

Introduction

Britain's New Labour government, in power from 1997 to 2010, attempted an unprecedented incorporation of culture into governance. At the heart of this effort was circulation of the idea that the UK was becoming increasingly dependent on the profitability of its creative economy. Faith in this idea has spread with remarkable speed. United Nations agencies have, for example, embraced the idea of the creative economy and attempted to devise ways to measure its impact. UNESCO's Creative Cities Network, and designation of official Cities of Literature, Cities of Film, Cities of Music, and so on, reflects its desire to "help unlock the creative, social and economic potential of cultural industries."¹ This yoking together of cultural, social, and economic goals is at the heart of the creative-economy frameworks adopted by local and national governments in the UK and elsewhere. What subtends the ready adoption of these frameworks?

I argue in this book that we find some answers to this question in literary studies. I consider, first, how long-standing ideas about literature and literary writers have informed creative-economy policymaking and the discourses that have arisen with it and complement it. I then examine how writers have articulated complicity with and distance from various facets of the placement of art in instrumental service to the economy—a placement that was of heightened concern for many cultural workers during the New Labour years but is of course by no means exclusive to it. Among the phenomena that have served to heighten concern are the

presentation of artists as models of contentedly flexible and self-managed workers, the treatment of training in and exposure to art as a pathway to social inclusion, use of the presence of culture and cultural institutions to increase property values, and support for cultural diversity as a means of growing cultural markets and fostering an inclusive society of active cultural consumers. The literature I discuss engages these phenomena, and I read it in relation to a broader wariness about how the linking up of culture, economy, and governance—a linking up that might have had welcome repercussions—has in fact tended to unfold. For just as creative-industries frameworks have found legitimacy within government institutions in the UK and around the world, many policymakers, analysts, writers, and artists, including those on the left who had seen a progressive potential in the expanding recognition of the importance of culture, have experienced what Justin O'Connor calls “affective disinvestment from the creative industries imaginary.”²

Reference to the creative economy, as to the attendant creative industries and creative class, first emerged in relation to claims about the empirically measurable economic might of the practices, institutions, and individuals ostensibly served by the intellectual property regime. However, it would be unwise to perpetuate the binary positioning of positivist approaches that take the existence of the creative economy for granted versus the more suspicious treatment of the creative economy as a script designed to serve political interests.³ Attempts to account for the creative economy, even those sponsored by government, are rarely free of contradiction and ambivalence, and we risk overlooking observable economic and cultural change if we treat the creative economy as little more than a fantastic projection of political will. Instead, I stress the dialectical interplay between the discourse of the creative economy and the real world of cultural economics that it is meant to encompass and quantify; my goal is not to debunk the notion that there is such a thing as the creative economy but rather to focus attention on how and why faith in its existence has become consequential.

One of my core claims, supported by several scholars, is that creative-economy discourse dovetails importantly with neoliberalism, conceived as a set of shifting practices whose net effect is to erode public welfare, valorize private property and free markets, position government

as a facilitator and “pre-eminent narrator” of the shift to neoliberal policy, and orchestrate or justify a corresponding notion that capitalism’s continued and insuperable expansion is at once inevitable and welcome.⁴ Britain’s first neoliberal government, under Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher (1979–90), established many of the expedient forms of state relation to the arts common under New Labour. Support for the kind of grassroots community-based work that flourished in the 1970s was significantly abrogated. Arts organizations and practitioners found that funding for culture was increasingly indexed to a centralized Conservative agenda: to preservation of the national heritage, which meant money for established British institutions; to the regeneration of deindustrialized cities that might thrive in a world of increasingly fluid capital and labor markets, which meant the linking of cultural events and institutions to urban renewal schemes; and to the running of the public sector based on private-sector models of efficiency and return, which meant that arts organizations would need to prove they could operate like viable businesses and even find private-sector collaborators if they hoped to be favored by government.⁵ If all of these developments—the imagining of the arts as an offshoot of a branded heritage and tourist product, the appeal to cultural infrastructure as a gentrifying force, and emphasis on artists as collaborators with private-sector development—continued under New Labour, there was a difference.

