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### **The Instrumental Leisure of the 'Creative Class'**

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## The Instrumental Leisure of the 'Creative Class'

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### **Abstract**

The utopianization of creative work is a pronounced feature of post-industrial societies. This paper analyses the attendant promotion of creative leisure, and its role in supporting discourses and practices of creative work. By analysing the example of Richard Florida's popular text *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) it argues that while creative leisure is offered up as a model means for free and autonomous expression, it may be leading, paradoxically, to the erosion of freedom as the terrain of critical and disinterested leisure is pervasively colonized by discourses of economic rationality. Secondly, it is contended that while, traditionally, capital has always sought to regulate and administer leisure 'from above' – with workers variably 'resisting' below - such a model may no longer apply since (according to Florida) creative class subjects now appear to be actively choosing to perform (rather than being coerced into) economically-directed leisure.

# The Instrumental Leisure of the ‘Creative Class’

## Introduction

As governments, CEOs, managers and entrepreneurs continue to promote the virtues of post-industrial work, critical social scientists have sought to establish just how far the merits and freedoms of ‘creative’, ‘reflexive’ and ‘knowledge-based’ employment actually extend (Bauman, 2000; Deuze, 2007; Lash, 1994; Löfgren, 2003; McRobbie, 2002, Ross, 2003; Sennett, 2006). This paper is no exception. However, the specific aim here is not to study creative work *per se* but the attendant realm of creative leisure. In particular, I focus on the leisure habits of those ‘creatives’ that appear in Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class*, a popular and influential work celebrating the emergence of post-industrial labour (see Florida 2002, also 2005). Florida’s work is chosen for three reasons. Firstly, it has had an enormous influence on debates regarding the role of ‘creativity’ in the ‘new’ economy and inspired a wide array of policy, planning and economic development initiatives (see Peck, 2005 for a review). As these actors have sought enthusiastically to apply Florida’s ideas to their own cities and regions, Bayliss notes that *The Rise of the Creative Class* has now become a most ‘popular manual of contemporary economic development thinking’ (2007, p.893) - yet one that has, thus far, attracted little critical attention. Secondly, Florida’s work exemplifies the current trend amongst new economy enthusiasts for promoting contemporary work as entirely non-alienating and self-directed, intrinsically rewarding and autonomous – a contentious claim worthy of additional scrutiny. Thirdly, and most specifically, while academics *have* begun to evaluate Florida’s thesis (see Bayliss, 2007; Markusen, 2006; Peck, 2005), these nascent analyses have mainly restricted their focus to Florida’s discussion of urban and regional development, and have largely ignored his (equally contentious) writings on leisure and lifestyle – this paper stands as a corrective to this neglect. Additionally, in the context of CRESO themes and objectives, this paper also addresses the broader project to evaluate the contours and character of work in ostensibly ‘culturalized’ and ‘creative’ work environments.

The particular focus here is on the promotion of leisure and its role in the creation of the economically productive ‘creative’ body. In this respect, the analysis of Florida’s book has three dimensions. Firstly, I examine how the (allegedly) ‘free’ and distinctive realm of post-industrial leisure that Florida promotes, may exhibit certain patterns of regulation and constraint that uphold (rather than challenge) the instrumental imperatives of the ‘new’ capitalism (Bauman, 2000; Sennett, 2006). Secondly, I argue, so close is the resemblance between the structure and purpose of creative leisure and creative work, it appears that the ideal notion of leisure as an autonomous work-antithetical practice may be disappearing - at least amongst the so-called ‘creative class’. Thirdly, as I discuss, what is further distinctive is the way in which the disappearance of non-instrumental leisure is not only endorsed by Florida, but also, apparently, creative workers themselves, who, contrary to tradition, appear to be enthusiastically embracing (rather than resisting) the administration of leisure by instrumental rationality. The conclusion summarises the implications of this process – and offers an assessment of its efficacy as a model of ‘new’ economy leisure.

## The Problem of Leisure

In modern societies, the meaning and role of leisure has been intensely debated (see Bramham, 2006 for a recent review). While, ostensibly, leisure emerged in industrial modernity as freely-given reward for hard-working labour, critics were not slow to recognize how the social and the political strongly guided the provision and undertaking of leisure practice. To give a somewhat schematic overview of the main perspectives, Marxian scholars

