

Dub music and Creativity

I have chosen to examine creative city policy through the lens of Jamaican dub music, for the insight it gives into the shortcomings of the notions of creativity supposed by the creative city discourses. In particular, I wish to build on the critique developed by Edensor *et al.* (2010) and emphasise the importance of repetitious or non-novel forms of creative production.

Dub music evolved during the 1970s with the manipulation of the master tapes from recording sessions to distort the original tracks and produce a new piece of music. Each dub track is a live remix of the master tracks, using mixing techniques and effects to distort the structure of the original recording. Each mix is unique and cannot be reproduced, yet the same tracks can be used to produce multiple versions. The reuse of backing tracks is a key part of Jamaican music culture, and some popular tunes such as “Real Rock” (Sound Dimension 1967, Studio One) have been reused and updated for over 40 years. Online databases record over 340 versions of the Real Rock riddim (riddimbase.org, riddimguide.com).

Florida (2003) and Landry (2000) both emphasise the importance of the new in their accounts of creativity. For them, creativity should be used to produce economic value, and the easiest way to do this is to create new products and consumption opportunities. In a neoliberal policy environment, creative production is inevitably tied up with legal issues of copyright, ownership and intellectual property, and one might argue that Florida's notion of creative production relies on these as they are a key means from producing economic value from creative and artistic activities (Edensor *et al.* 2010: 4).

Jamaica has been slow to adopt copyright norms favoured in the US and Europe, and even after copyright law was extended to cover music in 1996 application of the law remains low (James

2001). This has allowed the development of a music culture which values the reuse of older forms and iterations. Dub demonstrates an alternative temporality of cultural production which is not dependent of the 'now' or the new for its value. This also deindividualises the creative process since any one specific dub version of a track has a value that cannot be isolated to a single track or the artists performing on it, suggesting a more communal notion of creativity (Toop 1995, Hitchcock 1993). The number of actors involved in directly producing the final product (instrumentalists, vocalists, engineers) serves to further limit the identification of an “heroic artist” (Edensor *et al.* 2010) and complicates issues of intellectual property (Manuel and Marshall 2006).

The uniqueness of each dub production contains a tension between its original purpose as a one-off, unique mix for live consumption and its commodification through release on CDs and records (Williams 1976). While the musical product can be commodified and distributed successfully, other affective and sensual values attached to the music may not travel so well (Edensor *et al.* 2010: 10), and this is useful to bear in mind in the process of policy transfer relating to creative cities.

Furthermore, the fact that the Jamaican music industry thrives “despite” government policy with one of the world's most productive record industries measured on a *per capita* basis (James 2001: 83, Stolzoff 2000: 120) raises the issue of whether government intervention is even desirable in promoting creative industries, despite the campaigning for creative city-style policies from some groups (James 2001, Kozul-Wright and Stanbury 1998).

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