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**The Invention of Creativity. Modern Society and the Culture of the New.**

*by Andreas Reckwitz, translated by Steven Black, Cambridge, UK; Malden, USA, Polity Press, 2017, 310 pp., ISBN 978-0-7456-970408 (Paperback).*

In this remarkable book, Andreas Reckwitz, a sociologist and cultural theorist, has packed an impressive collection of socio-historical data to argue that the expectation of creativity has deeply transformed late modern society. Looking at various fields and disciplines, the book examines the omnipresent drive for creativity and aestheticisation in various aspects of contemporary lives. The underlying argument of the book suggest the irreversible implications of the emergence and of a ‘creative class’ of both producers and consumers. By conducting careful interdisciplinary vivisection of the growing institutionalised demand for creativity, Reckwitz deconstructs the social constitution of the aesthetic dispositif. He explores the trajectory from creativity as a domain of artistic subcultures to a universal and omnipresent social model and imperative with its perks and perils.

The book is comprised of eight chapters, with an Introduction inviting us to consider the inevitability of creativity. Reckwitz explores the idea of creativity going beyond the restriction of private self-expression and entering the domain of ubiquitous economic domain. He interrogates the requirement of producing something dynamically new as principle organising Western societies which accelerated around 1970, overtaking multiple aspects of contemporary lives and becoming a mandatory social order.

Chapter 1 deconstructs the ideas of aestheticization and creativity dispositif. Here Reckwitz explores the social regime of Aesthetic Novelty, grounding his arguments in the philosophy of aesthetics by Baumgarten and Burke, Kantean idea of ‘disinterested pleasure’, as well as classical social theories by Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Aesthetic here is equivalent with a sensuous act and contracted with action-oriented activities, and modernity is built upon the tension between constant de-aestheticisation and aestheticization. Following the social regimes of novelty, the new is understood primarily as aesthetics stimulus, and less as a progress, and the consumers are now expected to complement the producer to create emotional excitability. The creativity dispositif draws upon Foucault’s concept of the dispositif which includes a range of social practices, discourses, and artefacts.

Chapter 2 looks at the artistic creations, the ‘genius’ artists and the audiences. Reckwitz scrutinises art as a social form, and, drawing on Benjamin, its dependence on media technologies. He focuses on the regime of novelty in arts, and arts’ increasingly blurred boundaries and ongoing transformation of the figure of the artist.

Chapter 3 addresses further transformation of art practices, their boundaries, and their relation to audiences. Artistic creation becomes a form of labour and less a manifestation of an artistic genius, challenging the relationship between the creators and audiences in their right to judge the originality. By pointing our attention to the process, Reckwitz introduces the concept of performance for an audience. The cessation of the four components of modern aesthetics (the artists as the creator of novelty, the aesthetic object, the audience, the institutional framework) resulted in the further opening of aesthetic borders which crossed their own limits. That, in turn, led to re-definition of the artwork which was now ready to embrace a much wider spectrum (to include things like performance, installation and art/design hybrids, but also gradually making the audience an equal partner, reappropriation of found material or shift from work to the art event). That links to the evolution of postmodern artists-subject from arranger, performer, but also researcher, self-commentator, curator, atmosphere generator and agent of political or cultural intervention.

Chapter 4 explores the rise of the aesthetic economy. Exploring differences between Marx and Weber, Reckwitz argues that we are dealing with a sensuous and affective process proposes which cannot be understood in rational terms. Analysing the momentum creative industries and creative economy gained since the 1990s, Reckwitz suggests four characteristics of this phenomenon: innovation, novelty becoming symbolic, perceptual and affective, a culture of motivation and satisfaction and, finally, consumers becoming aesthetic subjects. Using case studies, he proves how the emergence of creative economies marked a radical shift in the aestheticisation of daily life. The economy no longer focuses solely on the production of goods; it now aims at aesthetics and creative work and circulation of symbols, experiences and emotion through promoted lifestyle models and brand identification.

Chapter 5 explores the psychological turn in creativity, analysing the transition from the pathological genius to the normalisation of the self as a resource. Borrowing from psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology and productive thinking, as well as self-growth psychology, Reckwitz concludes with three imperatives driving creativity as a norm: the transformation of everyday perception, development of everyday creative techniques for all, extending the ideal of the artist to make it universally inclusive, and the fixation of creativity as a social strategy in the competition for attention (p.147). It is fuelled by a paradoxical assumption that to become creative you just decide to be creative. That, in turn, is manifested by an attitude of constant receptivity in the everlasting search for new stimuli.

Chapter 6 looks at the star system and the mass-media construction of expressive individuality. Reckwitz points to the paradoxical status of celebrities as someone both exceptional and mundane, quotidian and exceptional. Moreover, celebrities serve as ideal role models for they are not defined purely by professional or artistic achievements. Here, we also look at the mass media strategies to attract attention and the process of objectification and identification which defines the stars. Reckwitz also scrutinises the idea of artistic stars as performing selves, most notably on the examples of film stars, pop stars, and, increasingly, footballers or even pure personality stars. The expanding star system causes the audiences to look at stars with an ‘aesthetic gaze’, focusing on their creative potential which elevates them to potential role models. Paradoxically, even serial killers and mass murderers have the potential to receive significant public attention making them similar to stars and celebrities.

Chapter 7 looks at the idea of creative cities and the culturalisation of urban life with the space which ‘acts as its stage’ (p. 173), while the final chapter looks at the society of creativity. The use of open living space encourages flexible and experimental usage, whilst shaping material space in the cities might be seen as a manifestation of political power. Creative cities are characterised by their dynamism, a ‘theatre of social action’. Reckwitz contrasts Debord’s influential concept of society of spectacle characterised by passive consumption with the idea of creative appropriation of the city and governing of a culture focused on planning difference and atmosphere.

A visible dissonance underlies the economisation, mediatisation and rationalisation which leads to depression, exhaustion and attention deficiency syndrome or even addiction. This is the price to pay for creativity everybody is obliged to achieve. It is not a surprise that the over-abundance of stimuli leads to dependence, which, in turn, damages the capacity of active focus and concentration. As a result, the society of creativity is scarred with the affect deficiency with no hope for satisfaction since aesthetic pleasure requires constant anticipation. The analysis leads to the conclusion that the ‘purest form of creativity is the production of the self’ (p. 209) with the aim to be different (rather than better).

The strength of the book is the broad socio-historical perspective on the evolution of creativity, aestheticization and novelty in modern society. What Reckwitz does particularly well is to shed light on the way various processes across disciplines interlink in assuming new standards that profoundly affect and change society. This compelling book provides a fascinating context for a more specific view on the creative economy by Angela McRobbiein *Be Creative? Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*, 2016 by the same publisher.

Reckwitz’s book is an exemplary model of scholarship. However, he comes short of identifying the ideologies and discourses which accelerate the aesthetic dispositive and he fails to examine the general tendencies driving creative industries now. It would be interesting to see a follow-up volume with the focus on the role internet and new media play in accelerating the feeling of constant participation in the culture of creative input. In summary, this is a fascinating lecture which makes the reader consider the complexity and inevitability of the current creative imperative.