have characteristically argued that leisure provides only illusory and inauthentic distractions that mask social divisions and systematic inequalities inherent in capitalist organization (for example Clarke and Critcher, 1985; see also Rojek, 1985). Indeed, since the 1930s the whole economy of tourism, entertainment and leisure has been more widely portrayed as a vast 'culture industry' that curtails those very essences it purports to provide: free will, self-determination and existential satisfactions (Adorno, 2007). From another perspective, feminist scholars have long identified the apparently 'universal' freedoms of leisure as being gendered and unevenly distributed (Deem, 1986; Wearing, 1998 see also Aitchison, 2003). For instance, not only has male experience been privileged in the assumption of men's 'natural' requirement for release and respite away from the demands of paid work (and women's needs for leisure ignored or trivialized), the availability of free time-space for women has been seriously curtailed by various constraints, not least women's requirement to provide unpaid labour in the home - ostensibly the primary realm of leisure. Alternatively, for 'figurational' sociologists such as Elias and Dunning (1986) leisure has played a key role in the 'civilizing process', part of the repertoire of social ordering processes that has ensured stable and acquiescent socialization in modern societies. Here, leisure is seen to act as a kind of safety valve for sublimating aggression and for stabilizing identities, including those focussed around locality, region or nation (see also Jary, 1987).

However, contrastingly, for many, a belief in the radical potential of leisure has endured. For some, leisure has provided a medium for the cultivation of explicit social critique (e.g. an 'escape' for Romantics and other opponents of modernization, or a focus for cultivating working-class consciousness, see Edensor, 2000; Jarvis, 1997). In *The Adventure* Simmel (1911) was amongst the first sociologists to identify exotic or erotic engagements with others and with nature as a possible refuge from the depersonalizing and alienating effects of modernity, offering a discrete 'exclave of life' away from one's positioning in the industrial scheme. More recently, critics have identified similar forms of 'adventurous' and 'extreme' leisure as resistance against the tyrannous rule of modernity, for example those celebrating 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990) practices that reject oppressive technologies of order and safety and emphasise sensuous engagement with the world and its kinaesthetic effects (see also Kiewa, 2002; Lewis, 2000). For others, the radical quality of leisure is demonstrated not in the possibility for alternative action, but the chance to cultivate a conscious *inaction*. Practices of idling have long been valued for providing refuge from the otherwise universal obligation for purposeful behaviour. Paul Lafargue's 1883 polemic *The Right to be Lazy* bemoaned work as 'the cause of all intellectual degeneracy, of all organic deformity', while Bertrand Russell's *In Praise of Idleness* (1932) proclaimed that 'the road to happiness and prosperity lies in an organized diminution of work', a durably popular view that continues to be (more humorously) championed to this day by self-confessed thumb-twiddlers like Hodgkinson (2004).

Yet, whether it has been understood as radical or reactionary, leisure has always been practically valued, at least amongst labour, as 'not work'; that is as a distinctive realm of practice that should stand apart from the demands of tenured labouring and the dictates of material necessity. Thus, the binary opposition between work and leisure has endured, partly because it has hitherto proved useful to capitalists and governments for stabilizing the economy and polity, but also due to the determined efforts of labour to protect their own autonomous time-space<sup>1</sup>. In the new economy, however, the legitimacy of this opposition has come increasingly under threat. Lewis (2003) feels compelled to ask whether 'post-industrial work is becoming indistinguishable from leisure, as an activity of choice and source of enjoyment' (Lewis, 2003, p.343), since the absorbing and skill-centred nature of so-called 'reflexive', 'knowledge-led' or 'creative' production appear to imbue at least some workers with the rewards and sense of fulfilment traditionally gleaned from the non-work realm (see also Lash, 1994). If leisure is defined as 'non-obligated time, activities which are perceived as freely chosen [and] intrinsically motivated' (Lewis, 2003, p.345) then those 'new' occupations which appear to offer autonomy and freedom of choice would appear in themselves to be

becoming more like leisure-time activities. Indeed, it is the promotion of creative and reflexive work as *inherently* fun, pleasurable and free (i.e. like leisure) that has most tellingly struck at the work-leisure binary, suggesting as it does a lack of necessary differentiation between the two realms (Bauman, 2000, Deuze, 2007; Lash, 1994; Nixon, 2003; Rojek, 1995; Ross 2003). For many, work has now become the site where we achieve those levels of status, meaning and self-fulfilment that appear increasingly unavailable to us in our non-work lives. Indeed, Hochschild (1997) has famously identified that for an increasing number of workers the meanings of work and non-work/home may have actually *reversed*, with many viewing work as the source of freedom, well-being, creativity and pleasure, and home (and non-work more generally) as the site of constraint, alienation, drudgery and despair.

However, as I will show, what seems most apparent amongst Florida's emergent 'creative class' is not simply that work and non-work have become somehow 'imbalanced' or even 'reversed' in meaning, but that work has come to colonize life to such an extent that it has pervasively *absorbed* leisure into its own logic, entirely effacing the work-leisure distinction, and, what is more, now appears to have achieved this with the express support and enthusiasm of labour.