New Labour politicians campaigned against the Conservatives’ blinkered focus on free-market economics and against the traditional Labour Party’s opposition to the deregulation of markets. New Labour insisted that social welfare and economic deregulation were intertwined. The party developed the idea of the Third Way to brand its mediation between market-based Thatcherite policymaking and Labour’s traditional focus on social needs and capacities. While New Labour policy would remain predominantly economic—the party’s premier intellectual urged it to consider “its orientation . . . in a world where there are no alternatives to capitalism”⁶—it would position economic reform as a way to reach more intangible goals such as social integration and personal well-being. New welfare, health, and education policies were justified as the means to economic ends.⁷ Culture would be central to negotiating the symbiosis between economic and social goals. The research director of the premier

New Labour think tank had written that it was only through culture that a “viable capitalist social order” would manage to “organise and sustain itself.”⁸ New Labour embraced this maxim to stress the usefulness of culture and the arts to securing individual and collective interests. It put forward a comprehensive creative-economy program to monitor and foster the economic value of culture and the arts. Its public and cultural diplomacy policies at times blurred into one another, as it trumpeted the use of culture, including literature, in nation-branding strategies that would encourage investment in the UK and sell British foreign policy decisions. Policymakers imagined that arts organizations could forward a social inclusion agenda by bringing minorities into a nation of happily multicultural communities. Urban regeneration policy positioned the presence of cultural institutions and of those who do cultural work as the key to increasing property values and to renewing troubled neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, in several social science and policy fields the cultural worker was constructed as a model flexible self-manager, committed to introspection, self-expression, and self-direction.⁹ Creative work tends to be figured contradictorily by creative-economy rhetoric, as at once newly valuable to capitalism and romantically honorable and free. A recent study by The Work Foundation, commissioned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, reports that

the creative industries are peopled by creative talents who themselves get pleasure and utility from what they do. They are “called to their art.” One upside from the business perspective (although it attracts complaints of exploitation) is that their “reservation” wages—the lowest they are prepared to work for—are lower than the marginal value of what they produce, making labour particularly cheap. A downside is that the “talent” care deeply about how the creative work is organized, which may discourage concessions or compromises to management.¹⁰

My study troubles this model. It questions the images of creative workers’ enterprising individualism present in policy documents, management and planning literature focused on cultural-sector businesses, and in much social science research on the creative economy. Its two parts reflect my two-pronged approach to forwarding more socially responsive conceptions of the creative self: we need to challenge the model of the asocial or antisocial flexible individualist by stressing that, though it is disseminated as a natural given, it is in fact historically produced, highly contested, and

contingent; and we need to identify and articulate alternative visions of a self not sufficient to itself, a self whose anti-egoism and need for sympathetic community are no less essential or natural than the predilections of the flexibly creative individual.

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Though neoliberal Britain is my particular case, I stress the transnational political currents—especially the US-based social science and management thought—at work in British creative-economy discourse and position the literature I discuss as part of a global conversation about the evolving relationship between cultural commerce and artistic autonomy. The first part of this study provides a partial genealogy of the mainstream model of the creative personality. I emphasize in particular how creative-economy frameworks, informed by management theory, have drawn upon mainly US-based social scientific observation of writers' working lives and have come to incorporate concepts bearing a literary provenance. These include the idea that the best work expresses the interiority of talented individuals, the idea that the creative realm is a space of pure introspection unbounded by necessity and expedience, and the related notion that though creative people may work within markets, serious ones will be motivated by internal directives to which profit is irrelevant. Placed in this light, mainstream creative-industries and creative-economy discourse evidently emboldens an established management conception—a conception that is in a sense originally American but now globally resonant—of the reflexive individual's enterprising and expressive labor, a vocabulary that itself leans on depictions of artists' expressive creativity.

Chapter 1 provides a closer look at the key features of the new vocabulary of creativity. I begin by considering the influence of *The Rise of the Creative Class* by Richard Florida, the American management guru now installed at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. *The Rise of the Creative Class* has become a handbook for government officials and done more than any other work to crystallize and disseminate globally the ostensible virtues of the conception of culture that New Labour campaigned on and then fostered as it governed. In it Florida argues that the work of the creative class is to render ideas amenable to market circulation. It is precisely this rendering that is the mark of

