Timon Beyes,
Jörg Metelmann (eds.)

The Creativity Complex

A Companion to
Contemporary Culture

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The Creativity Complex

A Companion to Contemporary Culture

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Wherever we turn, we find creative practices and creative spaces, creative organizations and creative subjects. At work or in public places, in media representations and in advertisements, on social platforms, in schools and universities: There is a demand to be new and special, conspicuous and singular. How did this creativity complex and its imperative to be creative come about? Which terms and concepts enable us to understand its multiple and partly contradictory forms and processes? Where are its limits? Gathering and interweaving 40 short and incisive essays, this companion maps, investigates and illuminates the contemporary creativity complex.

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Introduction

The Creativity Complex

Timon Beyes, Jörg Metelmann

No matter where one looks, creativity can be found everywhere in contemporary society, from creative spaces and creative practices to creative subjects and creative organizations. To belong in contemporary society, everyone must satisfy the entry requirement of being creative, of being new, unique, and above all, different. An essential part of everyday work and daily routines, creativity is just as evident on social networks and technological platforms as in advertising and traditional mass media, and it even seems to have become a compulsory concern of school and higher education. As though taking a cue from the tradition of liberal arts colleges in the United States, the undergraduate program at the university where one of the two editors of this book currently works was recently described as “creative and inspirational.” In the German-speaking world, a creative and inspirational university would have long sounded like an oxymoron, and the notion of an institute of higher education providing for creativity would have only made sense for design and artistic programs even a few decades ago, and only then if the students were lucky enough to have Joseph Beuys as their teacher.¹

In contemporary society, creativity can be found not only where one would most expect it: in the media sector; in the cultural and creative industries (Lovink/Rossiter 2007); or in the artistic field (White 1993), where the term nonetheless retains somewhat negative connotations (Loacker 2010; Rosler 2010/2011). Even where one might least expect it, traditional institutions have started capitalizing on the currency of creativity. “In an epidemic manner,” the

1 | See <https://www.leuphana.de/news/meldungen/titelstories/2014/bachelor-studium-kreativ-und-inspirierend.html>; on the short-lived “Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research” (Freie internationale Hochschule für Kreativität und interdisziplinäre Forschung), which was founded by Joseph Beuys among others, see <http://pinakothek-beuys-multiples.de/de/glossary/freie-internationale-universitat-fiu/>.

term ‘creativity’ has made an “entrance into administrative and technocratic literature” (Wuggenig 2016: 12). In *The Entrepreneurial Self*, sociologist Ulrich Bröckling quotes a now-discredited educational theorist as saying, “Creativity is without doubt *a*, if not *the*, ‘salvational word’ of the present moment” (2016: 101, emphasis in the original). “Faith in the creative potential of the individual is the secular religion of the entrepreneurial self,” Bröckling concludes in the vein of this theological language (ibid). While defending the emancipatory potential of collective creativity, philosopher and sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato observes that the ability to expressive oneself creatively is no longer merely in demand but is now a condition of employability. Hence, the neoliberal mottos “Be creative” and “Express yourself” have taken their place alongside the classic liberal economic standby “Make yourself rich” (2017: 175).

Therefore, creativity in contemporary society is understood as both a “moral imperative” (Osborne 2003: 508) and a “central mode of post-Fordist subjectivization” (Raunig/Wuggenig 2016: 72; Raunig/Ray/Wuggenig 2011). Today, you can perhaps become different things, but you have to be creative. For this reason, creativity was untenable to cultural theorist Stuart Hall, the concept having been appropriated and corrupted by technological, commercial, and entrepreneurial practices (2010: x). Over two decades earlier, sociologist Niklas Luhmann glossed the growing presence of the term as a kind of “democratically-deformed ingenuity” (1988: 16). Like the concept of genius, creativity is indeed characterized by the temporal dimension of the new, the factual (or symbolic) dimension of the distinctive or the significant, and the social dimension of the surprising – albeit on more modest grounds. As Luhmann quips with typical irony, “Anyone who has the talent and makes the effort can turn that into creativity. The only requirements are patience and, of course, job openings” (ibid: 16). A related yet different critique of creativity has been developed by cultural theorist Angela McRobbie (2016), which focuses specifically on the precariousness and insecurity of contemporary work in the creative industries: ostensibly operating in the name of creativity, these industries have actually downgraded any engaged and collective commitment to creativity in favor of training urban middle classes for a workscape without proper job openings and social security.

