

June 4th Workshop at the GLC

One-Way Street?

Cultural diversity and technological change: the London Industrial Strategy and the cultural industries.

'When the revolution came in 1848, Alexander Dumas published an appeal to the workers of Paris, in which he presented himself as their like. In twenty years, he said, he had produced 400 novels and 35 plays; he had provided a living for 8,160 people: proofreaders and typesetters, machine operators and cloakroom attendants; he even spares a thought for the claque.'

'...a Rabelaisian joy in quantity'

Walter Benjamin

Traditionally arguments about state policy and culture have always taken the form of arguments about levels of subsidy: Labour cares more about culture because it spends more. But there are other ways of thinking about culture - particularly with regard to the modern technological forms of cultural production: recorded music, television, cinema, publishing. Cultural production is desirable not only because it offers, for example, a critical mirror to society, provides pleasure and self-awareness, engages people in their emotional and affective lives, lifts them out of the daily routines of getting and spending and so on - but also because it provides jobs! In fact the leisure and cultural industries are likely to be major points of growth in employment from now until the year 2000.

Therefore a radical and innovative cultural policy has to take seriously the prospect of intervening in the newer, technological forms of cultural production. What is required is a policy on video, cable television, the record industry, publishing and so on, as well as the traditional concerns for live music, the theatre, museums and galleries. Such a strategic cultural policy would not only create possibly tens of thousands of new jobs, but it would also turn the 'one-way streets' of broadcast television, record production and publishing - that is to say one way systems of communication from the producers to the consumers - into two-way systems of participation and popular cultural production. For the new technologies now make it possible - for all those who wish - to make their own cassette tapes, publish their own small books and magazines, produce their own video television programmes, outside of the market-place which is currently dominated by the multi-national companies. This doesn't mean that we turn our backs on the monopolies and simply cultivate our own small gardens - but it does mean that we create both the demand and the expertise for popular control and accountability.

In Britain, as elsewhere, the leisure and cultural industries are beginning to take their place as key sectors in the modern economy. In 1984 consumer spending on 'leisure' was at an all time high of some £47 billion, 24.5% of total consumer spending. London's largest manufacturing sector is that concerned with printing and publishing, currently employing 112,000 people. Electrical engineering which provides, amongst other things, the infrastructure of cultural transmission is the second largest manufacturing sector in London employing 99,300 people. A further 50,000 people are employed in the audio and audio-visual industries, 20,000 in advertising (59% of the UK total) and another 30,000 in the music industry. According to the Institute of Employment Research at Warwick University, between 1980 and 1990, the category of 'literary, artistic and sports' will be the fastest growing area of employment, increasing by 30% nationally in that period.

Therefore there are real and clearly socially useful jobs to be created for London's 390,000 registered unemployed in the field of cultural production, distribution and exchange. The GLC strategy for the cultural industries is not just about challenging the ownership and control by the major multinational companies of production and distribution, but also about developing a greater diversity of choice through the creation of more specialist and flexible forms - through support for what is known as the 'independent' sector - the hundreds of small music labels, the hundreds of small publishing initiatives, including community publishing projects, feminist and ethnic publishers, the growing number of film and video production groups outside of the BBC and the commercial television companies, local and community radio stations and so on. Not only do these projects offer a greater diversity of choice, they are also create more jobs too. It may seem strange to want to link cultural policies with economic policies, but in fact the two are completely inter-related and any discussions about 'the quality of life' cannot proceed without direct reference to both. Cultural democracy is predicated on the economic security and opportunity which come with socially useful and meaningful employment.

In recent years the GLC has grant-aided many hundreds of cultural projects throughout London - and in doing so has created many hundreds of new jobs - some of which have become economically self-sufficient. Through the Greater London Enterprise Board it has invested in record production, in book distribution, in video distribution schemes, and worked towards creating infrastructures of distribution and promotion which will enable many smaller projects to get their cultural products to a wider range of people and therefore to become more commercially viable.

The purpose of organising the day conference, and the workshop on the cultural industries to which you are particularly invited, is to present the different sector strategies and to answer questions and seek a wider discussion of the policies presented. Please find enclosed, then, the programme for the day - which includes details of the various sector workshops - and a copy of the chapter of the London Industrial Strategy on the 'cultural industries'. Also attached in a list of the people to whom we are extending this invitation. We regard the London Industrial Strategy as a radical and innovative way of thinking about work and the future, both in London and as a possible model elsewhere, and look forward greatly to your comments, contributions and attendance on June 4th at County Hall. The test of the strategy on the expansion of the cultural industries in London will be the extent to which people active in the industries themselves wish to become involved. That is why we sincerely hope that you will attend.

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