

Urban Subversion and the Creative City. Oli Mould. 2015. Oxon: Routledge, 206 pages. £90.00 (hardback). ISBN: 978-1-13-879704-8.

In *Urban Subversion and the Creative City*, Oli Mould argues that the Creative City (with a capital 'C') paradigm that is dominant in urban planning today is in fact, counterproductive to true creativity (with a small 'c'). However, instead of only providing a pessimistic critique of cities and urban creativity, Mould proceeds to suggest how a critical reconceptualization of creativity can point us back to recovering true urban creativity.

The book is divided into two parts. In Part 1, Mould examines how the Creative City paradigm became a tool for neoliberal urban development, and was essential for urban planners to achieve Global City rankings. Through a theoretical, empirical and rhetorical excavation of Richard Florida's thesis on the Creative Class as well as its spatial organisation, Mould demonstrates how the language and "soft" appeal of creativity have been conveniently adopted by the urban elites to achieve their economic aspirations, whilst hiding behind the veneer of Creativity to obscure the deleterious social impacts that follow. Mould's underpinning argument is that the proliferation of Creative City policies perpetuates a particular economically-oriented form of urban planning and reinforces a singular, homogenous form of Creativity.

After exposing the insidious pervasiveness of the Creative City paradigm, Part 2 then begins to open up ways in which creativity can be recuperated *for* and *within* the city. Drawing upon Deleuzian thought, Mould notes that true urban creativity is acting upon a visceral desire – desire that is an inherent human quality. Clearly seen in works by Walter Benjamin, the Situationists, Guy Debord, Henri Lefebvre, De Certeau, Deleuze and Guattari, ideas of true urban creativity and subversion are not new. Mould suggests that there is value in recovering those ideas by realigning them to 'their original emancipatory politics' (p.109).

Besides drawing from cultural and philosophical theories, Mould also uses his empirical work at London Waterloo to demonstrate the risk of urban subcultures being co-opted by the Creative City, while still highlighting their potential for imagining possibilities.

The book argues that the Creative City paradigm is continually on the move to identify and ossify subcultural practices in particular places, and when this happens, such subcultural practices risk ceasing being subversive as they reproduce hegemonic biases and inequalities that sustain the Creative City. To escape such dead ends, Mould suggests we consider Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) ideas of desire-production. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is not simply a reactionary response, but rather, a desire that is innate and visceral. These visceral desires are being monitored and controlled by institutionalised systems in the Creative City, where creativity and the desire to be creative are being adopted to sustain a neoliberal agenda. In order to be truly creative then, one must imagine and act upon visceral desires so as to engage with what Deleuze and Guattari understand as "lines of flight" to point to new possibilities beyond the hegemonic ways of being. It is in the process of continually *becoming* rather than *being* that it is possible to avoid reproducing gendered, ablest and class biases that the Creative City does insidiously using the name of creativity.

In short, even though creative practices get easily co-opted by the Creative City agenda and reproduce particular gendered, ablist and class inequalities or capitalistic agenda, Mould argues that there is still value in realising the potential of creative urban practices that can open up alternative possibilities hidden within the layered city. By continually seeking to express differences and escaping from capture by state or commercial apparatuses through critique and working through conflicting internal politics within urban subcultures themselves, these creative practices still act as platforms for urban citizens to challenge the Creative City and its hegemonic biases. Such a situation is far more productive than the homogenous and singular representation of creativity the Creative City imposes on its urban citizens.

The last chapter presents four different urban scenarios with different intensities of urban subversion – the creative industrial city, the spectacularised city, the creatively activist city and the socially creative city. These four scenarios are not blueprints for a truly creative city. Instead, Mould demonstrates that the Creative City contains within itself multiple elements from each of those four scenarios. A creative city is therefore one which is already immanent in the present, but requires the recognition of a non-hierarchical diversity of conflicting voices, practices and aspirations that make up the urban fabric. Perhaps this connects to the idea of an agonistic city as proposed by Ananya Roy (2014).

Mould has noted that this book has focused on cities from the Global North and only a small range of urban creative subcultures. I believe that this is thus Mould's invitation for urban scholars to use this book not as a fixed representation of what creative urban practices are, but as an opening to explore different urban spaces so as to better understand the shifting and varied dynamics that drive creativity. Hence, while this book has provided a coherent and illuminating perspective on urban creativity, there are some questions that arise through my reading of it. Firstly, Mould's focus in this book is on the neoliberal agenda of the Creative City. What would a C/creative city look like in contexts where dominant political-economic forms of regulation may not necessarily adhere to neoliberal ones – for example, in developmental states? Secondly, the book's brief references to privilege do not always make clear how privilege plays a role in the resources (social capital, financial, time etc.) urban citizens possess in order to act on their visceral desires. A more in-depth explanation of the processes involved in the planning and mobilisation of creativity could offer a clearer picture of the risks and biases fraught within practices of urban creativity.

All in all, this is an engaging, perceptive and accessible book that is both based on the author's extensive empirical work over many years and connected to a wide range of theoretical work on urban creativity and subcultural activity. Mould does not romanticise urban creativity and critically exposes particular neoliberal agendas behind some creative

urban practices. What was refreshing in this book was that the author did not discount the hopeful possibilities that can be uncovered when we reconceptualise the notion of urban creativity. Such a perspective is pertinent for urban studies that has had a tendency to provide polar narratives on urban creativity and subcultural activities. Indeed, to be creative means to critically acknowledge the risks involved in subcultural practices in replicating normative biases and to continually be in the making. In light of an accelerated proliferation of C/creative urban practices across the globe today, this book is a timely one at providing a coherent discussion of urban creativity.

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References

Roy, A. (2014) The Good City? In R. Paddison and E. McCann (eds.) *Cities & Social Change: Encounters with Contemporary Urbanism* (pp. 201-210). London: SAGE.