Of course, the discourse of creativity itself is fueled not only by the complaints about the unacceptability and corruption of the concept or the harmful consequences of its propagation, but also by any ironical or detached take on the concept, such as the reformulation of ‘creativity’ in systems sociology as the “ability to take advantage of opportunities” (Luhmann 1988: 17). The critical approach and the detached approach are both part and parcel of the same ‘creativity complex’. According to sociologist Andreas Reckwitz, this “multipart complex” of creativity is a “historically unprecedented manifestation belonging to the last third of the twentieth century” (2017: 6) – which, it should be added,

continues to shape life, at least in Western societies, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In *The Invention of Creativity*, Reckwitz argues that the emergence of this complex is responsible for the “production” of creativity as a social and cultural phenomenon. Thus, the creativity complex gives rise to a concomitant desire “to think about our own creativity using quite demanding concepts [...], to train it using appropriate techniques, and to form ourselves into creative subjects” (ibid; translation modified).

This book is dedicated to thinking through the creativity complex with the aid of more or less demanding concepts. It does not provide drills for cultivating creativity, but rather reflects on the ascendancy of **Creativity Techniques*. Nor does it include any guidelines for cultivating the creative self, but rather discusses the relationship between the imperative to be creative and the process of **Self-Generation*. It will not offer any tips for designing creative and playful spaces, but inquiries into the aesthetic constitution of the creativity complex in terms of, for instance, **Atmosphere*, **Color*, **Improvisation*, and **Play*. The volume mobilizes nearly 40 concepts, from **Aesthetic Capitalism* to **Work*, for the exploration, investigation, and analysis of the constitution of the creativity complex and the proliferation of ‘creativity’. The conceptual range of the entries in this volume reflects the ubiquity and efficacy of creative topoi, which have also inflected social and cultural discourses in recent years. In this respect, the “currently most-cited works of individual scholarship” that “have the noun ‘creativity’ or the adjective ‘creative’ in the title” come neither from psychology or the newly-dominant discipline of cognitive science, nor from the once-dominant disciplines of philosophy and history, but from the social sciences – another symptom of the creativity complex (Wuggenig 2017: 174). Thus, the concepts addressed in each contribution to this volume identify and illuminate many of the empirical phenomena involved in the expansion of the creative. Taken together, they should also provide a conceptual apparatus for analyzing the creativity pandemic.

In this sense, we would like this book to be understood as a handy, useful companion in the truest sense of a *vade mecum*: a theoretical handbook and a reflexive guide to the creativity complex.² Given the contemporary significance of the creativity complex, this volume can also be understood as a textbook for the analysis of contemporary culture and the contemporary obsession with creative phenomena, processes, and subjects. Each chapter provides a different means of locating the key terms and concepts for comprehending the spread

2 | The subtitle of the German edition of this book is *Vademecum*. The fact that the *vade mecum* was initially used as a term for a genre of theological handbooks serves as a reminder of the deep theological layers still underlying the current call for creativity. It is a fact not lost on Luhmann (1988) among others and dealt with in this volume particularly in the entry on **Guilt*.

of the creative (and of creative people), whether from a social, cultural, economic, material, or technological perspective. To this end, the contributions are also tasked with negotiating the contradictions and limitations of creativity, which is at once a desire, a call, and a command. Learning to think through the multiple facets and ruptures of the creativity complex demands a wealth of empirical detail, explorations of unconventional conceptual territory, and even a somewhat experimental form. This companion or *vade mecum*, with its supply of short entries handy for consultation at the appropriate moment, seems to be the appropriate form.

The Invention of Creativity

The present book would not exist without another: Reckwitz's study of *The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New* (2017), which originally appeared in German with a slightly different subtitle *Die Erfindung der Kreativität: Zum Prozess gesellschaftlicher Ästhetisierung* (2012). This original, influential, and much-debated study provided the basis and the springboard for our own experiment in the form of this volume. Generally proceeding from Reckwitz's observations and arguments, the entries in our companion establish further connections, some in dialogue with Reckwitz more explicitly than others, and thereby continue the exploration and conceptual mapping of the creativity complex. At the same time, *The Creativity Complex* goes beyond *The Invention of Creativity*, with each of the contributions deepening, broadening, or pushing to the limits of what Reckwitz (as well as Angela McRobbie and Fabian Heubel, 2002) called the 'creativity dispositif'. In keeping with this gesture, the last entry in this companion is provided by Reckwitz himself, who pushes the limits of his previous work in the form of a postscript written especially for this volume. In the **Postscript*, Reckwitz puts his own theory of the creativity dispositif in dialogue with the central theory of his next book, *The Society of Singularities: On the Structural Transformation of Modernity* (2019), thereby interrogating their shared concepts including 'aestheticization', 'culturalization', and 'the new'. At the same time, Reckwitz's postscript also puts the constellations of concepts in this volume into conversation with the discussion about the role of creativity in the current structural transformation of modernity, thereby suggesting another avenue for future research.