originality or creative genius. Florida thus imagines that true creativity is indivisible from marketability. This conception accords with and shapes how the creative economy has been posited, defined, and discussed in the UK and globally. The particular vocabulary of creativity he helps foster, highlighting the economic impact of culture and the importance to urban growth of the presence of creative workers, informed the New Labour government's emphasis on creativity as the particular form of expertise that would secure a postindustrial UK's viability within the global economy. This emphasis became in turn a key branding strategy for the party itself. New Labour claimed it would be able to forge the felicitous intersection of social and economic productivities, the union of individual and civic goals in the service of economic growth. It presented the creative economy as a model of this harmonization of social and economic goals. Its approach to culture was, moreover, consistently constructed as the way of the future: Given the inevitability of an increasingly immaterial capitalism, creativity would be an ever more important skill. Thus, synonymous with a welcome embrace of ceaseless change, creativity would also be the privileged marker of one's personal evolution toward a reflexive capitalist modernity.

Chapters 2 and 3, ranging beyond New Labour and the British context, consider how particular ideas about art and artists, especially authors and authorship, have been marshaled to promote the connection between capitalist modernity, reflexivity, and flexibility. Chapter 2 turns again to Florida's work to consider the surprising parallels between his understanding of the creative class and neo-Marxist theories of immaterial labor. What they share most notably is a fundamentally ahistorical conception of creativity as the natural expression of an innate opposition to routine and to management. They deny the contradictory and constitutive histories of artists' labor and of images of artists at work that subtend their conceptions of subjectivity. Labor theories of cultural production, which attend to the position of the producer within the marketplace and within a broader field of social relations, can provide an alternative. I outline two relevant tributaries: the development of the contradictory relationship between artists and the markets for their work; and the mainstreaming of the figure of the artist as valorized mental laborer.

Chapter 3 continues in this transnational and genealogical vein by charting what creative-economy discourse and its models of the flexible

personality owe to an understanding of the creative person that extends back to the late 1950s and 1960s. This was the period when US-based psychologists like Abraham Maslow and Frank Barron began to posit creativity's importance to the optimal self and when progressive management theory, informed and informing psychologists' findings, began imagining all business culture as an outlet for and source of workers' enterprising individual self-fulfillment. This process later found one of its signal articulations in the new-economy rhetoric that celebrated "liberation management" and an idealized flexible workplace whose epitome is the dot-com paradise of jeans and sneakers and foosball tables—a rhetoric that dovetails significantly with creative-economy discourse.¹¹

Little research accounts for how particular ideas about artists' work have exerted their influence—ideas about its flourishing in unstable conditions or about its relationship to economies of competition and prestige, for example. That what exert influence are not simple facts about artists but rather aspects of a discrete aesthetic ideology with its own rich and contentious history is often ignored. Chapter 3 argues that since the early 1950s influential psychologists and management theorists, mostly US based, have tended to present study of artists as straightforward evidence that the social is a form of constraint to be transcended by the effective working self. Their work has had global implications for how art is perceived and for how work is organized. They have depended upon and reinforced the notion that making art is the fundamentally insular expression of one's personally directed passionate devotion to "the task itself," "the materials at hand," or simply "the work"; and they have formed and circulated models of good work as a flexible and self-sufficient enterprise averse to social responsibility, human interdependence, and collective politics. Brian Holmes suggests that rigorously exposing, situating, and undermining mainstream celebrations of the flexible personality are part of the work of narrating new subjectivities.¹² It is part of the collective work of imagining new ideals of autonomy and authenticity to counter the old critique of massification, whose demand for liberation of a limitless human potential from all social constraint proved so useful to management discourse. These new ideals will not arise from yet another innovative discovery originating in the inherently creative intellect. They

will emerge instead from old roots that need only be uncovered and valorized. In Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's compelling formulation, they will stem from sensitivity to others' conditions of existence and from the incrimination of any model of the self that assumes and privileges its egoism.¹³ In concert with these other theorists, I suggest we can challenge the model of the asocial or antisocial flexible individualist by stressing that she is produced by the same social circumstances she is supposed to disavow, and we can attend to socially responsive visions of human agency and identity that are evidently more relevant to many creative workers. I turn to literature to find mediation of these visions.

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The chapters in the second part stem from the observation that, though ideas about their working lives have made them a norm-setting model, writers appear to experience making culture less an inherently fulfilling self-expression and more an encounter with heightened contradictions: between the traditional veneration of artistic autonomy and the reality of conscription into proliferating state and corporate initiatives, and between the social production of culture and the lionization of the individual creator. My focus is how literature has reflexively exemplified, internalized, and critiqued vocabularies and phenomena that are integral to our unfolding creative-economy era.