### **Defining the Creative Class**

Since its publication in 2002, Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How its Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* has achieved consecration amongst disciples and acolytes of the new economy (see Bayliss, 2007, Markusen, 2006; Peck, 2005). Indeed, Florida's book has achieved the uncommon prestige of being widely adopted *globally* as a kind of guidebook for those local and regional authorities, economic development agencies, managers and consultants hoping to make hay in the new economy sunshine. The key (and highly seductive) idea in his book is that it is creativity that now provides the fundamental source of competitive economic advantage and is, indeed, now 'the defining feature of economic life' (Florida, 2002, p.21). A good dose of creativity is offered as the best (and only) medicine now available for those ailing regions struggling to adapt to a new economy based on the manipulation and application of information, knowledge and cultural/symbolic goods and services. This has proved a popular prescription, not least for its feel-good quality and the 'ostensibly cheap and easy implementation' (Bayliss, 2007, p.893) of many of the recommended creativity strategies - and so the material impacts of Florida's ideas should not be underestimated. As Peck (2005) extensively details, Florida's ideas have been applied in numerous USA cities and regions, which have eagerly bought into the notion that the best way to enhance economic development is to provide a mix of relatively inexpensive hard and soft planning measures designed to attract and service the needs of creative class firms and their workers. City governments are thus moving to providing appealing arts and leisure facilities, funky neighbourhoods, creative clusters, and authentic consumption opportunities hoping this will attract creative workers and help shift their failing industrial backwaters up the league table of Florida's self-devised and much-celebrated 'Creativity Index'. The message is now spreading quickly to territories across the globe. In a 2004 speech Patricia Hewitt, the (then) UK Secretary of State for Trade and Industry approvingly offered: 'The American academic Richard Florida argues in his book 'The Rise of the Creative Class' that: "...human creativity is the ultimate economic resource. The ability to come up with new ideas and better ways of doing things is ultimately what raises productivity and thus in turn living standards." He is absolutely right', and Florida himself has now become that rare personage – an international celebrity in the field of urban and regional development (Peck, 2005).

In his book, Florida first (somewhat nebulously) defines the creative class as that group of people who 'add economic value through their creativity' (2002, p.68). More precisely it comprises those whose function it is to generate goods and services that rely upon specialist

forms of scientific knowledge, information and expertise, or derive their value from their unique symbolic, aesthetic or design-based qualities. Within this, the creative class is not, however, homogeneous but stratified; in what Florida calls the 'Super-Creative Core' we find scientists, doctors, engineers, architects and planners but also artists, entertainers and academics – workers whose primary role is to be innovative and 'super creative', autonomous and problem-solving. Beyond this core, they are supported by a whole raft of 'creative professionals' (subordinate workers in the same aforementioned professions, also the legal professions, social services professionals, financial sector professionals, sales executives, managerial occupations generally) who are also identified as being engaged in creative work, though clearly not to the same extent as the super creative core. Outside of these creative elites, the 'non'-creative classes now comprise the Service Sector (low-end service and support work, domestic workers) and a residual Working Class (construction and extraction jobs, maintenance and repair occupations, assembly line production, transport). 'Agriculture' is identified as being a class in itself. In the USA case (on which the book is based), this (rather curious) occupational class structure is said to contain around 38 million creative class workers (compared with 55 million service class and 33 million working class) who now relatively enjoy higher wages, bigger homes, better education and superior health to their non-creative counterparts.

The classifications and aggregates are, of course, open to question (see Malanga, 2004; Markusen, 2006<sup>2</sup>, O'Connor, 2007 and also Peck, 2005 for comprehensive critiques) but crucial to Florida's assessment (and my reading of it) is that the creative class is presented as 'the dominant class in society' (Florida, 2002, p.ix), in terms of 'influence' (ibid, ix), if not (yet) in terms of productivity, incomes or total population. The creative class are the primary source of ideas, the key innovators, trend-setters, and visionaries; destructive creators at the vanguard of the eagerly anticipated post-industrial work-utopia - yet they are also pioneers of a putatively new *style of life*. The purpose of Florida's book is thus not simply to reflect on the economic consequences of creative class dominance, but – as the subtitle of the book suggests – to understand how the emergence of this class is changing *everything*. Florida thus aspires for his work to be judged as not simply an exercise in economic forecasting, but as an attempt at total social theory; for the creative class are argued to be exerting the most profound bearing on *all* aspects of the operation and constitution of post-industrial societies.

Within this frame, Florida argues that it is certain core and shared *values* that bind and identify the creative class. Specifically, as harbingers of a new 'creative ethos' the creative class emphasise (i) *individuality*, (ii) *meritocracy* and (iii) *diversity* and *openness*. Thus the creative class worker not only resists 'traditional group-oriented norms' (Florida, 2002, p.77) in the pursuit of a self-determined and individualistic identity, but also promotes the virtues of hard work and 'getting on' through individual merit and further takes the view that '[t]alented people defy classification based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference or appearance' (Florida, 2002, p.77). The creative class worker is thus an individualized subject, disdainful of 'old' economy values, disregarding of tradition and dismissive of history. For Florida, now, the 'old categories no longer apply at all' and the creative class 'represent a new mainstream setting the norms and pace for much of society' (Florida, 2002, p.211).