The Invention of Creativity not only provides evidence for the propagation of creative narratives and practices, and for the critique of their banality and corruption, but also an analytical approach to 'doing genealogy' in social theory. Like *The Creativity Complex*, Reckwitz's genealogy of the creativity dispositif takes the phenomenon of creativity seriously as the result of social power relations and one of their driving forces. Taking creativity seriously as a social phenomenon entails a shift in focus from the individualistic qualities of crea-

tive activity to the collective level of sociality. The decisive starting point for Reckwitz's analysis consists in expanding two central dogmas of modernity theory – 'formal rationalization' (and the attendant processes of bureaucratization, marketization, and scientification) and 'functional differentiation' (and the accompanying distinctions among social systems or social fields) – so as to include practices and processes of 'social aestheticization'. In the "Preface to the English Edition" of the *Invention of Creativity*, Reckwitz situates his project within the German sociological tradition of modernity theory stretching from Max Weber and Georg Simmel to Jürgen Habermas and Ulrich Beck. His study seeks to redress the relative neglect of processes of aestheticization in the dominant categories of modernity theory, where aesthetics tends to appear in the guise of de-aestheticization (in the case of 'formal rationalization'),³ and in the form of field- or system-specific aesthetic practices like those of the artistic field or the mass media (in the case of 'social differentiation'). Hence, Reckwitz's study reflects the further inheritance of a humanities-based tradition of thinking aestheticization in the German-speaking world (Rebentisch 2011). In this respect, it complements the major critical project of (not only German) sociology, which is a form of 'social critique' that opposes social inequality and disintegration, with a form of 'aesthetic critique' that seeks to provide no less than a "revision of the sociological perspective" (Reckwitz 2015: 21).⁴ As a third area of influence, Reckwitz mentions the current (German-language) boom in the critical analysis of contemporary society informed by cultural theory and cultural sociology (e.g., Ulrich Bröckling, Hartmut Rosa, Joseph Vogl). In addition to this explicitly-cited German tradition, the more implicit influence of French and Anglo-American cultural sociology and social theory make *The Invention of Creativity* open to further connections beyond the German-speaking world (and provides one of the main reasons for the publication of parallel editions of this volume in English and German): One exemplary connection can be found in Reckwitz's usage of a practice-oriented and pluralistic concept of 'culture'; another in his book's fruitful relation to Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's influential study *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2007).

To be sure, the rise of creativity could definitely be examined in the alternative terms of the mechanisms of rationalization involved in its scientification, marketization, or even bureaucratization. It could also clearly be approached

3 | The social-theoretical axiom of a generalized 'de-aestheticization' (*Entästhetisierung*) of society is not to be confused with the **deaestheticization* (*Entkunstung*) of artistic practices within the field of art since the 1960s.

4 | Reckwitz's positioning of *The Invention of Creativity* can also be read as an attempt to more fully develop a theoretical program that can already be found in modernist sociology, e.g., in Georg Simmel's sociology of the senses, fashion, and urban life, and in Gabriel Tarde's sociology of imitation and innovation.

through its differentiation in distinct societal systems or fields, where the most obvious candidates would be art, traditional mass media or its platform successors, and the recent cultural and creative industries. However, neither of these approaches would fully illuminate the defining characteristic of the creative turn: its aesthetic constitution. Therefore, the great social theory concepts of ‘rationalization’ and ‘differentiation’ need to be accompanied by a third term accounting for what the other two completely exclude, take with a grain of salt, or at best restrict to sub-sectors of society: ‘aestheticization’. In Reckwitz’s own words, “Modernity is not only a de-aestheticization machine but also an *aestheticization machine*” (2017: 19, emphasis in the original).

