc.edu), Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI 53703, USA.

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