Consultancies and the global assemblage of culture and creativity

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Abstract

Culture and creativity have been increasingly instrumentalised in policy programmes worldwide in recent decades. This has been associated with the rapid development of techniques for quantifying and measuring the sector. This paper argues that the development of these techniques has been central to the mobility of policies and policy concepts that instrumentalise culture and creativity. Using Ong and Collier's notion of global assemblage, it is argued that culture and creativity have been rendered technical in relation to the invention and circulation of a number of interlinked global forms, such as the 'creative industries' and the 'creative class', which are embedded in abstract, placeless, technical systems that provide them with an apparent universality. How this is achieved is examined in detail through a discussion of the work of a London-based consultancy specialising in cultural knowledge. The consultancy helps to produce this assemblage by doing the work of producing technical, calculative measures of culture and creativity that translate a messy social world into a set of ordered, rationalised representations that can be compared to similarly produced representations from elsewhere. Their work helps to convert topographical connections between places into topological relations across which appropriate global forms can move with relative ease.
Key words: Global Assemblage, Policy Mobilities, Technocracy, Consultants, Cultural Policy, London

1. Introduction

The instrumentalisation of culture, meaning the deployment of aspects of local culture for achieving economic and social goals, has been a conspicuous policy trend worldwide in the last few decades (Gray 2007; Marcuse 2007; Belfiore 2012). Recently, this has often involved culture being partnered with, and occasionally substituted by, 'creativity'. So, the cultural industries, an invention of the 1950s, have been swallowed up in the creative industries since the coining of the term in 1998 (Galloway & Dunlop 2007; Garnham 2005). Cultural development is often touted as a potential harbinger of regeneration in dilapidated neighbourhoods (Vickery 2007), and this argument now has even greater intellectual weight due to Richard Florida (2002) claiming it as vital to cities being able to attract the 'creative class': those citizens with creative skills that can lift economic performance. Not only have culture and creativity been put to work for political purposes, together they have become a policy industry.

This trend has been controversial. Some regard the adoption and celebration of creativity as ideologically suspect (Miller 2004). Others argue that instrumentality is too simplistic a judgement of a more complex process of overcoming traditional elitist conceptions of culture (Gibson 2008). Still others consider these ideas as some of the latest to go through the policy churn, occurring on the surface of longer-term and more consequential processes (Peck 2005). In contrast, I want to dig deeper into the significance of one aspect of this trend: the rendering of culture and creativity in quantitative terms. Arguably, it has been the measurement of culture and creativity that has, in part, prompted the view that they are being instrumentalised, precisely because measurement allows for judgement against pre-specified criteria. While this measurement has not gone unremarked upon (e.g. Selwood 2002), this has tended to criticise the methodologies or question the appropriateness of trying to measure such indistinct objects as culture and creativity. Rather than critique how the measurement is being done, or speculate on the meaning of the emergence of this type of policy, this paper explores the link between the quantification of culture and creativity and the adoption of these instrumental policies around the world.

The increasingly global policy status of instrumentalised culture and creativity is clearly linked to processes of *policy mobility*. This describes the way policy travels between different administrative sites, such as through the porous boundaries between nation-states, offering often ready-made solutions to economic and social woes (Peck 2011; Peck & Theodore 2010; McCann 2011a). The emerging geographical literature in this area has much to offer for thinking about the spatiality of political discourses, ideologies and regimes, including those associated with culture and creativity. One aspect of policy mobility that geographers have emphasised has been the construction of networks of state and non-state actors across boundaries which facilitate the movement of policy. There has been a proliferation of actors involved in policy processes, and the transfer of policy has become an industry itself as private and third sector actors get involved in transferring policies between cities and countries (Larner & Laurie 2010; McCann 2011a; Stone 2008). Again, culture and creativity are no exception to this trend (Peck 2005; Prince 2010; Gibson & Klocker 2004). To be sure, the quantification and mobilisation of culture and creativity has often been conducted by formally non-state actors.

This paper argues that the rendering of culture and creativity in quantitative terms is central to their policy mobility. More specifically, it argues that these mobile policy forms take shape in what Ong and Collier (2005) call 'global assemblages'. These are a peculiarly modern form of assemblage associated with the rendering of the world in the technical terms that notionally abstract concepts can be applied to. These abstract concepts take on a universal character as they appear to be applicable anywhere the techniques of the assemblage can be reproduced, enabling them to travel with relative ease. This approach is expanded upon in the next section, with some brief examples of instrumental policy that have both circulated widely and illustrate the technical rendering of culture and creativity provided in section three. Section four, the main empirical section of the paper, focuses on a group of actors, cultural consultants, partially responsible for making the global assemblage. It demonstrates that they have a key role producing technical knowledge out of a messy social world that is comparable across space, but that this effect of universality is still forged in a social and political context. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of this argument for thinking about mobile policy.

2. Global assemblages

The emerging geographical literature on policy mobility provides important insights into the changing socio-spatial constitution of policy-making (e.g. McCann 2011a; McCann & Ward 2011; Peck 2011; Peck & Theodore 2010). Going further than tracking and categorising the incidence of similar policy in different places, as the political science diffusion and transfer literature has tended to do (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000; Dobbin *et al.* 2007), the geographical policy mobility literature has emphasised the mutations that occur in policy as it moves, the construction of relations and networks across space for policy to move down, the logics and political context that have driven this movement, and the relational nature of the places where mobile policies manifest. While the literature does not speak from a single point of view (Prince 2012a), overall its focus on the drivers and consequences of mobile policy deepens appreciation of the socio-spatial shifts and transformations that are occurring in a globalising world.