In this modest revision of modernity theory, Reckwitz’s approach accounts for the sensuous, affective dimension of social forms and processes, which is also the only way of accounting for the unique “duality of the *wish* to be creative and the *imperative* to be creative, subjective desire and social expectations” (ibid: 2, emphasis in the original). In Reckwitz’s analysis, affective intensity and corporeal perception are the elementary components of social practice, and, with that, the objects and technologies that make social affects possible and influence sensory perception in the first place. In Reckwitz’s terminology, there are two different “modes of the aesthetic”: “aesthetic practices” refer to autotelic, self-referential conduct, devoid of any instrumental rationality, that is embodied and organized through the senses; aesthetic perception takes place in “aesthetic episodes” or events (ibid: 12-13). These two modes of the aesthetic provide the raw material for the rise of creativity as a social and quasi-theological order. “The social complex of creativity,” in one of Reckwitz’s succinct formulations, “territorializes the floating processes of the aesthetic according to its own particular pattern,” – namely, “the production and uptake of *new* aesthetic events” (ibid: 9, emphasis in the original).⁵ ‘Creativity’ is thus Reckwitz’s name for an aesthetic regime of the new, the distinctive, and the surprising, which relies on sensuous perception and affective intensity. In this sense, the astonishing spread of creative narratives and practices is symptomatic of the aestheticization of the social. While this process cannot be reduced to either economic or media-based mechanisms, it is interwoven with processes of economization and technologically-facilitated mediatization. The amalgamation of artistic and economic practices, the creation of one’s own self, the design and development of urban spaces primarily in cultural and atmospheric terms – all of these are

5 | Reckwitz’s understanding of the aestheticization of the social restricts ‘aestheticization’ and ‘aesthetic theories’ to the affective experience as a self-referential practice. Arguably, this is a narrowed-down (and perhaps individualized) approach to the aesthetic in relation to affective consumption; it avoids dealing with the aesthetics of particular (art) works or aesthetic theories of production and reception (Henning 2016: 311).

part of the rise of social aestheticization in the guise of diverse practices and narratives of creativity.

The Creativity Complex: On the Genesis of the Book

The analysis carried out in *The Invention of Creativity* ends in a sense with Reckwitz's diagnosis of the imperative to be creative "in the form it has been assuming since the 1980s" (2017: 30). To study the emergence of processes related to creativity in different social fields and to track the diffusion of creative practices and episodes, Reckwitz draws on Michel Foucault's concept of the 'dispositif'. As Sverre Raffnsøe points out in contributions to this volume (**Dispositif*, **Genealogy*), the Foucauldian approach also allows Reckwitz to elaborate on the genealogy of the creativity dispositif. Reckwitz's whole endeavor, in Raffnsøe's reading, is an attempt to answer a central question posed near the end of the book: "How has the creativity dispositif managed to assert its power?" (ibid: 214) A similar, slightly more qualified question is posed in Reckwitz's preface to the English translation: "How did creativity come to be accepted as a desirable norm?" (ibid: vii)

In either case, Reckwitz's recourse to Foucauldian dispositif analysis may provide a means of bracketing together a variety of practices under a single term, but it also puts pressure on his own argument. For Foucault, at least in Giorgio Agamben's reading, a 'dispositif' responds to a socio-historical 'urgency' (Fr. *l'urgence*), an emergency, imperative, or necessity in 'gouvernementality' (e.g., in sexuality, surveillance, or other forms of 'biopolitics'). Thinking through the question-and-answer structure implicit in Foucault's concept of the dispositif, Reckwitz formulates what is perhaps the book's most far-reaching thesis: "What urgent problem is the creativity dispositif responding to? It is precisely the lack of affect in classical, especially organized, modernity" (ibid: 202; **Affect Culture*, **Aesthetic Capitalism*, **Organization*). Thus, the historical end of Reckwitz's genealogical study lends a renewed *affective* inflection to his seemingly neutral claims of revising sociological theories of modernity through the addition of **aestheticization*. Presented as a response to a 'lack of affect', the very term 'creativity' already contains an emphatic dimension: In discussing something under the rubric of creativity today, then, we make it part of the longer history of emotions in Western cultures, most of which tended not to talk about feelings with such great intensity, following a first semantic climax around 1800, or to come up with concepts for emotions in such great variety until around the year 2000 (Frevert et al. 2011). Reckwitz's thesis of 'affect deficiency in modernity', which could be read alongside his comments on the structural transformation of modernity in the Postscript to this volume, thus intervenes in a foundational narrative of transatlantic culture: the separation of mind and body, of intellect and feeling (cf. Metelmann 2016). It is

this framework that creates the possibility of discussing the creativity complex not only with reference to various phenomena (e.g., **Coaching*, **Consumption*, **Co-Creation*, **Pop*), but also to axioms of (modernity) theory (e.g., **Aestheticization*, **Deaestheticization*, **Plasticity*, **Guilt*). The premise of the present book is that creativity's configuration as a 'complex' makes its analysis pack a greater punch.