Chapter 4 takes up two novels that at once exemplify and interrogate the therapeutic imperative to use self-criticism and traumatic experiences as progressive engines through which to achieve personal contentment and career success. It begins with Aravind Adiga's 2008 acclaimed novel *The White Tiger*, which offers a thorough critique of the entrepreneurial personality and was marketed as Adiga's self-critical rejection of his own earlier work as a finance journalist. Its narrator is Balram, a once-destitute servant who decides he must kill to succeed in India's newly global economy of dot-coms and enterprise zones. The marketing story attached to the novel tapped into the creative-labor ideal: interviews and profiles praised it as a product of the author's critical self-reflection, claiming it refuted his earlier work as a mainstream finance journalist by critiquing the neoliberal rhetoric of entrepreneurial innovation. The novel suggests that this rhetoric downplays dependence on an expanding service class

and requires its protagonist's antisocial conception of the flexible self as an engine of capital accumulation. The novel incorporates a further self-conscious commentary on the commercial success of narratives about the Indian economy's dark side. Highlighting how he turns his suffering into an inducement to succeed, the narrator remarks, "To break the law of his land—to turn bad news into good news—is the entrepreneur's prerogative."¹⁴ This remark of course extends to the author as well. If his journalism involved disguising bad news as good news, his literary labor is not altogether different, since his stories of others' suffering produce his success. So if his novel is attentive to the abject and the untold, it is also worried about the service these provide to the writer's career. Self-critical gestures like these are by now an almost clichéd means for writers to negotiate the terms of their participation in the literary field. I argue, thus, that the novel, its marketing, and its reception all emerge as worried responses to the popularity of literary works that emphasize the inequities and depredations of a rapacious capitalism.

Chapter 4 compares Adiga's work to Monica Ali's 2009 novel *In the Kitchen*, homing in on its depiction of the breakdown of Gabriel, an aspiring restaurant owner who embodies many of the features of the creative worker imagined by New Labour policy. I suggest that the novel offers a deeply ambivalent take on the limitations of its protagonist's obsessive interiority. While it suggests that his tortured self-consciousness is a form of social and political paralysis, it also counsels the reader, through the example of Gabriel's employee Oona, that to perceive his foibles with sympathy is to evince the kind of fellow feeling that he himself lacks. I suggest that this ambivalence, balanced between empathy and critique, is how Ali imagines her aesthetic purpose. I relate this imagining to the hostile reception of her novel *Brick Lane* as a Trojan horse for the creative-class takeover of London's East End.

These novels' respective forms of interest in entrepreneurial protagonists who suffer from significant psychoses—psychoses inseparable from their precarious working lives—speak to a broader zeitgeist. When approaching the new world of work, many writers emphasize its troubling psychological effects, its alienating impact, and its reliance on a precarious underclass. Chapter 5 considers writers who, while partaking of the same cultural moment, focus their inquiry on the practice of making culture itself. The chapter takes as its starting point literature development

initiatives that aim to ameliorate social problems and boost intellectual property production by increasing diversity within the creative industries. The best example is *decibel*, an Arts Council program that, among many other projects, partners with Penguin Books to offer prizes and publishing outlets to minority writers. Initiatives like these appear to have heightened writers' sensitivity to the idea that they need to appeal to their belonging to a specific minority niche in order to receive funding, win prizes, and ultimately find success within the market. However, as often as writers make such appeals, they are accused of lacking the authentic community connection that sells their works, and the controversies that arise from such charges tend to aid their literature's further circulation. I suggest that these fraught circumstances are encouraging minority writers to articulate agonized conceptions of their own labor.

A signal case is Daljit Nagra's poetry, in which we witness the author's staging of himself as a brand designed to address a gap in the market with the proliferating commodities united under the author's name. His self-presentation enfoldes objections to his own market value but also includes his recognition that his very objections will become what his brand is made up of, contradictorily adding to the value and interest of his work. Nagra's strategies are usefully compared to Gautam Malkani's in his 2006 novel *Londonstani*. Malkani is editor of the Creative Business page at the *Financial Times*, and his controversial first novel unwittingly reveals his serious reservations about translating his own teenage years in the "rude boy" subculture, which was the subject of his novel and of his Cambridge anthropology honors thesis, into his means of entry into a privileged creative elite.