Policy moves for any number of reasons. It may move down ideologically-loaded 'fast policy' networks (Peck 2002), or via the learning practices of travelling policy-makers (Ward 2006), or as a result of the coercive pressure of a powerful institution like the IMF (Peet 2007), for example. But some policy forms have an additional quality. They appeal to universal values and principles – a characteristic that makes them appear to be true, and applicable, virtually everywhere. This makes their movement more likely, or at least more straightforward, though not inevitable. Even if, when they are put in place somewhere else, they have mutated into something different, their universal character is often central to the impetus for them to move in the first place.

This paper takes an assemblage perspective on universality (Anderson & McFarlane 2011; Anderson *et al.* 2012). Thinking with assemblage blurs divisions between the binaries that structure much social thought, such as society-nature and structure-agency, to consider heterogeneity. The spaces in which we live are assemblages of human and non-human materialities and practices, including people, buildings, trees, oil, electrical currents, books, discourses and so on, held together by socio-technical networks as homes, towns and countries. But the word assemblage is also intended to

stress the *making* of the assemblage (Braun 2006): a constant process that is never complete. This calls for a focus on the practices of assemblage as well (Li 2007a), such as techniques of control, standardisation and social reproduction. Assemblages are often cut across by competing as well as complementary logics, and are dependent for their reproduction on the work of a range of often conflicting actors and forces. So thinking with assemblage means focusing on how these diverse materials and practices come together for any period of time. Importantly for geographers, it means not preconceiving the spatial form that assemblages take, such as scale or region, but focusing on how these emerge out of the assemblage itself through the materialities, practices and performances of its constituents (McFarlane 2009; Allen & Cochrane 2010).

A developing strand of the policy mobilities literature takes an assemblage perspective (Prince 2010; Prince 2012a; McCann 2011a; McCann & Ward 2012a; McCann & Ward 2012b; McCann & Ward 2011). McCann argues that assemblage thinking is useful for the study of urban policy, by understanding the latter as an assemblage emerging in a city out of the 'purposive gathering of people, institutional capacities, expertise, models, techniques and technologies, political sustenance, etc. from local sources and, crucially, from elsewhere' (2011b, 144). But assemblages are more than networks: they emerge from and exceed the connections and components that constitute them (Anderson *et al.* 2012), like a living body emerges from and exceeds the functions of the organs that make it up. Furthermore, insofar as assemblages involve components from 'elsewhere', they are, in the words of McFarlane (2009), 'translocal': blurring distinctions between the nearby and the far-off. This is because assemblage thinking involves a shift from topographical to topological conceptions of space (Jacobs 2012). This means thinking about how different policy-making sites are not simply more and more interconnected with policy networks and relays, but folded into one another through, for example, practices of comparison or emulation.

The notion of 'global assemblage' that I turn to below has been used in policy mobility studies elsewhere (Prince 2010), but this work focused on how technical systems were made to line up in the same assemblage so that a specific global policy form, in that case the 'creative industries' concept, could move. Here I focus, in a sense, one step back: on

the *production* of the technical systems, and so of the global assemblage itself. Moreover, in contrast to these other deployments of assemblage thinking, the paper explores how assemblages can help us to think about universality. From an assemblage perspective, universality is something that must be constructed. So thinking with assemblage can help us to think about how universality is achieved, while simultaneously disrupting and undermining that very universality.

The notion of 'global assemblages', introduced by the anthropologists Stephen Collier and Aihwa Ong (2005; see also Collier 2006), are assemblages that are distinctive because they are products of, for want of a better word, *modernity*. Modernity here refers to enlightenment styles of reasoning that prioritise abstract systems of thought and organisation. These are forms of thought that rest on technical systems and principles that can be developed free of context and so appear to have a universal validity, such as science, bureaucracy and economic rationalism. The claim here is not that global assemblages exist because we live in a 'modern' world, but that insofar as modernity exists, global assemblages are the form it takes.

A key feature of global assemblages are global forms (Collier & Ong 2005). Global here captures the wide trajectories the form may be able to travel and the quality that makes this travel possible: universality. Global forms are able to move from one context to another and maintain their validity, regardless of social and cultural differences between these contexts, due to their situation in impersonal technical systems. They are not the same as mobile cultural forms which are global in a more conventional sense (clothing brands, for example) which are reinterpreted through cultural codes specific to any context they move to. Rather, global forms have a mobility borne of the universality technical systems are able to generate. So to think of global forms we need to think of the technical systems which have been assembled across space that allow them to circulate. Global assemblages emerge through the contested process of constructing these technical systems across space.