Our emphasis on the 'creativity *complex*' is intended to expand the horizon of analysis (once again, following Reckwitz's eye-opening study). Beyond the discussion of the 'creativity dispositif', the purview of the 'creativity complex' includes mapping a constellation of diverse and heterogeneous elements of our aesthetic present. What may be lost in terms of theoretical sharpness, in comparison to dispositif analysis guided by questions of "urgency," should be gained through a sharper, because in itself more contradictory, relation to the present. In this respect, the concept of the 'complex' (which Reckwitz does not develop) lends itself particularly well to the study of creativity, including that the concept itself contains all sorts of playful and entertaining connotations. To start with a relatively callow pun, "The complex is complex." Beyond its longstanding psychological associations with the 'Oedipus complex', the 'Electra complex', or the 'Napoleon complex', the term 'complex' also evokes society's large-scale power formations, such as the 'military-industrial complex' or the current 'security-entertainment complex', and often contains a latent potential to provoke conspiracy theories (Martin 2003, Beyes 2019). As a productive figure of paranoid thought, the 'complex' also contains a reflexive dimension that applies well to the field of academic research: To what extent can academia (with this book explicitly included), which currently likes to conceive of itself as "creative and inspirational," position itself productively within the current aesthetic regime, provided that, in principle, academia considers things in retrospect (i.e., is not *new*), publishes with a small or minimal impact (i.e., is not *significant*), and parses the world into footnotes (i.e., is not *surprising*)?

In spite of these reservations, we have maintained great pleasure in coming to terms with the creativity complex in the years following an informal conversation with Andreas Reckwitz over dinner one night in St. Gallen, Switzerland. Based on our joint idea of thinking through and beyond *The Invention of Creativity*, we organized two international symposia, which were supported by funds from the Haniel Stiftung within the framework of the Haniel Seminars and the European Haniel Program on Entrepreneurship and the Humanities. Following our initial meeting in April 2014, the first conference took place in Copenhagen, Denmark in October 2014, and the second in St. Gallen in October 2016. The contributions from the participants in these symposia formed the basis of our *vade mecum*, which was expanded through entries on other relevant concepts from scholars already working on similar topics. While the range of entries included in this volume does not claim to represent an ex-

haustive collection, they should provide a representative constellation of the creativity complex and a serviceable map for its vast terrain. As is commonly the case with this kind of experimental constellation, readers are invited to jump in at any point, to leap ahead, turn back around, or remain in place. The use of *italics*, as demonstrated in this introduction, should facilitate the process of making connections among the various entries, and create further paths for both non-linear reading and future studies of the creativity complex.

We would like to thank Andreas Reckwitz and all of the participants at the symposia, and of course everyone involved in the creation of this volume. We are particularly grateful to the Haniel Stiftung, especially Rupert Antes and Anna-Lena Winkler, for making the symposia possible; to Morten Rishede Philipsen in Copenhagen and Sabrina Helmer in St. Gallen, for organizing them; and to the University of St. Gallen's Publication Fund for supporting the production of the (German and English) volumes. Also, the creation of both books would not have been possible without the great support of Maximilian Schellmann in Copenhagen and Inga Luchs in Lüneburg. Thanks, too, to transcript and Annika Linnemann for the superb cooperation. Ultimately, this English edition would not exist without the felicitous translations (as well as comments, advice, and further edits) by Erik Born and, as indicated in the imprint, by Juan-Jacques Aupiais, Jonathan Davenport, Daniel Binswanger Friedman, Mariaenrica Giannuzzi, Sophia Leonard, and Matthew Stoltz.