Critics of British creative-economy diversity initiatives claim that they perpetuate long-standing and often restrictive assumptions about authenticity and representation. "Ethnic" or "minority" writers and artists have often been burdened by the notion that they should articulate an ostensibly whole and organic community. Their work is understood as the innocent "outgrowth" of their belonging to that integral unity, and, as the emanation of a particular culture, their work is presumed to capture its essence.¹⁵ Meanwhile, an existing roster or canon of texts is thought to lack diversity in a way that the inclusion of certain "representative" figures will correct, such that those writers are taken as speaking for a previously

neglected group.¹⁶ Writers who thwart these prescriptions—as many do—tend to find themselves accused of inauthenticity. Such charges are hardly a straightforward problem, however. Despite the seeming naïveté of many official cultural diversity policies, it is debate about authenticity that seems to be particularly pressing, perhaps because contemporary readers and writers already think routinely about how to live authentic lives in which their relationships to family and community are honest and sincere and in which, in Marshall Berman's terms, their "capacity for life, freedom, spontaneity, expressiveness, growth [and] self-development" is fully realized.¹⁷ In other words authenticity debates perhaps provide a uniquely relevant set of terms for literary expression and discussion because we already engage the challenges of authenticity as part of their own reflexive self- and career development.

The focus of Chapter 6 is British writers who take up commissions to work with property developers on urban renewal schemes. It thus outlines some very new purposes to which the aspiration and training to write are currently being put. Writers tend to work with developers in two main ways. The first can be deemed a poetic function and has some precedent, as they contribute words for public art to feature in new or revitalized structures. The second function is a newer one, focused on narrative, as they facilitate public storytelling about a region's history, present character, and possible futures, before finding creative ways to convey the gist of what they have gathered for the public to read and for developers to consider and, at times, implement. The rise of the writer-consultant clearly signals the use of culture as an aid to gentrification. Yet we see in writers' own thinking about their work as consultants, and in the various products of their commissioned labor, that they continue to express concern about the precise relationship between art and the official development establishment. Writers' descriptions of their commissioned work either evince some hesitant hope that they might have a progressive impact on the renewal or urban capital or suggest that they are content to be the sanctioned opposition to the process. Even if we decide that their autonomy is imagined, we cannot deny that their own faith in it informs how they engage with and understand the projects to which they are aligned. I argue that, far from making the question of the artist's relation to capital more passé than it already was, the work

of the writer-consultant reveals the question's ongoing salience, as its permutations are inscribed in and inseparable from writers' fulfillment of their contracts.

Use of writers and other artists as consultants appeals to developers keen to justify their work as attentive to the public interest and motivated by goals greater than profit making. Ian McEwan's 2005 novel *Saturday*, the focus of Chapter 7, pivots upon a similar sense of art's anti-instrumental impetus. The novel has received a lot of scholarly attention, perhaps because there is little agreement about the meaning of the novel's technique. For every reader who laments its insufficient distance from the focalizing consciousness of its protagonist, neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, another remarks upon its subtle revelation of the blinkered outlook of the privileged male professional living in a posh home in London. There appears to be consensus, though, about the novel's pivotal scene, in which Baxter, an underclass home intruder suffering from Huntington's disease, is moved against his intent to harm the Perownes after hearing Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" read aloud. The scene tends to be read as affirming art's ameliorative capacities: in the face of the aesthetic, the intending criminal retreats, his capacity to be moved by poetry proving his heretofore hidden humanity.

I argue, however, that if we attend to the novel's intensive interest in the nature of *Henry's* consumption of art, the idea of McEwan's faith in its transformative potential becomes hard to support. I argue that *Saturday* presents the arts, especially music and the visual arts, as all too easily made into signs of its protagonist's elite status and props to his conventional modes of self-affirmation. It presents literature, the medium that Henry fails to appreciate, as holding the most potential to act as what Russell Keat calls a "meta-good," meaning a good that may cause us to reflect upon the relative value of other kinds of goods to human well-being.¹⁸ However, it also highlights what appear to be insurmountable barriers to this potential ever being realized. I thus interpret the novel as a highly ironic treatment of New Labour's attempts to connect art to social inclusion. It suggests that, in an era in which art is asked to do much but appears to change little, the writer's task is to enumerate and scrutinize the substantial barriers to his medium's own effectiveness.