However, it is arguably in *leisure* that Florida identifies creative workers at their most autonomous, self-directing and dynamic, apparently embodying the kind of free-thinking 'rugged individualists' that Adorno (1990, p.306) once argued had disappeared from the social formation. Florida himself – as a self-identified member of the creative class – vigorously promotes the virtues of leisure as a means to intellectual and creative self-fulfilment, mind-body harmony and personal freedom; though as we will see, the qualitative essence of this freedom has radical implications for the (imagined) move to a 'better' kind of post-industrial society.

## **Creative Leisure – the Servant of Capital?**

Because we identify ourselves as creative people, we increasingly demand a lifestyle built around creative experiences. We are impatient with strict separations that previously demarcated work, home and leisure. Whereas the lifestyle of the previous organizational age emphasized conformity, the new lifestyle favours individuality, self-statement, acceptance of difference and the desire for rich multidimensional experiences (...) Spurred on by the creative ethos we blend work and lifestyle to construct our identities as creative people (...) This kind of synthesis is integral to establishing a unique creative identity (Florida, 2002, p.13).

In his book Florida presents selective extracts and findings from an unspecified number of interviews and focus groups with creative class professionals, and offers some personal reflections on his own leisure habits as a self-identified member of this putatively new class. In reviewing this data what is most striking is how the *primary* role of creative class leisure is to provide opportunities to undertake activities that directly (rather than indirectly or accidentally) enhance and improve the individual ability to undertake future creative work. Thus, the role of leisure is not so much the traditional one of providing the physical and mental relief sufficient to ensure a return to work (though this is certainly part of it) and is clearly not designed to enable the negation of work identity ('escaping work', 'getting in touch with my real self', 'living for the weekend') but appears more formally geared to actively developing and servicing individual 'creative powers' as a strategy for further economizing the body. Freedom is obtainable through working the body in the interests of work. Thus, amongst Florida's free-wheeling, post-traditional subjects, in leisure there is no conventional attempt at 'forgetting' about work - on the contrary, leisure appears to be conducted only if it helps reaffirm and remind one of one's own work identity and creative capability, as he asserts:

Because we relate to the economy through our creativity and thus identify ourselves as 'creative beings', we pursue pastimes and cultural forms that express and nurture our creativity' (Florida, 2002, p.171).

Florida endorses what he calls the 'experiential life' of leisure, the enthusiastic pursuit of new consumption opportunities, in the form of sports, hobbies, games, travel and relationships that are valued for their abilities to stimulate and reaffirm creative (work-oriented) identities rather than as activities that provide escape or that are good to do in themselves<sup>3</sup>. The intrinsic value of leisure, or its potential for cultivating critical consciousness, is entirely absent from the accounts provided:

The new lifestyle is not mainly about 'fun'. Rather it complements the way members of the creative class work and is a fundamental part of the way they go about their lives. (Florida, 2002, p.169).

It is appropriate then that Florida understands the creative class less as a kind of 'leisure class' in the sense of Veblen (i.e. conspicuous consumers of status-filled goods) and more as an 'active class' (in his terms), that is as a group committed to the purposeful utilization of leisure time (indeed, as he states, the creative classes avoid indolence and 'do not participate in time-killing activities of any sort' (Florida, 2002, p.170)). The acquisition of useful and convertible experiences fires creative impulses and creates new opportunities for workplace creativity and the commodity production it serves.

More specifically, for Florida's subjects, preferred leisure practices are identified as adventurous, extreme sports (rock-climbing, road and mountain bicycling, snowboarding, trial running and so on), non-conventional 'exotic' travel, cosmopolitan and 'authentic' consumption, in fact any distinctive activities (requiring high levels of economic and cultural capital) that lie beyond the material, aesthetic and intellectual reach of what Florida identifies

as the non-creative mass. Yet, to return to Simmel's analysis, where the role of 'adventure' was to provide an alternative to the turmoil and constraints of modernity, in Florida's world the role of 'adventure' appears to be geared to reaffirming the centrality of work. Indeed adventuring (or at least its contemporary equivalent of practising 'extreme' travel or outdoor leisure) is seen either to provide new ideas for future creative work, or to re-establish the harmonious balance of the creative body in ways amenable to economic activity. While, traditionally, the sensual constraints of work are imagined to be released in outdoor leisure, amongst the creative class we find the same possibilities for somatic liberation being instrumentally harnessed in order to recharge the creative body for its desired return to economic activity. Now, in those forms of creative class leisure that involve active and 'adventurous' engagement with the physical environment, any sensual blockages, emotional paralyses or stymied arousals appear resolvable through kinaesthetic engagement of the body with what we might term the 'elemental forces'. Here, Florida describes how, in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001, he finds himself transfixed by the television, and so powerfully affected, anxious and disturbed that he is unable to communicate, and, most crucially, unable to *work*. His chosen remedy for recovery was an intense dose of road-biking:

The events of September 11 affected me powerfully. For two weeks I was unable to concentrate on my work or focus on my writing. I cancelled a number of speaking engagements because literally I couldn't speak (...) But there was one thing I wanted to do - that I was pulled to do. And that was to ride my bicycle. I am an avid road cyclist, and I took several hours each day to just go out and ride...and ride...and ride. (...) As a way of both disconnecting and recharging, *it is part of what we need to do as creative people* [my emphasis]. (Florida, 2002, p.169)

Only through such active leisure was a return to work was made possible. Florida as a self-identifying 'creative', understands the demand for kinaesthetic physicality, for connecting body and environment, as innate to the creative worker, which may involve some elements of the traditional demand for 'disconnecting and recharging' but more directly helps satisfy desires for creative 'stimulation' – the aim being not to be passive in the environment but active, alive and self-reflexively aware of how to utilize it in order to service one's own creative needs. As an aside, in his discussion of travel literature in *Mythologies*, Barthes (1972) took a satirical swipe at how the conquest of nature provided the middle classes with a much-needed sense of civic virtue, acting as a restorative for the working body, and serving the purpose of reconciling them to their own personal insignificance in the scheme of production – yet perhaps even he could not have envisaged how far the conscious instrumentalization of nature has now developed. For now, the creative class appear to view the natural world, not as a retreat and escape from the wearying constraints of base commerce, but as resource for the cultivation of a more focussed and effective economic body. Rock-climbing, cycling, trail-running, kayaking, adventure sports in general are valued for their creative, 'freelance' qualities, for their capacity to reinforce what Florida calls the 'I'm doing it' factor, for their abilities to set 'you against nature [and] your own physical and mental limits' (Florida 2002, p.181). Nature, in providing the opportunity for continuous bodily engagement, mental stimulation and a catalogue of individualized tests and attainments, offers an ideal proving ground for appraising the effectiveness of the enterprising new economy 'creative'. The growth of self-monitoring behaviours and obsessions with bodily image and performance have been seen by some as indicative of the transition to a post-traditional order where the individualized self becomes a primary unit of social reproduction (Bauman, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). While self-reflexivity can be liberating (Giddens, 1991), increasingly, such impulses appear driven by the demands of maintaining an effective *working* body, with only 'useful' pleasures being valued for their capacity to reinforce the necessary sense of progress and self improvement demanded by contemporary (especially neo-liberalized) societies.



In Florida's work, the promotion of *useful* leisure corresponds with a disavowal of those traditional sources of *critical leisure* – the working classes and the Romantics. First, Florida is dismissive of what he terms 'blue-collar' leisure practices (identified as TV watching, packaged holidays and inauthentic tourist experiences, spectator sports such as baseball and football), since they fail to provide the sense of individuality and autonomy that creative workers intrinsically crave. Put bluntly, Florida sees working-class leisure as intellectually and morally inferior since it is passive, requires no original thought and is not directly productive<sup>4</sup>. Thus, while middle-class creatives are judged as discerning, self-reflexive and active, the working classes are portrayed as cultural dupes. The possibility that mass practices may underwrite the formation of collective class consciousness, or cohere sentiments of solidarity or critique are therefore not considered. Secondly, according to Florida's analysis, the idea of Romantic and, indeed, hedonistic leisure is now firmly rejected by the creative class. The super creative core apparently eschew alcohol, drug-taking (apart from high-grade coffee), night-clubbing<sup>5</sup>, partying and other excessive behaviours since, as one of Florida's respondents offered, they 'can't afford the recovery time' (Florida, 2002, p.166) – they need to be back at work the next morning, toiling hard. There is more than an element of puritan zeal in Florida's ruminations on the creative class worker, a kind of fetishistic championing of clean, pure bodies, engaged in healthy creative practices – and a deliberate refusal of the idea that more traditionally 'bohemian' work identities may persist in the new economy – indeed Florida argues the creative class summarily reject the term 'bohemian' as pejorative. Yet Florida's assessment contrasts markedly with Ross's (2003) account of new media workers in New York's Silicon Alley, with Nixon's (2003) study of London's advertising workers, and with McRobbie's (2002) more generic readings of the fashion, new media and other cultural/creative industries, where drinking, partying, nightclubbing and a hedonistic (albeit strongly masculine and exclusive) ethic of 'play' help cement what is a highly 'clubbable' (McRobbie, 2002) set of social relations.