Calculative regimes are often central to global assemblages. Calculative regimes have proliferated as various governing agencies have mobilised them in order to better know the domains that they are governing – such as the population or the territory – and in

the process constitute them as both real and governable (Elden 2007; Rose 1999). With the development of the requisite sciences, such as political economy, for understanding the dynamics of these domains, calculative regimes become important tools at the disposal of these agencies. These are important because the knowledge they generate comes across as somehow pre-interpretive. The numbers that will populate and constitute a calculative regime are the typical form of what Poovey (1998) calls the 'modern fact'. These modern facts have a history, also centuries-long and not unrelated to the number-collecting work of governing agencies, which Poovey shows has them shift from *being interpretation themselves* to being conceived as the more fundamental bedrock of systems of knowledge and so *what must be interpreted*.

Any number or measure is an interpretation of what constitutes a countable object, of what must be counted and what must not, and of where boundaries lie between objects. Consider the equivocation that occurs around the question of how to count difficult social categories like ethnicity in a census, for example (see Duke-Williams 2011). But as soon as the counting is done and considered reliable according to whatever rules of measurement have been set down, they become facts: true according to the self-referential technical system that made the rules (Porter 1995). Anywhere the technical system can be put in place and mobilised, facts can be collected which are comparable with facts collected by the same technical system somewhere else. Hence calculative regimes and the technical systems that comprise them can constitute global assemblages around which global forms circulate (Collier & Ong 2005).

The outcome of this can be significant objects of knowledge. One such object is the economy. Timothy Mitchell (2002) has pointed out that 'the' economy is a relatively recent invention, having only started to be used in the mid-twentieth century. 'The' economy, understood as a geographically bounded entity comprised of monetary exchanges, only emerged with the invention of sets of technical measures that could be applied, in principle, to different regions of space: measures such as GDP, unemployment, economic growth, balance of trade, and all those other indicators we look to if we want to judge the health of the economy. These measurements made the idea of a geographically bounded, singular economy possible, and so changed the way 'economy' is thought about.

We can think of the emergence of 'the' economy as a universal category as involving the construction of a global assemblage. To describe an economy in what we would consider to be conventional, calculative terms reduces often exceptionally diverse activities into simpler, measurable categories. Achieving this means constructing technical systems that are able to handle this diversity. This is a contested process. For example, critics have pointed out that this process narrows what counts as productive activity, with all manner of labour, especially reproductive labour, left out, and others reduced to the amount of money that changes hands in the process (e.g. Waring 1988). But by referring to economic activity in two countries in the same calculative register, whether in terms of GDP, unemployment or the balance of payments, it appears we can compare these two economies directly, and in the process infer their existence as two separate, national economies. As a result, 'the' economy has consolidated as a basic component of life around the world through the geographical spread and linking of technical systems, including national statistics offices, taxation systems, central banks, and supra-national institutions. These are the elements that make up the global assemblage that global forms like GDP, or even the idea of 'the' economy itself, can circulate around and have meaning anywhere.

The assemblage, and in particular the calculative regime, that constitutes 'the' economy is a useful illustration, but it is also important to the global assemblage I am focusing on here. Assemblages, including global assemblages, are more than the sum of their parts: as pointed out earlier, they exceed their components and connections (Anderson *et al.* 2012). So, on the one hand the economy is not simply a figure of the imagination: it is made up of all the calculations, balance sheets, productive labour, circulating goods and currency, and so on, that added up together comprise 'the' economy. But, on the other hand, it is not just these elements functioning according to their individual logics. They function and are made to function in a particular way as a result of being a part of 'the' economy, for example through actions (such as reducing inflation (McCormack 2012)) that are thought to make 'the' economy healthier, more productive, or whatever goal for 'the' economy might be held. The radical implication here is that while a component of 'the' economy, such as a particular sector of productive activity, may not change, it and its properties may produce different results if it is placed in combination with a new set

of components and so a different set of relations and interactions. Together they may synthesise a 'new' assemblage (Anderson *et al.* 2012).

The remainder of this paper focuses on an emergent global assemblage taking shape around instrumental notions of culture and creativity. The proliferating policies in this area are not only united by their similar objects, but also by their technical and calculative character. It is argued that this latter aspect accounts for that proliferation because it creates a sense of universality for the policy concepts, making them global forms embedded in seemingly universal, impersonal, technical principles. The following section provides examples of the kind of policy concepts I am talking about here. Section four of the paper shifts the focus to an example of the work being conducted by particular actors to render culture and creativity in technical, calculative terms. Without this kind of work, the universality of these policy concepts would not be achieved, and their mobility would be hampered. It is through this work that the global assemblage is assembled.

3. Global forms of culture and creativity

The policies that instrumentalise culture and creativity make up a diverse terrain, with a variety of policy forms circulating through it. Here I use two prominent examples to illustrate it. While neither are policy in a programmatic sense, they are both relatively new policy concepts that have informed acts of policy-making in a variety of locations.

The creative industries were first defined by the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 1998 in the *Creative Industries Mapping Document* as 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (DCMS 2001, 4). The list of industries put forward by DCMS as comprising the creative industries included a number of industries more commonly referred to amongst policy-makers and researchers as the cultural industries (e.g. music, performing arts, TV and radio, publishing) along with industries regarded as depending on some spark of human creativity (e.g. advertising, architecture, software development). This has proved remarkably popular. The 'creative industries' concept,

usually incorporating some variation of the constituent industries, has been put to work in policy programmes in cities and countries on every continent (Cunningham 2009).