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This study, reading the presence of the literary in creative-economy discourse against literature's own interest in the instrumentalization of culture, does not deny outright that literature can operate as a site of resistance. Literature can critique the excesses and inequities of neoliberal capital, and its rigorous focus on the inner life can allow us to perceive anxiety, guilt, and other negative feelings hidden behind the cheery face that mainstream discourse draws for today's workers. However, in its very criticality, literature can also exemplify and internalize some of the foundational aspects of the creative-economy turn. Most formulations of creative work have a vision of autonomy from instrumental imperatives built into them. During the New Labour years in particular, policymakers, social scientists, and management theorists routinely enjoined people to look within, beyond materialistic concerns, as a way to uncover an authentic expressive self to participate in market activity; contradictorily, one's faith in one's distance from market imperatives was said to make one better able to engage in work that would prove both economically and socially productive.

I suggest that this emphasis on the market value of an authentic self should be read in relation to a broader social and cultural history. Just as psychologists were turning to the study of creativity after World War II, psychological terminology was being popularized in unprecedented ways, and a therapeutic imperative was encouraging people to imagine themselves as constantly pursuing better versions of themselves. Indeed, overlapping therapeutic and Maslovian terminologies, celebrating the self in reflexive and lifelong pursuit of its own best version, are by now culturally dominant. Fomented by a widespread embrace of the value of the artistic way of life,¹⁹ by the 1980s the individual's interior world seems to have become, in Timothy Aubry's terms, "the site of greatest importance, interest, complexity, depth, and fulfilment in the world" and "the staging ground for all the suffering, risk, trouble, and heroism that . . . continue to be perceived as necessary aspects of a meaningful life."²⁰ According to Nikolas Rose, individuals are now "incited to live as if making a *project* of themselves: they are to *work* on their emotional world, their domestic and conjugal pleasure, to develop a 'style' of living that will maximize the worth of their existence to themselves"; this process is, moreover,

linked to the “rise of a new breed of spiritual directors”—novelists among them—who help instill a “reflexive hermeneutics which will afford self-knowledge and self-mastery.”²¹ Embrace of the primacy of the therapeutic self, motivated by nonmaterial or postmaterialist goals and committed to constant indeterminacy and self-evolution, converges with the neoliberal image of the flexible creative worker whose career is her primary site of self-discovery. In this light, if writers mark their own distance from art’s instrumental applications, they find particularly rich material because readers of literature are themselves inclined to disavow instrumental goals as secondary to, or as inhibitors of, immaterial goods like self-knowledge, authenticity, originality, and happiness. So literature’s anti-instrumental and self-critical gestures may exemplify and model larger cultural mores and may be highly marketable for precisely this reason. Instead of simply celebrating these gestures, I attend to the material conditions, informed by a broader set of sociopolitical circumstances, which make them so appealing.

I focus, in addition, on ways in which writers have themselves reacted to the palatability of many forms of critique. The writers I study cannot be said to assume the validity of routine anti-instrumental and self-critical gestures and can by no means be summarily dismissed as complicit in circulating the neoliberal model of the ideal self. Instead, each of my readings suggests more troubled and more tangled forms of self-consciousness, far distant from any celebratory self-appreciation. Among the works I consider in detail are some that reckon with the ambivalent consequences of an excessive focus on interiority and individual expressivity, some that suggest an inability to either embrace or disavow entirely the idea that art should be separate from any instrumental application, and some that attempt not simply to critique but to respond to critique’s apparent exhaustion within a cultural economy so able to accommodate it. Writers have been contributing to a broader questioning of conceptions of culture that literary tradition has helped to constitute and legitimate: conceptions emphasizing a self-referencing interiority and creativity, self-expression and self-invention, freedom from constraint of any kind, and that ideal of the autonomous artwork, expressive of individual genius and innovation, that has proven so useful to neoliberal capital.²² But this questioning cannot be celebrated in any simple terms.