Indeed, the more vividly Florida describes the lifestyle of the creative class worker, the less convincing his argument becomes; analysis segues into moral prescription as the social fact of an ideal-type of creative class subject is wished into existence. If his data only weakly indicates the apparent existence of an emergent class of active, clean-living and socially-motivated subjects (of which he is the perfect personification) then this is used to underpin Florida's strong hope that the creative class will in the future take more seriously the 'obligations of leadership that come with our position as the norm-setting class' (Florida 2002, p.317) and evolve from being 'self-directed, albeit high-achieving, individuals, into a more cohesive, more responsible group' (Florida, 2002, p.316).

Thus, the apparent intensification of instrumental and work-oriented leisure, practised by compliant and enterprising subjects, and the attendant disavowal of blue-collar and hedonistic leisure, is disturbing because while leisure has long been the target of administration, workers have often shown a reliably capricious and wilful disregard for its officially prescribed forms, often resisting the efforts of managers to regulate their non-work conduct. Yet, rather worryingly, now, amongst this putative creative class, we find no evidence of such resistance. Indeed, in Florida's account we can identify a much clearer homology between the logic of capital and the structures of contemporary 'creative' leisure as creative class subjects appear to be actively *choosing* (rather than being forced into) workful leisure because it appears to enable them to 'validate their creative identities' and to obtain the social prestige and rewards that increasingly appear available only to those who are active and self-governing (Knights and McCabe, 2003). The consequence of this (at least amongst the creative class) is that the purpose and instrument of leisure has now become so closely entwined with economic rationality that the hitherto enduring belief that leisure should serve some intrinsic, radical or non-instrumental values now appears to be on the wane – a significant reversal, in my view, for the possibility of autonomous social critique.

In summary, for Florida, the pursuit of adventurous, creative leisure is an uncomplicated expression of the radical individuality inherent to the new economy. Leisure is a primary means by which the individual can define themselves *as* individual – and is thus coterminous with freedom. Yet there are a range of ways in which might view this more critically. For Adorno, leisure and ostensible 'free time' were never anything more than 'the shadowy continuation of labour' (2007, p.194) with workers being trained into 'modes of behaviour' demanded by and conducive to the prevailing work process. The 'autonomous' leisure practices of the creative class might now be seen as simply reflecting and upholding the particular demands of the new economy workplace. Further, the 'radical' components of creative leisure would doubtless be challenged by Bourdieu (1984) who alerted us to the ways in which apparently distinctive and individualized consumption and leisure practices tend to betray their class origins and conformist impulses – and, more recently, Edensor (2000) has specifically identified how even 'adventurous' leisure comes with its own formulas, props and practices that help regulate this apparently autonomous and untamed form of expression. Additionally, as a further contrast to Florida's reading, the cultivation of a self-expressive and individualized identity has now been identified by neo-Foucauldian theorists of government such as Barratt (2004), Rose (1999) and du Gay (1996, 1997) as central to the administration of modern workplace life. If viewed from this governmentality perspective, Florida's account reveals creative selves who are not necessarily ruled 'from above' (in his book there is an obvious absence of subjugation by powerful corporations, firms or managers), nor reluctantly subjected to forced domination, but appear (as 'freelancers' and 'creatives') provided with a certain freedom to act and self-regulate their conduct – but only in relation to an overarching set of norms and values that provide guidance for appropriate (work-based or work-enhancing) action. Thus the creative economy promotes leisure pursuits that rely upon practitioners to 'set their own pace and create their own rules' (Florida, 2002, p.175), ones that now (just happen to) reinforce and enhance the prevailing economic values of individuality, resourcefulness and self-management. Seen critically, we might even suggest the creative class worker appears to be a victim of the 'organized self-realization' that Honneth (2004) identifies as characteristic of late-modern societies, where freedom can be obtained - but only through socially prescribed and discursively regimented means. Of course, while we might also challenge these critiques for their apparently abject view of agency (even in making 'choices' workers always seem to appear systemically constrained and 'governed'), we should note they provide a vital corrective to kind of upbeat and unreflexive euphoria characteristic of Florida's analysis – where the exercise of personal choice is judged to be intrinsic, liberating and wholly unrestrained.

## **Discussion**

An approval of the instrumentalization of leisure in the interests of economic development is a central component of Florida's argument. Indeed, Florida has sought to promote the virtues of cities and regions catering for the consumption tastes of creative class professionals through the provision of specific leisure facilities. As he asserts, the provision of 'lifestyle amenities' - typically realised in publicly-privately financed urban gyms, climbing walls, road and mountain bike trails, jogging paths, dry-ski slopes and so on - is a crucial element of any self-respecting 'creative city' strategy, for it is only through such provision (alongside other vital lifestyle amenities such as arts provision and distinctive shopping opportunities) can the all-important creative classes be attracted to the city. It should go without saying that such innovations are occurring in tandem with the relative decline in public funding for state-provided, more inclusive (certainly less middle-class oriented), community health and leisure facilities and projects. For the likes of Peck (2005), what is being promoted here is nothing less than the reinforcement of middle-class privilege. And lest we should be inclined to dismiss Florida's work as but a single voice in the cacophonous marketplace of new economy discourse, it is clear that his message has resonance – and the powerful are eagerly listening to it<sup>6</sup> (see Bayliss, 2007; Markusen, 2006; Peck, 2005).