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Aesthetic Capitalism

Elena Beregow

The notion that ‘culture’ and ‘economy’ form two distinct, even opposing, areas of society remains a powerful one, to this day. The concept of ‘culture’, especially in the German tradition of post-Kantian aesthetics, is usually associated with ‘high culture’, the fine arts, the sublime, and freedom from purpose (*Zweckfreiheit*). Hence, culture is a ‘soft sphere’, which is free from the iron-clad laws of the economy. While contemporary sociology rarely adopts this understanding of culture explicitly, many sociological diagnoses implicitly presuppose distinct spheres of culture and economy in their descriptions of the mixed logic resulting from the ‘economization’ of the social. The economy serves a hegemonic control function in these sociological diagnoses, which often turn out to be complaints, and spreads throughout supposedly non-economic areas, such as culture, aesthetics, and subjectivity.

With the concept of ‘aesthetic capitalism’, Andreas Reckwitz effects a change of course in *The Invention of Creativity* (2017), moving away from the frequently invoked economization of culture and toward an **aestheticization* of the economic. However, Reckwitz’s claim of providing a comprehensive social diagnosis emphasizes his ambition of providing more than a mere reversal of the economization thesis. For Reckwitz, the economy is only one component in a more comprehensive process of social aestheticization, including art, the media, and other sectors; analyzing these different large-scale processes together is what leads to his thesis about a ‘society of creativity’. The guiding assumption of Reckwitz’s study is that contemporary society is characterized by the reconfiguration and social intensification of aesthetic principles. Reckwitz’s main point is that sociology needs to examine capitalist economy not only as an object of aestheticization, but as its driving force. The economy is not only being aestheticized; it has highly aesthetic effects itself. The structural core of this process of aestheticization can be found in the creativity dispositif – a hybrid form of the aesthetic and the economic that blurs the boundaries between art and economy.

Yet what does ‘aestheticization’ mean for Reckwitz? Starting from the concept of ‘aesthesia’, which lends an aesthetic accent to any kind of sensation, Reckwitz limits ‘the aesthetic’ to a very specific mode of sensory perception: “practices of self-dynamic sensuousness and affectivity freed of all rational purpose” (2017: 35). In other words, the distinguishing characteristic of the aesthetic is the self-referential character of the sensuous, whose only purpose is itself. We do not perceive things for any specific purpose but only for the sake of perception (ibid). In assuming that the aesthetic has its own dynamic character, Reckwitz follows the classical Kantian understanding of aesthetics as ‘disinterested pleasure’, and thus also draws a sharp contrast between the rational and the aesthetic. As a result, ‘aestheticization’, as a processual category, implies the social expansion and increasing complexity of a purpose-free aesthetic (ibid: 34-35). Even if Reckwitz does not share the coupling of the aesthetic with the true, the good, and the beautiful in Kantian aesthetics, his reading of ‘classical social theory’ still raises the question of how capitalist modernism updated Kantian aesthetics – especially since he considers the main characteristic of modernity to be a decisive moment of de-aestheticization. Reckwitz’s reading of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim reveals a strikingly closed image of society: Capitalization, objectification, and functional differentiation are the driving forces in a process of de-aestheticization, which prioritizes instrumental rationality over sensual principles and systematically excludes the aesthetic. At work in this process are the “modernist dualism of the aesthetic and the rational” (ibid: 16), which is simultaneously a conceptual distinction that seeps in to sociology from classical aesthetics and a “real bifurcation” (ibid) with practical social effects.

Against this process of de-aestheticization, Reckwitz claims to campaign for the hybrid forms that would reveal modernity to be a process also of parallel forms of aestheticization. To this end, he identifies five “agents of aestheticization” (ibid: 19-22): two ‘classical’ aesthetic areas, “the expansionism of art” (**Deaestheticization*) and “the media revolution” (**Pop*); “the rise of the subject,” (**Self-Generation*) which addressed the individual, starting in the late-eighteenth century, as an equally reflexive and sensitive subject; “the expansion of the world of objects,” which led to the creation of a variety of novel artefacts in technology, architecture, and **design* (**Atmosphere*, **Color*); and “the rise of capitalism,” which had previously been a marked sector of de-aestheticization in modernity and gets transformed into a driving force of aestheticization (**Capital*). For Reckwitz, the explosive power of the aesthetic for capitalist economy can be found above all in a sensual and affective mode of action in the modern world of commodities (**Product*). Since the 1920s, the pressures of expansion and redevelopment have “led capitalism, in two large historic waves, systematically to promote the production of such aesthetic consumer goods, signs and feelings by ‘immaterial labour’” (ibid: 21). Even in Fordism, there was already a creative (though not yet aesthetic) compulsion to innovate, even though its

internal organizational structure also demanded standardization and the repetition of behaviors (ibid: 86-87).