The second example, the creative class, is the brainchild of American academic Richard Florida (2002). While the creative industries contain what is understood as cultural activity within them, the significance of the creative class thesis for culture is in its implications. The creative class are those workers (around 30% of the workforce according to Florida) whose creative skills are the key to productivity growth, and so economic growth, for a city, region or country. But the creative class are also finicky about where they live. According to Florida, they want to live in 'cool' cities – vibrant places with an interesting and exciting local culture. This means that cities that want the kind of people who will offer them economic advancement need to work on, amongst other things, making their local culture into something that the creative class will be attracted to. And, as with the creative industries, this idea has proved very popular. At the height of his fame, Florida was speaking at cities across North America, Europe and Australasia (Peck 2005; Gibson & Klocker 2004).

Both of these concepts use the notion of 'creativity', but they also both involve the mobilisation of what is generally understood as culture for economic and social development purposes. But the most significant point of similarity is their technical character. The creative industries were not simply hypothesised by DCMS, they were shown to exist through the construction of statistical tables of their revenue, employment and contribution to GDP, the last enabling the government to say they were (by 2001) over 5% of the economy and growing considerably faster than the economy as a whole (Christophers 2007). This technical rendering has often been reproduced when the creative industries have been picked up elsewhere (Prince 2010). For the creative class, Florida constructs a series of indices – e.g. the creativity index, the bohemian index, the gay index – from a variety of data sources, such as the US Bureau of Labour Statistics. These measure different things, from the number of creative people living in a city, to the availability of interesting cultural facilities, to levels of tolerance for different lifestyles. He then uses these to rank different American cities, arguing that there is a correlation between the economic performance of a city and that city's performance on the various indices.

This technical rendering is a significant act in both cases because of the quality of numbers as pre-interpretive and neutral representations of reality (Porter 1995; Poovey 1998). Florida claims in his appendix that he could have written his book without statistics, that his 'arguments could have been made as convincingly just by telling stories from my field notes and letting my human subjects and observations speak for themselves' (2002, 327). This may be, but his recognition that 'good, hard statistical analysis' can 'confirm' his theories articulates why it is done: numbers are perceived to make for 'good' and 'hard' representations of reality. Moreover, they make the comparisons he conducts possible, and in making them he casts all the cities in the US into the same virtual space. In a similar fashion, the creative industries become a reality anywhere they are being measured, with differences between places reduced to, and realised in, quantitative representations of size. Across this space, certain kinds of policy prescriptions can travel with an ease that would not have been possible without the ability of these places to see themselves in the same terms. In this sense, the concepts of the creative industries and the creative class are global forms: able to move across different contexts with ease because of their constitution in technical, calculative systems that provide them with an apparent universality.

The creative industries and the creative class are headline stories in a longer process of rendering aspects of culture in technical terms and towards an instrumental end. In the 1980s, for example, John Myerscough (1988) published a book detailing the 'economic importance of the arts' in a decidedly quantitative fashion. More recently, UNESCO has published a report titled *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, which contains 19 statistical tables over almost 100 pages demonstrating 'cultural diversity'. It argues that there is an 'urgent and overarching need to implement standards to improve cultural data collection worldwide' (UNESCO 2009, 260). These are not isolated examples: cultural statistics has been a growth industry, if a frequently problematised one (Selwood 2002).

The calculative rendition of culture and creativity facilitates the emergence of a new sense of them as measurable and comparable in one way or another. This in turn facilitates the constitution of global forms that appear to occupy a plane of universal

validity beyond the context of their production. This is an effect of the practices of calculation and the constitution of these forms in global assemblages. And this is where my focus shifts for the remainder of the paper. By observing how culture and creativity are rendered technical and converted into rationalised, quantitative representations, we can observe how universality itself is assembled.

4. Consultants as global assemblers

The work of assemblage often occurs around particular moments of policy transfer and formation, and is ad hoc, improvised and disjunctive (Prince 2010), but beyond this it also often occupies both a wider space and a longer period as the outcome of a variety of partially aligned and evolving projects. It also involves large numbers of actors. Maintaining a global assemblage around which global forms can circulate will involve agencies, institutions and individuals in a wide variety of roles. Many of them would have a direct involvement with the work of governing culture, such as UNESCO. Others would be just as important, but less concerned with culture directly, such as the national statistics offices that supplied much of the data UNESCO used for its statistical tables. The size and complexity of the assemblage means it is more efficient to aim for indicativeness than comprehensiveness, and more productive to consider a slice of related actors within the assemblage in some depth than take a shallow sample of actors across the assemblage as a whole. This allows for a deeper perspective on the practices of assemblage that are occurring, and so a view of how the assemblage is being produced and reproduced, albeit one that is situated and partial.

The view here is through a small consultancy based in London called Cultural Consultants Incorporated (CCI).[1] This consultancy of around a dozen people supplies consultancy work for organisations working in the cultural sector. During November and December of 2010 I spent six weeks combining participant observation in their offices in London with formal interviews with all of the consultants (most of whom were interviewed more than once), as well as four formal interviews and several less formal conversations with individuals from their wider network. The participant

[1] This is a pseudonym, as are the names of the consultants quoted below. References to projects are vague to protect identities.

observation involved assisting with consultancy projects by attending meetings, analysing surveys, conducting focus groups and gathering appropriate data. I also assisted in work more internal to the company around strategy, planning, and communication. In addition, they provided access to their database of previous and current projects. CCI have existed since the late 1990s and at the time of my visit had 240 completed and current consultancy projects on their books, ranging in size and scope from a few days to many weeks, although the work programme could be stretched out over several years.