Arguing from a left-critical perspective, the 'radical' character of the creative class leisure has been exposed for what it really is – a bogus affirmation of 'freedom' that serves only to further promote the virtues of labour and the diminution of non-instrumental leisure in the interests of capitalist enterprise and economic efficiency. However, while Florida's reading of leisure is likely susceptible to further critique from Marxian critical theory or governmental approaches, there are further reasons for questioning its efficacy from a more grounded (and liberal) perspective that more closely evaluates both Florida's methods and the empirical realities it seeks to describe. Thus, just as there are good critical-theoretical grounds for challenging Florida's optimistic reading of the 'freedoms' of creative leisure, so too can we question the extent to which the pursuit of instrumental leisure has now become a conventional and standardized *practice* of the creative worker.

Firstly, we should not too hastily extrapolate from the Florida case - for his work is not without significant methodological problems. We should reiterate that not only is the actual existence of a discrete and identifiable 'creative class' open to question (see Markusen, 2006 on the inadequacies of the statistical classification; also Peck, 2005), but that Florida's own qualitative assessment of it is at best partial, and rendered further superficial by his apparently *ad hoc* and highly selective approach to the collection, presentation and analysis of interview data. His sample size and composition is unspecified and he is too easily inclined to fall back on his own personal experience in order to help scaffold his general argument. Within the sample, the full complexity of possible motives and meanings of creative class leisure are by no means adequately explored. Secondly, the analytical weaknesses of Florida's work are compounded by its unreflexive idiom and evangelical tenor – he presents not simply an analysis of changing patterns of work and leisure but an unequivocal endorsement of them. Indeed, in his heated descriptions of the joys and benefits of biking and adventurous leisure he appears to have fully 'gone native' and lost all sense of perspective on the partiality of his own (particularly classed and gendered) position and the ways in which the opportunities and constraints of leisure are unevenly distributed across society. The moralistic and proselytising tenor that underpins much of Florida's text inures him to the concrete realities of everyday leisure – a world where workers are involved in myriad and complex struggles to carve out leisure time-space, beyond the grasp of work, and where even amongst the creative class there is significant disquiet regarding the decreasing availability of disinterested leisure and some deep-felt anxiety regarding the colonization of the self by economic rationality (Banks, 2007). The upbeat tenor of Florida's descriptions of creative class leisure disavow the possibility that for women, working class or ethnic minority workers, or those with 'unfit', disabled or non-active bodies (indeed anyone outside of Florida's ideal creative class type), the domain of leisure may well hold other (non-instrumental, work-antithetical, less utopian) meanings. The creative class worker - even if we accept such a category exists - cannot possibly be as homogeneous and standardized as Florida imagines, for there are always other classes and other leisures – and variations within them.

Secondly, even if we did accept that leisure has become instrumentalized in the way Florida welcomes (and I, and the likes of Adorno and Foucault, would condemn), we ought not to forget that the application of government and administration is a 'congenitally failing operation' (Rose and Miller, 1992, p.190) and vulnerable to progressive transformation from within by social *agents*. Indeed, arguing from a more liberal-democratic perspective, I would not wish to overlook the fact that in being provided with the capacity to become self-governing, the opportunity for workers to pursue strategies of dissent and resistance is not necessarily eliminated, but may be further *enhanced*, for, as Foucault himself described, 'power relations are only possible in so far as the subject is free' (Foucault 1997, p. 292 cited in Barnett 1999, p 383). We should not forget that incitements to self-government can backfire, since being forced to constantly reflect and act upon ones' own status or position in society can (arguably) engender a more deliberative and critical attitude towards it (Beck,