In the second half of the 20th century, this highly organized form of capitalism was reconfigured into something increasingly 'disorganized' – an earlier diagnosis formulated by Scott Lash and John Urry. In *Economies of Signs and Space*, Lash and Urry show that capitalism developed into a global symbolic economy due to its informational expansion and spatiotemporal compression (1994: 10-11). But since 'postmodernism' exceeds rational and cognitive modes of processing, it also increasingly needs to produce an aesthetic reflexivity drawing on the tradition of aesthetic modernity and extending it to everyday life with the help of 'cultures of aesthetic experts' for art, media, and pop culture (ibid: 54; *Valorization).

Modifying the sociological diagnosis of 'disorganized capitalism', Reckwitz's concept of 'aesthetic capitalism' always interprets the symbolic economy from the perspective of its inherent aesthetic effects. Hence, the structural core of contemporary capitalism can be found, according to Reckwitz, in the aesthetic economy, which made the development of the creativity dispositif possible and drives it forward (2017: 89). In the creativity dispositif, the driving forces of aestheticization in modernity crystallize into a new kind of regime of the aesthetically new. Two separate processes converge in the creativity dispositif: the principle of dynamic innovation, which had already been a distinguishing feature of organized capitalism; and the figure of the subject as creative producer modeled on the creative artist (ibid: 23). Once conceived of in aesthetic terms, "the new is understood not as progress or as quantitative increase but as aesthetic – i.e., as a perceived and felt *stimulus*" (ibid, emphasis in the original). While the new was reduced in rational capitalism to technical innovations, and thus also de-aestheticized, the aim of the aesthetic economy, of both its products and organizations, is the "permanent innovation" of "new signs, sense impressions and affects" (ibid: 89). This aestheticization of innovation would subsequently permeate all the individual processes of 'aesthetic labor' – not only the production of aesthetic goods and services in the creative industries (**Creative Cities*), but the meaning of work itself. According to the "post-romantic aestheticization of work" (ibid: 95), labor becomes more fulfilling and rewarding through a commitment to creativity (**Work*). Lastly, the creativity dispositif involves an aesthetically sensitive sphere of consumers, who are themselves depicted as "creative" in their engagement with affective goods and services (ibid: 91; **Consumption*, **Stage*).

As Reckwitz freely admits, the characteristics of the aesthetic economy do not determine the entire economy in all its breadth and heterogeneity. However, according to his thesis, the aesthetic economy still becomes increasingly hegemonic and "gives a strong aesthetic bias to the focus on innovation" (ibid: 91). How might this development be explained? To answer this question, Reck-

witz reconstructs several different origins of aesthetic economies at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. In his argument, there were several different ‘innovators’ in the revision of economic rationalism: the bourgeois arts and crafts movement and the late-bourgeois discourse of the ‘entrepreneur’; the early creative industries and the creative economy in fashion, advertising, and design, which already had a firm place in the Fordist economy; and the early American management theory of the 1950s and the postmodern management discourse of the 1980s (ibid: 92; **Organization*).

This material spectrum, consisting of aesthetic avant-gardes, on the one hand, and management discourses, on the other, is related to Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello’s well-known thesis about capitalism’s appropriation of critique. In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that the legacy of art criticism from the 1960s eventually found its way into the motivational structure of a “projective city” that made activity, i.e., the generation of new projects and contacts, into the main standard of value (2007: 103-163). By turning the artist into an exemplar of economic action, capitalism equipped itself with a cultural foundation of both legitimacy and motivation, which it could not otherwise generate on its own. Unlike Boltanski and Chiapello, Reckwitz does not assume that the field of art will necessarily spread throughout the entire economy, and instead localizes the development of the aesthetic economy “in and around the Fordist, formal-rational economy itself in the early twentieth century” (2017: 92). Although the creative industries and the arts and crafts movement exhibit many various links to the field of art, Reckwitz argues that the radical economic regimes of the new are not essentially oriented toward aesthetics. Early aesthetic economies, such as advertising and fashion, were actually prototypes of the aesthetic dispositif, i.e., of “institutional complexes for production, presentation and consumption” (ibid: 123). In these prototypes, there was, from the beginning, a mixture of aesthetics and instrumental rationality, such as wages and profit. According to Reckwitz’s critique, Boltanski and Chiapello neglect the specific techniques and skills of aesthetic work and thus “fail to capture the structure of the aesthetic economy in its entirety” (ibid: 125). In doing so, Boltanski and Chiapello overlook the important status of the public’s aesthetic sensibility, which had decisive effects on both the production of goods and the culture of work.