It should be noted that visual artists have long been committed to affirming a fundamentally social view of their creative practice. Claire Bishop has recently discussed how the rise of “participatory art” and “relational aesthetics,” in which artists collaborate with co-producing participants in the creation of social situations, has been motivated by an “ethics of authorial renunciation.”²³ Yet she argues that developments in the visual arts prove that collaborative activities, often promoted regardless of their aesthetic merits and particular political purposes, are an insufficient response to the problems of the art world’s complicities and incapacities. The idea that artists should be involved not only in their own career development as solo authors but also in the forwarding of social goals is one that neoliberal governments have tended to embrace; self-managed career development and commitment to social goals are promoted as entirely compatible directives, and it is hardly the case that all social practices, processes, commitments, and transformations are automatically progressive. The point then is not to suggest that singular authorship activities might or should be replaced with collaborative production of social processes and situations of whatever stripe. What matters rather is that we highlight the techniques and strategies that artists have developed as they have come to focus on the problem of the instrumentalization of their practice, including of its legacies of “negation, disruption and antagonism.”²⁴ A key target has been the celebrification and circulation of the model of the virtuoso star producer. What has emerged to challenge this model is, sometimes, straightforward insistence on the priority of social bonds. In other instances, though, we find what I take to be more productive emphases: on the social constitution and framing of models that privilege autonomy; and on an aesthetic practice driven not by the solo author’s self-definition and self-validation but rather by a constant unraveling of the ideal of her self’s priority and sufficiency.

Writers join this debate belatedly and with some difficulty, in part because mainstream literature is historically inseparable from the model of unique expression protected by copyright on the grounds that it is one individual’s original work. The writers I discuss in Chapter 6, who are engaged in work with communities, tend to renounce this model, if only for the sake and duration of those projects, and are akin to socially engaged visual artists in that they perceive their work as an opportunity

to involve the public in participation in forwarding broader social goals. Most of the writers I study, though, are hesitantly qualifying traditional ideologies of authorship from within the tradition itself. Their takes on the idea that creativity's primary engine is a self-willed expressive force are, even when unwitting, consistently agonized and affective. Their writing suggests not a contended giving up of one's controlling position for the sake of fostering a participatory community of creators but rather a struggle against oneself, against one's own work, and against the traditions of one's medium.

To worry about the formation and circulation of the value of creativity is hardly new. This worrying has in recent years become more focused and more visible, as more and more parties to a global conversation about the creative economy have highlighted the pathologies of the ethos of individual self-management and self-referencing introspection, and have advocated an understanding of creativity not as the happily individual innovation that is the engine of enterprise but as a set of socially constituted and situated activities whose purposes and consequences—social and ethical—must be considered and judged. Where there is a willingness to continue to embrace the aesthetic as a space in which value can exist independent of capital, and to support the ideal of productive activity as an end in itself, it is tempered by awareness of the ways that these conceptions have been put to the same uses that they have often been marshaled to oppose.²⁵

A brief reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) begins my Conclusion, in which I highlight a problem that is implicit and perhaps niggling throughout these pages—a problem that other scholars have usefully addressed and whose proper treatment would require a different kind of study than this is.²⁶ I am referring to the matter of how to define artistic autonomy in a way that is attuned to our contemporary moment, a moment in which, in Brian Holmes's terms, the "cultural exception becomes the productive rule."²⁷ My overall approach to this problem is to waver between valuing and challenging writers' claims to autonomy and to suggest that writers are often similarly caught between affirmation and refusal. This wavering—between celebration of the potential of autonomous art, and indicating all of the ways that exact celebration has been useful to neoliberalism—is precisely the critical position I support, and my Conclusion says more about why. I crystallize there what will already

be evident: What might seem at first glance like a split, dividing literature as incipient critique from literature as marketable, palatable critique-*lite*, I see as an essential and united feature of our literary world. The writers I study exhibit various levels of reflexive engagement with the commercial and political aspects of their work, and I think it is important to highlight those differences. However, overall it seems that writers tend now not just to position themselves as critics but to use their work to explore the barriers to effective critique—not least, the incorporation of critique into neoliberal capitalization. A primary theme here is thus literature’s engagement with the incorporation of the value of culture’s autonomy from capital *into* neoliberal capital.