CCI produces knowledge that is spatialised in particular ways. During the early 2000s in particular, CCI conducted a large number of creative economy 'mapping' studies – around 60 of their projects contained an element of mapping in them. These drew on the discourse of the Creative Industries Mapping Document (CIMD) produced by DCMS but were focused on particular pre-defined cities or regions within, and occasionally outside, the UK. Like the CIMD, they presented a statistical picture of how creativity and culture were manifesting in the area, although the kind of mapping work that was conducted was more varied. They also work for agencies who are themselves spatialised in terms of their focus or jurisdiction. These include agencies with national, regional and even international jurisdictions, and private and third sector agencies with more specific geographical foci, such as 'the street' for a homeless charity. The work can include programme evaluations, market scoping studies, strategic planning and structural reviews. While the spatial component of these projects is often less explicit, it is still an element of the work. In their mapping and other work CCI produced spatialised knowledge that could shape the performative possibilities of those spaces, and so contributed to the production and reproduction of the spaces themselves (Gregson & Rose 2000).

Here I make three observations about CCI's work in this global assemblage. One, it involves the conversion of a messy reality into technical systems of representation that are easily comparable with each other. Sometimes this involves the deployment of components from other assemblages in new ways, sometimes it involves the invention of new techniques. Two, this work occurs in relation to assemblages that supply

political context, which shapes how this work of assemblage is conducted. And three, this work involves making topographical connections into topological relations.

i) Making numbers, rendering technical

CCI are complicit in the construction of the calculative regime that is central to the global assemblage I am describing here because they produce a large amount of calculative knowledge in the form of quantitative data relating to culture and creativity. This is not the only kind of knowledge they produce, and every project they conduct contains written analysis, recommendations, conclusions and other interpretations of the data, and a significant number rely on more qualitative forms of knowledge, such as interviews, policy analysis and strategic planning. But the concept that defines the work of the consultancy, *evidence*, is itself understood for the most part as quantitative.

So CCI is in the business of producing facts in the sense that Poovey (1998) describes them. These facts take the form of objective, quantitative measures of things like the economic significance of culture, the cultural and social impact of a cultural event or institution, or the success of a programme in delivering cultural outcomes to a population. The numbers they produce provide the *evidence base*. This language permeates their work and their understanding of it. Projects are regularly described as providing an 'evidence base' for some purpose, such as economic impact, level of cultural activity, policy development, strategic review, and so on. This is how the numbers are seen: as the *basis* on which claims and decisions can be made. They take on the character of raw data: pre-cognitive and pre-theoretical, just numerical renditions of an underlying reality to be questioned only in terms of how accurate or appropriate they are, not what such technical representations mean for how we understand, engage with, and act on culture and creativity. It is a key movement in the construction of a global assemblage because the comparability of numbers is central to the sense of universality in the phenomena being described.

This quantitative knowledge is technical, in that it relies on a range of particular methodological techniques that delineate, measure, count, organise, analyse and display the world in numerical terms (Li 2007b). Sometimes they use, rework and recombine

data that already exists as a part of other assemblages, such as in the databases of market research companies or the National Statistics Office. Sometimes these methods draw the numbers directly out of the messy social world through surveys, structured interviews, media analyses and direct observations. For a cultural festival evaluation, for example, they might measure the amount of media coverage the event gets, changed perceptions of the culture being celebrated amongst attendees, and the number of people returning to the event from previous years. And they have techniques to produce numbers out of the numbers, such as the 'economic multiplier'. This is a way of working out how much a visitor to a place for a cultural event will spend beyond what they spend on the event itself: so on accommodation, food, transport and so on. With a variety of techniques, the consultants are both producers and shepherds of quantitative data, corralling it to their purpose. The numbers produced not only provide an air of authority for the claims around economic, social and cultural impact being made here (Porter 1995), they are also infinitely comparable to similar numbers produced elsewhere, bringing the things being measured into the same virtual space of comparison: the space of the global assemblage.

But that sense of the numbers as just pre-cognitive, pre-theoretical, 'raw' data is less apparent when we consider the art to the expertise the consultants possess, particularly in relation to the production of numbers and the theoretical models that animate them. Many of the numbers they use come from already existing databases – components in other assemblages (Anderson *et al.* 2012). But how these are used requires a combination of technical knowledge, innovation and invention. CCI use a combination of private and public sector databases, but depending on the scale of the project, the information provided will often not be specific enough, meaning it will need to be used alongside more anecdotal and survey evidence to make a case. Sometimes they need to find ways to rework the data so that it is more fit-for-purpose – such as the weighting of ONS data classified under the generally non-creative sector of 'textiles' to come up with what they regard as a realistic measure of the 'creative' sub-category of 'designer fashion'. They will also use less conventional data, such as the proportion of generic 'big brand' retailers in a town against independent stores to assess distinctiveness. This working through, across and between databases is described by one consultant as 'triangulation':

> You look at what Database X tells you, you look at what the ONS tells you, and maybe do the locations quotient as well, and see what that tells you, and get a sense between them of where the strengths in a particular area are, in terms of what industries it does well in, and so on (Michael, CCI Consultant).