Reckwitz’s recurring critique of selectivity also makes clear his own ambition to present a programmatic concept for the analysis of the contemporary economy in the form of ‘aesthetic capitalism’. In using the concept of capitalism as a diagnosis of temporality, Reckwitz implicitly joins a tradition associated with the **critique* of political economy. The fact that Reckwitz is not concerned with the conditions of production and ownership, nor with their corresponding antagonisms, is clear throughout the book, especially when he attributes discord in a creative economy to “a dispersion of attention” (ibid: 212) and “the

advancing aestheticization of social fields” (ibid: 213). Marxist, neoclassical, and cultural-theoretical approaches can often agree on a baseline understanding of ‘capitalism’, which takes its core to be the increase of capital through instrumental rationality (e.g., Boltanski/Chiapello 2007: 40). Were Reckwitz to proceed from this consensus, his definition of ‘the aesthetic’ as a process with its own internal dynamics and its own rational objectives would create a fundamental contradiction between two different ends in themselves – namely, capital and the sensuous. There is a good reason Reckwitz’s book contains only vague and isolated references to the characteristics of aesthetic labor as wage labor and the pressure to turn a profit, which also underlie aesthetic economies (for a Marxist critique of Reckwitz, cf. Loheit 2016). Extending the creativity dispositif to account for both the conditions of exploitation in a highly precarious creative economy and its effects beyond the urban middle class would not only be empirically valuable; it would also have cultural implications and theoretical consequences (**Queer*).

The concept of the creativity dispositif is made for more than a strict analysis of the economy. It crystallizes heterogeneous fields, such as art, the media, urban space, and the individual, into “aesthetic sociality” (Reckwitz 2017: 212). This broad range of applications informs Reckwitz’s decision to adopt Foucault’s concept of the ‘dispositif’, in order to grasp “a whole social network of scattered practices, discourses, systems of artefacts and types of subjectivity” (2017: 28). However, Reckwitz only adopts the Foucauldian analysis of power in an attenuated form, even though he points out that the “old, emancipatory hopes” put in creative work have turned into “frenetic activity geared to continual aesthetic innovation” (ibid: 7). Reckwitz even accuses Foucault of overlooking the affective and emotional dimension of social invocations (ibid: 28-30). For Reckwitz, the “affectivity” of aesthetic perception is the decisive criterion insofar as it forms the core of aesthetic processes along with self-referential sensibility (ibid: 23). From this perspective, aesthetic capitalism is a form of ‘affective capitalism’, which responds to the “affect deficiency in modernity” (ibid: 201) with a qualitative and quantitative increase in affectivity (**Affect Culture*). For Reckwitz, the concept of ‘affect’ can be defined as “culturally moulded, corporeal intensities of stimulation or excitement” (ibid: 12), and is often synonymous with that of emotion. This definition is surprising since Reckwitz’s references to Brian Massumi locate the concept of affect in recent debates about affect theory connected to Deleuze and Spinoza. Their central insight is that affect does not function culturally or consciously, and always has de-individualization effects (cf. Massumi 1995). Even though Reckwitz conceives of the aesthetic not only as an “internal, psychological phenomenon” (2017: 12), but also emphasizes the role of objects, the bulk of his analysis ultimately remains on the affected (i.e., emotionally-involved) creative subject (ibid: 10).

One contemporary field of aestheticization, which Reckwitz notes only in passing but could be examined further for the role played by affects in de-individualization, can be found on the Internet. The aesthetic economy of the Internet not only puts a new pressure to innovate on the classic creative economies, but also restructures the conditions of aesthetic perception. A considerable part of the Internet consists of images that are consumed in the Reckwitzian sense: They present the inherent dynamic attraction of the aesthetically new. In most cases, there is no greater purpose to clicking through series of images than a momentary sensual attraction; the activity may be guided by “sensuousness for its own sake, perception for its own sake” (ibid: 11), which does not become an emotion because every image is followed by another in rapid succession. Apps, algorithms, and recommendation systems produce a variety of such processes according to their own internal dynamics. The continuous production of ‘the new’ on the Net could be traced back, from the perspective of affect theory, to a form of creativity that emerges from random, contingent events – and not to a creative subject (**Computer, *Performativity*).

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