1992; Lash, 1994). Thus the realm of disinterested leisure likely remains valued for its potential to provide sensual and erotic freedom, hedonistic escapes, private pleasures, self-gratifications and shared entertainments, downtime, free time and 'my time' - as well as opportunities for social critique and political organizing. Indeed, today, we see creative class workers increasingly refusing their casting as self-interested, atomized and pacified individuals and, instead, being re-energized by the putatively new arenas of choice opened up in individualized social climate, working to create new 'progressive' work-based identities that vitiate the demands of economic rationality (Banks, 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Berking, 1996). To give only illustrative examples, the political engagements of 'creative' (and of course other) workers through collectivized, critical leisure movements has become an emergent feature of advanced capitalism, such as the global Critical Mass cycling movement, various free climbing groups, grass roots and communitarian sports club developments, urban movements involved in activities such as free running, parkour, not to mention various kinds of critical walkers – all of which explore the possibilities for enhancing freedom through collective, non-instrumentalized leisure practice (Carlsson, 2002; de Certeau, 1984; Kiewa, 2002; Lewis 2000; Schofield, 2002). While we should not overestimate or utopianize the impacts of these developments, neither we should not too rapidly dismiss the prospects for critical leisure continuing in the new economy – nor the possibility of a politicized element of creative class professionals becoming involved in it. Yet, nor should the expansion of such movements be automatically seen as an endorsement for Florida's utopian conviction that the creative class has now begun to 'grow up' and face up to its social responsibilities. What such initiatives perhaps more convincingly reflect is the fact that capitalism is comprised *already* of an existing panoply and complexity of work-identities, critical leisures and non-work social solidarities that co-exist with the neo-liberal hegemon; expressing a rich (but fragile) political diversity in leisure practice and an heterogeneity not yet reflected in the kind of work-oriented and self-centred creative class cultures that Florida would wish to promote. Yet, while the diversity of leisure practice remains (thus far) reassuringly vital, we should not underestimate how the drive to instantiate a new economic world where work and leisure are (re)converged in the interest of capital, and personified in the totalized form of the continually-active economic body, poses a threat to the terrain of critical and disinterested leisure – the right to a life beyond work cannot be taken for granted and must continually be fought for and won.

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1 While we should not essentialise leisure as some intrinsically free domain, we should remain cognisant of how, for many, it remains idealized as an important site of self-expression and autonomy, and contains a hard-to-destroy utopian promise. The mooted progressive postmodernization of work and leisure (see Rojek, 1995), and the implied death of work-leisure boundary, is not a process that is universally distributed, experienced or recognised – particularly amongst those working in low-paid, low-end service and manufacturing jobs. The issue at stake here is how far the utopian impulse remains embedded within the 'creative' wing of the middle class constituency.

2 Markusen for example argues that because Florida defines the creative class by agglomerating different occupational codes from the US Census, where classification is based heavily on educational background and attainment, his index does not measure 'creativity' *per se* – simply the distribution of educational capital in the population. More generally she avers: 'the creative-class and, by extension, creative-city, rubric is impoverished by fuzziness of conception, weakness of evidence, and political silence' (2006, p.1924).

3 This is in some ways similar to Bourdieu's (1984) well-known observations regarding the apparent emergence of a 'new petit bourgeoisie', a culturally-literate and experimental middle class, one in constant search for a liberated and emancipated life, free from the mundane shackles of the 'old' petit-bourgeoisie. As Bourdieu argues, while the working classes and the lower strata of the petit bourgeoisie 'fling themselves into prefabricated leisure activities designed for them by the engineers of cultural mass production' (1984/2003, p.179) the new upwardly mobile middle class imagine that they can evade such constraints through their own originality, creativity and transgressive leisure practices. Of course, while Bourdieu is highly sceptical towards (what he sees as inherently class-bound) new petit bourgeois pretensions (he is pithily dismissive of what he terms their 'controlled transgressions')

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and 'dreams of social flying'), Florida is an enthusiastic arbiter of middle class leisure and its apparently autonomous and radical characteristics.

4 Bourdieu argues that mass appeal team sports are eschewed by the elite and upper classes as they 'combine all the features that repel the dominant class: not only the social composition of their public, which redoubles their commonness, but also the values and virtues demanded, strength, endurance, violence, 'sacrifice', docility and submission to collective discipline – so contrary to bourgeois 'rôle distance' - and the exaltation of competition' (1984/2003, p.214). Like Bourdieu's socially-aspirant new petit bourgeoisie, in thrall to the elite, the creative class similarly eschew the 'mass' and aspire to sports and leisure practices that emphasize individuality but also disregard direct competition in favour of either self competition (testing out ones own body, evaluating it, measuring its limits) or competing against nature. Indeed, Bourdieu detects in the preference for what he calls the 'Californian sports' (running, boating, trailing and trekking) a desire to distance oneself both from 'vulgar crowds' (with associated collectivized performances) and the unseemly demands of base competition.

5 Curiously, while adventurous sport and leisure is valued as a means to construct individualized identity, attempts by young clubbers to self-create identity – through selective consumption of distinctive clubs and styles of music and dance – is disregarded by Florida as the actions of 'trendy sheep' (Florida 2002, p.188). Presumably clubbing is too collectivized and generic to appeal to the 'authentic' creative class, though the underlying moralistic (and rather patronising) tenor of Florida's analysis also comes through: 'Not to be too judgmental here, I did some of those things myself once upon a time and I still occasionally visit music venues and clubs' (Florida 2002, p.188).

6 On his own website ([www.creativeclass.com](http://www.creativeclass.com)) Florida reveals himself to be 'one of the world's leading public intellectuals on economic competitiveness, demographic trends, and cultural and technological innovation'.

Indeed he has accumulated an impressive list of clients – numerous city and national development and governmental agencies (including from the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand), various large corporations, leading universities, newspapers and other public and commercial organizations.

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