The qualitative 'feel for the data' that this implies is an important part of the consultant's skill set.

Another key tool requiring the consultant's artistry is the survey. Constructing large scale surveys that measure whether a person's happiness has changed as a result of their participation in a British heritage project, for example, is not straight-forward, particularly when the aim is to produce a number. The aim is to take the diverse feelings and responses of the myriad people involved in a project, translate it through techniques like the survey into a generalisable category, and convert this into a number, in the processes overcoming all the misunderstandings, incorrect form-filling, potential for causing offence and occasional deception (such as a single person filling out multiple forms) that occur. While the surveys are usually constructed with one eye on comparability with other surveys, constructing them is a ground-level, iterative, learned process. As Michael put it, 'once you've done a survey you take that knowledge with you to the next one. That's part of the process of developing surveys; you experience previous ones' (Michael, CCI Consultant). In the use of databases, in surveys and in interviews, through trial and error, experimentation, experience, and developing a sense of what it takes to produce a *believable* number, the consultant develops their art.

The need to be inventive, responsive and flexible in this way indicates the thought that needs to go into the production of numbers. What must be counted is not always immediately obvious, and sometimes what can be counted is only ever a proxy at best. One consultant, Andrew, spelled out that theorisation must occur before measurement can:

> There isn't really any quote-unquote 'technique' for developing frameworks for measuring cultural statistics. You have to have theories for what culture is and how it works, and therefore what you want to try and measure... you can't just leave it to the statisticians. The theory gives you an idea about how to shape it, and

> also gives you rules for inclusion and exclusion. And without a theory you don't really know where to go (Andrew, CCI Consultant).

CCI's work also often works with relatively recently invented concepts, such as the creative industries and 'social impact'. These are ideas that express particular values and perceptions. Social impact, for example, refers to particular socially beneficial outcomes that are a direct result of some kind of cultural action, such as the staging of a cultural event or the work of a cultural agency. This could be imagined in a number of ways, such as the growth of community identity, the creation of job opportunities, or an increase in the sense of social inclusion amongst participants. Deciding what kind of impact can be meaningfully described as a 'social impact', which ones can be linked to the cultural action, and which ones can be measured to produce a quantitative indicator of social impact are all complex theoretical and methodological questions. Before a single seemingly pre-theoretical number is produced, theoretical work is occurring.

The *sense* of what is right is vital to the production of the theoretical models that accompany the numbers as well. Here Toby talks about a tool he is developing to diagnose what he refers to as the 'creative potential' of an area:

> So, we're just sitting down, we're thinking: what are the aspects that we associate with the kind of place that cultural regeneration can create at its best, the kind of place that has vibrancy and attractiveness, and a distinctive profile, but at the same time a much firmer economic base underpinning it than it previously had, particularly using the creative economy. And we essentially came up with a list of attributes that we associated with those kinds of places. And from that I've tried to find a way, a proxy indicator for measuring... each of these, and then using existing data, a way of putting them into bands. And the idea is that this will lend itself to a radar or spider diagram. Just as a simple little diagnostic tool, so we can sit there with policy makers or with developers, and say, look, this is our snapshot of the creative potential of your area (Toby, CCI Consultant).

This kind of thought process, designed to produce a diagrammatic and calculative representation of 'creative potential' is illustrative of some of the more complex theoretical work going on at CCI. It demonstrates again how numbers are not pre-theoretical: that they are produced after thought – 'sitting down and thinking'. But the

test of the theory, the question of whether the numbers it produces are valid and can be used with authority, is internalised by the consultant as a kind of tacit knowledge:

> I'm going to push some data through this and see how it stands up, under my own analysis, let alone anyone else's... I've got to see whether I've actually aligned the scales correctly in each of these (attributes). The only way to check that is to actually push some real places through it and say, does what this is telling me chime with what I know about those places (Toby, CCI Consultant).

This tacit knowledge of the consultant is exactly what they get paid for, but its very tacitness, its embodiment in the consultant, is obscured when we see the numbers. They move from being forged by the theories, innovations, experiences and arts of the consultant to being the evidence base: the numbers from which decisions will be made.

The work of the consultants here in converting messy reality into technical, calculative renditions of culture and creativity is typical of the practice of assemblage in that it is tacit, intuitive, haphazard, and often inventive as well as systematic and practiced. The use of numbers has the effect of transporting the localised focus of the project into a universal space of comparison: the space of the global assemblage. But this is not the construction of an assemblage entirely from the ground up. The use of components from other assemblages is as much a part of the work of assemblage as the creation of new data sets, such as the ONS data which gets plugged into this new assemblage and deployed in new ways. And there are other assemblages that shape this global assemblage in significant ways as well.

ii) The politics of making numbers

The global assemblage I refer to in this paper is not the only assemblage that CCI is complicit in. Indeed other assemblages, not necessarily global ones, have shaped the global assemblage as some of the former's component parts, such as discourses and technical practices, have come to influence the latter's working (Anderson *et al.* 2012). Particularly important have been the governmental assemblages that have produced what can be described as the political context in which CCI works. By governmental assemblage I mean those assemblages of materials, discourses and practices that seek to shape the conduct of particular target populations. The governmental assemblages I

focus on here have served to reinforce the quality of self-evident neutrality that numbers draw from their seemingly pre-cognitive and pre-theoretical status.