When Pierre Bourdieu wrote about artistic “autonomization,” a process he said reached its fullest flourishing in the bohemian Paris of the nineteenth century, he claimed that writers themselves made a signal contribution to public recognition of bohemia as a “new social entity.” They invented and spread the whole idea of bohemia, as they constructed its “identity, values, norms and myths.” He notes as an example Honoré de Balzac’s 1830 *Traité de la vie élégante*, which posited three classes of being—man who works, man who thinks, and man who does nothing—before drawing attention to the ultimate exception, the artist, whose “idleness is a form of work, and his work a rest,” as he is often found “meditating a masterpiece without appearing to be occupied.” To Bourdieu, schema like Balzac’s helped to constitute the autonomous aesthetic realm that it claimed to be describing. “The reality designated by words in ordinary usage—writer, artist, intellectual—has been made by cultural producers,” Bourdieu writes, through their normative and performative statements about what the world is and what it should be.²⁸ In Bourdieu’s treatment, Balzac was thus a key participant in a successful movement to justify the beliefs of a social grouping of artists who valued their own autonomy from capital—a group that sought, and actually achieved, something of a monopoly hold over the production of interpretations of culture and society. My research is indebted to Bourdieu’s claims because it is interested in how the social world has been shaped by the split between art and commerce that bohemia solidified and valorized. My central research focus is really the afterlife and telling persistence of the art-commerce dialectic that forms the generative heart of Bourdieu’s whole scholarly endeavor.

Boltanski and Chiapello consider how the “artistic critique” of capital—the critique that Bourdieu thought reached its zenith in an authentic bohemia—influenced the social movements of the 1960s and encouraged the transformation of the capitalist workplace into a space of self-appreciation. Jasper Bernes argues succinctly that what results are “new forms of autonomy and self-management that are really regimes of self-harrying, self-intensification, and inter-worker competition disguised as attempts to humanize the workplace and allow for freedom and self-expression in work.” It isn’t so much that artists have been straightforwardly determining the transformation of spheres to which they do not belong, however. It is rather that they and their working habits have been a source of answers to questions that press upon all working people and are thus woven through the social fabric. In writers’ work, and in their personae, they provide terminology and discursive critique, shaping a “network of terms, practices, attitudes and values” that firmly bind the workplace to what Bernes memorably deems “the aesthetic situation.”²⁹

It seems that literary writers now rarely feel that they have the kind of power to construct that social imaginary that Bourdieu attributed to figures like Balzac, Flaubert, and Baudelaire. They tend rather to consider the dissipation of literature’s power and the attenuation of public faith in the notion that there is any merit to the idea of an autonomous aesthetic realm. They take up the autonomization process not as an easy and assumed inheritance but as a problem in search of a solution. I hope that my approach to this problem will encourage more study of writers as cultural practitioners interested in the uses to which their work is put. Literary studies’ relative inattention to matters of cultural policy and cultural work may be another sign of the trenchancy of some of the conceptions of creative expression that I explore—conceptions of its “antagonism toward counting,” its inherent aversion to state intervention and to economic rationalities, or of its relative autonomy from the state and from capital.³⁰ As Stephen Schryer has recently argued, literary intellectuals still want to embrace the “compensatory privilege of viewing their work as an anti-instrumental antidote to the triumph of instrumentalism,” even if this means papering over the distinction between instrumental service to capital and instrumental service to social goals to which capitalism is averse.³¹ Hence our ongoing reluctance to cross the disciplinary divide between

social science and humanities inquiry, a divide itself often fathomed as an expression of the split between instrumentalism and its countermeasures. But crossing this divide is important, in particular because a rich seam of social science and social theoretical research precisely illuminates ongoing debates over the idea of autonomous art as endless countermeasure to capital. Throughout these pages I draw upon this research for its insights into cultural workers' conceptions of their own practice in order to frame writers' persistent and pressing inquiry into the merits and limitations of conceiving of the creation of culture as a form of autonomous aesthetic production. This focus suggests ways that literature is informed by and engaged in broad debate about the status of art and uses of culture and cultural value within contemporary life. Indeed, I argue that the current struggle over the nature of creativity and the value of cultural expression, a struggle sometimes referred to as the "war over measure," is one in which literature is thoroughly involved, implicated, and interested.³² The writers I focus on are evidently interested in collapsing distinctions between economic, political, social, and cultural forms of value; they are interested in the diverse social, political, and economic ends to which cultural practice is now being indexed. An interdisciplinary approach, balanced between literary studies and social science work in geography, sociology, and psychology, is thus a necessary response to the interests of the writing in question. One cannot fully understand how these writers conceive of and engage in the work of writing literature without paying attention to the broad political-economic movement toward neoliberalism and to the attendant transformation of cultural policy by creative-economy discourse.