

Reviews

On Creative Mythmaking

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Richard Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent*, HarperBusiness, 2005

Launching the latest in its line of G5 Power Mac computers, Apple stores in the US were plastered with posters of the new machine, the side panel removed to reveal the two processors that power it. Accompanying this model example of techno-fetishism was the slogan, 'The New Power Mac G5. Engineered for the Creative Class'.

Apple's pitch to the creative class owes much to the efforts of Richard Florida, professor of public policy at George Mason University. In recent years, Florida has carved a niche for himself raising the class consciousness of graphic designers, software engineers, research scientists, business entrepreneurs, writers and academics and assorted other people involved in intellectual forms of work.

Florida's most sustained version of his creativity thesis is *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2003), an updated argument about the centrality of knowledge workers to advanced economies in the same vein as Daniel Bell's *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* and Robert Reich's *The Work of Nations*. By Florida's reckoning such workers currently account for around one-third of the US workforce.

Although billed as serious social science, at many points over its lumbering 400 or so pages, *The Rise of the Creative Class* reads like an extended PR document for graphic designers, architects, software engineers, ad execs, writers, artists and assorted other 'creative' professionals.

Rise was followed by *Cities and the Creative Class*, a more succinct though considerably drier re-statement of the same basic ideas. Addressed primarily to civic leaders and city planners, the book was filled out with statistics, case-studies and replies to critics unconvinced by the first book.

In spite of this prolificacy, Florida's 'creative capital theory' as he calls it, is fairly prosaic stuff. A species of human capital theory, it argues that economic prosperity is dependent on the knowledge and skills that individuals possess. Florida argues that where in the industrial economy the key to economic prosperity lay in attracting large industry to employ people, in the so-called 'creative economy' the economic success of regions and cities is about attracting talented and creative people.

Creative people, according to Florida, choose to live in particular places for quite specific reasons. Successful places, he argues, have three factors in common: a concentration of talent, particularly writers, artists, musicians and designers; technology, that is, high-tech firms, and tolerance, measured through numbers of gay people, which can be happily contracted to the '3T's'. Florida's key message is that in a less secure, fast-shifting labour market where people can move from one job to another, policy makers and planners ought to use lifestyle as a lever to attract certain kinds of workers to a city or region.

The Flight of the Creative Class adds little to Florida's overall argument, except to take aim at current US policies which, in his view, are undermining the US's ability to attract creative talent from around the globe. Overzealous security and immigration controls,