Under New Labour the notion of 'evidence-based policy-making' emerged as a governmental discourse (Clarke 2004): from now on, the government proclaimed, policy would be made based on what has been shown to work using quantitative evidence. This is symptomatic of a political context in which numbers have come to attain a central, constitutive role and a continuation of the allegedly post-ideological advance of quantitative methods for assessing performance such as audit and benchmarking – techniques of government that define the governmental assemblages described in the governmentality literature as 'advanced liberal' (Rose 1999; Dean 1999). This is an approach to governing, emerging over several decades, which calls on individuals and groups to submit to quantitative measures of their performance in order to assess how well they are delivering on targets set down by governing authorities. The ethic is one of ongoing assessment and improvement based on transparent and consistent standards, and the consequence is a culture of display as we constantly demonstrate how well our performance measures up.

These rituals become a part of the subjectivity of the governed. Validating oneself in an advanced liberal assemblage means being able to show how well you have performed using this quantitative language, meaning the presentation of evidence of your performance becomes something that is done as a matter of course, not because funding agencies, or the Treasury, might demand it. The governmental assemblage is one where material evidence of performance has a central role. This shift has occurred in the UK cultural sector in recent years, as noted by one of the consultants:

> The cultural sector has become much more data driven and data savvy and evidence based. It was heavily criticized 15 years ago for not being evidence based enough, and I think that actually throughout the sector are probably one of the most evidence driven sectors right now, there has been a pretty wholesale transformation (Toby, CCI Consultant).

It was the demand for evidence, driven by the government and by actors in the cultural sector as well, that created the conditions for consultancies like CCI to emerge in the first place. As cultural sector actors sought out ways to display their performance or to

justify their next set of actions, they needed advice on how to navigate the uncharted waters of these advanced liberal assemblages. Consultancies like CCI emerged in this problem-space.

But it would be a mistake to equate governmental discourse about evidence-based policy with a government which bases policy on evidence. As more than one interviewee quipped to me, what often occurs is less evidence-based policy-making and more policy-based evidence-making, as evidence is sought to support policy-decisions that have effectively been made in advance. But this is not just a reversal of causation. Neutral, seemingly pre-theoretical quantitative evidence gives policy concepts objective status. For example, policy often supplies the very concepts that must be theorised, and will even do some of the 'theorising' for them. The creative industries are a clear example, but notions of 'impact' (HM Treasury 2011) and 'public value' (Kelly *et al.* 2002), have also shaped projects CCI has worked on – and so components from one assemblage become components in another. The game for consultants seeking to help their clients becomes how far they can stretch a concept like social impact, and back it up with quantitative evidence, before it loses political purchase. So 'evidence-making' is a feature of the political games that continue to be played under an advanced liberal regime, but the latter is not reducible to the former. Through being governmentalised and made calculable by CCI and others, aspects of culture are provided content and agency in the form of an ability to impact on social and economic processes.

The forge where numbers are produced for the evidence base is not just made up of the consultant's own ideas, innovations, experience and expertise: it is also shaped by a political context. An advanced liberal style of government has animated the production of numbers for culture, in the process changing the landscape of the cultural sector by inviting in actors, like CCI, that are able to work with this way of thinking. Regarding the argument of this paper, as the make-up of the forge that transforms a messy social world into a seemingly neutral quantitative evidence base comes more into view, it is harder to justify the latter as pre-cognitive, pre-theoretical, or even pre-political.

iii) Knowledge connections

Finally, CCI produces knowledge that connects to knowledge produced elsewhere. The downloading, translation and mobilisation of policy concepts produced in central government agencies is an example of this, as is the use of different databases in the creation of evidence bases. But other kinds of connections occur as well. CCI will often use overseas examples in their work, drawn from internet-based 'desk research' or the store of knowledge possessed in the databases and bookshelves of the CCI offices and by the consultants themselves. They run and attend conferences, seminars, workshops and visitor exchange programmes which bring policy-makers, academics, researchers, practitioners, politicians and other consultants from different parts of the UK and the world together. Some of the consultants engage with cultural policy students at British universities, including one class I attended where one of the senior consultants spoke to forty British and international students about the history of British cultural policy, and the work of CCI, at a London university.

CCI has overseas clients, linking them to China, South Africa, Europe and Latin America. The type of work and the depth of engagement has varied. They have advised on creative industry mapping projects, helped to draft cultural development strategies, and provided information about the British cultural and creative industry policy they know intimately. They have provided advice on the collection of cultural and creative economy statistics in many of these contexts, including to UNESCO for the report cited earlier. Based on their own mapping work they have provided methodological tracts to overseas agencies to help them collect their own creative economy statistics which, by virtue of these methods coming from CCI's experience and knowledge, will be comparable with those collected by CCI in the UK as well as with each other, even as they get translated and mobilised by different sets of actors with different sets of concerns.

These are topographical connections: CCI facilitates the movement of knowledge across global policy and knowledge networks. As a result, they proliferate the kinds of connections between different policy centres that the policy mobilities literature argues are significant for understanding a politically interconnected world where policy-making is increasingly conducted as much 'between' states as within them (McCann 2011a; Peck 2011; Peck & Theodore 2010). But where the knowledge they produce

and/or put into circulation is the kind of technical knowledge that defines the global assemblage, it makes the universality of those policy forms, here understood as global forms, possible, because it renders a complex and diverse cultural and creative landscape into a technical language which makes that landscape divisible into comparable spaces and scales. In the process, they fold different places into the same space of comparison. For example, when a creative industries mapping project is conducted in Colombia based on the same technical principles as one conducted in the UK, they are comparable. The topographical connection is converted into a topological relation in this space of comparison (Jacobs 2012), which is the space of the global assemblage (Collier & Ong 2005). So long as the policy form (in this case, the creative industries concept) can be articulated with the technical principles of the assemblage, the apparent universality of a policy form is an effect of the construction of this topological space because it can be understood and applied in relation to both the UK and Colombia. CCI is involved in acts of local and extra-local construction of the global assemblage that generates this space.

5. Conclusion

In the global assemblages that are peculiar to modernity, consultancies like CCI occupy a key role between the myriad relations and processes that constitute day-to-day life and the technical representations that rationalise and order them. Using instrumentalised notions of culture and creativity, they translate the messy social world into something that can be grasped, represented and compared. In the process they help to give culture and creativity a new kind of content: an agency and manipulability that is able to be captured and used by various forces and authorities. Policy concepts embedded in these technical renderings can become global forms, in the sense of being universal, and applicable anywhere the assemblage touches.

These technical renderings allow us to think about space in particular ways: for one, as something that can be partitioned into packets (nation-states, for example) and represented using rational, transferrable techniques (such as Florida's creativity index) which, in turn, can be used for ranking and comparison. By being known in this way, these differentiated spaces are performed into existence through their articulation into

ways of organising social relations. So a city is performed through its ranking on one of Florida's lists, and then performed again through efforts to mobilise actors across this space in ways that will (purportedly) improve this ranking. Of course, Florida's lists, nor indeed any of the techniques being used around culture and creativity, did not partition space: rather they worked with the existing conceptions of space that had been produced and reproduced for decades through many other assemblages (MacKinnon 2011). So this assemblage has tended to work with these scaled spaces, but seeks to reproduce them as spaces with particular endowments of culture and creativity that can be mobilised by various actors. CCI works at multiple scales pre-existing their engagements, making this global assemblage one that still makes the world as a scaled one (McFarlane 2009), just one with a new set of metrics for comparing different spaces.

On the other hand, the space of the global assemblage itself is topological, drawing geographically distant places together, effectively lining them up side-by-side for comparison, and making them part of the same virtual space (Jacobs 2012). However, the coherence of this space should not be overstated. The topology is a fluid one: difference and continuity coexist in the space (Mol & Law 1994; Prince 2012b). Assemblers like CCI recognise that often their technical work in different places will not be exact methodological reproductions, due to resource constraints and incommensurable datasets. Creating comparable datasets often requires compromise, meaning comparisons are being made that are not quite between like and like, but are held to be meaningful enough to be made anyway. Furthermore, CCI are not the only actors in this network, nor are they necessarily particularly important. There are many other agencies working to produce technical renderings of the cultural and creative world. Again, compromises will often be made to allow comparisons between datasets. The space of the global assemblage is therefore not even and fixed, but uneven, and as a result dynamic: it is a space where new combinations will emerge and circulate to potentially change how the global assemblage looks and works. There is potential in this space for the emergence of new ways of thinking and acting on and through culture and creativity.

Additionally, the knowledge that CCI produces, and the techniques that they export, were produced in the particular social and political forge of where they are situated: London. This has two implications. One, these techniques will still carry the trace of the forge where they were produced – they are still situated knowledge (Kobayashi 2009) despite their constitution as universal in the context of the assemblage. And two, other actors applying the techniques elsewhere will also find ways to carve out numbers appropriate to the forge where their work must be done, meaning they are also situated knowledges, despite their comparability across the assemblage. At the very least, recognising this undermines the sense of universality inherent in the global policy forms circulating across the assemblage, but it may also open the door to new ways of thinking and acting.

This global assemblage is an outgrowth of existing assemblages, global or otherwise, that define and divide the world in ways that make possible the measurement of creative industries revenue or the separation of space into comparable packets. Although we can organise our analysis around particular sets of ideas, like I do here with culture and creativity, these global assemblages are not easily separable. Added together, they constitute the spaces of post-ideological, technocratic policy-making: the 'technocracy' (Centeno 1993). The policy mobility that has marked recent transformations in the state should be understood as occurring in the context of this developing technocracy because it is off its back that policy regimes, such as neoliberalism, attain their insistent universal relevance. We can use the concept of the global assemblage to trace the geography of the technocracy and show how it emerges from localised complexity and politics, as the discussion of CCI illustrates. But the power of the technocracy to overwhelm space is difficult to counter, as the re-embedding of neoliberalism after the recent global financial crisis shows. When we understand the world through the kinds of technical representations that suggest universal knowledge is possible, it becomes very difficult to imagine any other way of knowing it.

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