



Cities of a lesser god?

Reassembling the history of creativity & the city from a long-term perspective

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Structure lecture

1. Introduction
2. Why the present-day 'creative city' debate?
3. Why do we assume 'agency' to cities?
4. Conclusion

1. Introduction

Cities and Creativity from the Renaissance to the Present

- Routledge, 2017
- I. Van Damme, B. De Munck and A. Miles (eds.)
- Interdisciplinary team of researchers
- Value of empirical-historical analysis on city-creativity nexus
- Case studies on 'creative city'-formation from the Renaissance to the present-day
- Focus on Italy, France, England, the Low Countries and Scandinavia

Four base assumptions

- a. Cities are never a 'natural', 'organic' or 'self-enhancing' bedrock of creativity and innovation
- b. The 'creative city' is not an ontological state-of-being, but a complex process of becoming, an emerging historic 'assemblage' on both discursive & material levels
- c. The 'creative city' is made tangible in networks of 'stuff' of a discursive/imaginary & material/physical kind

Networks of 'stuff'

Time and place specific networks of 'stuff':

- Values
- Actors
- Institutions
- Discourses
- Practices
- 'Actants'



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2. Why the present-day 'creative city' debate?

Origins of the current creative city debate?

- Crisis of the 'Fordist' regulation of Western cities, and the challenges of the post-industrial era from the '80 and '90s onwards
- To be competitive in a global, 'post-communist', liberal world-order:
 1. Cities have to invest in human knowledge, innovations, creativity, culture
 2. Giving incentives to the 'symbolic economy'; 'culturalising' the economy (John Urry)
 3. "Learning from L.A." (Allen J. Scott)

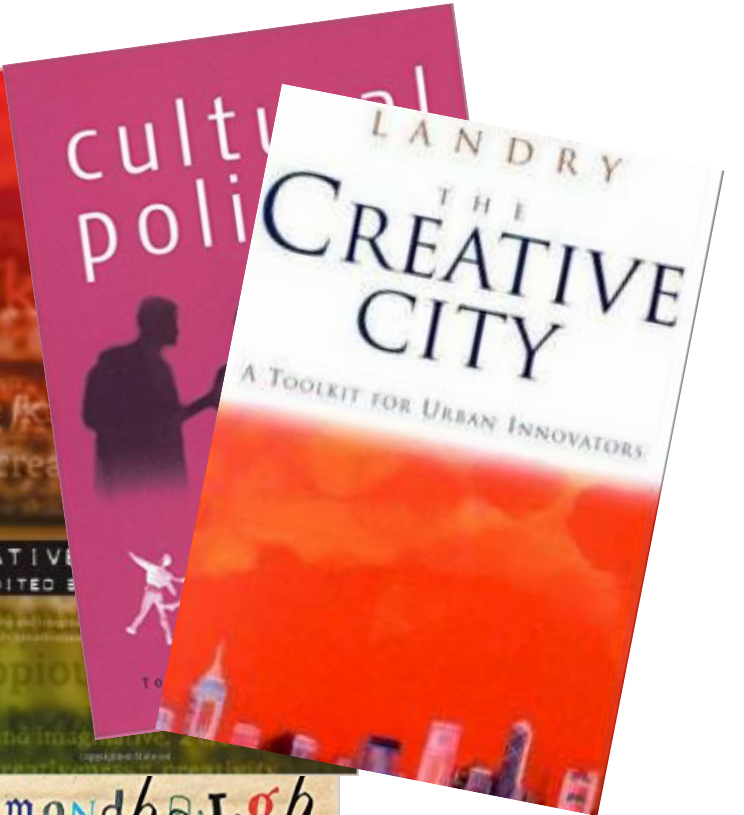
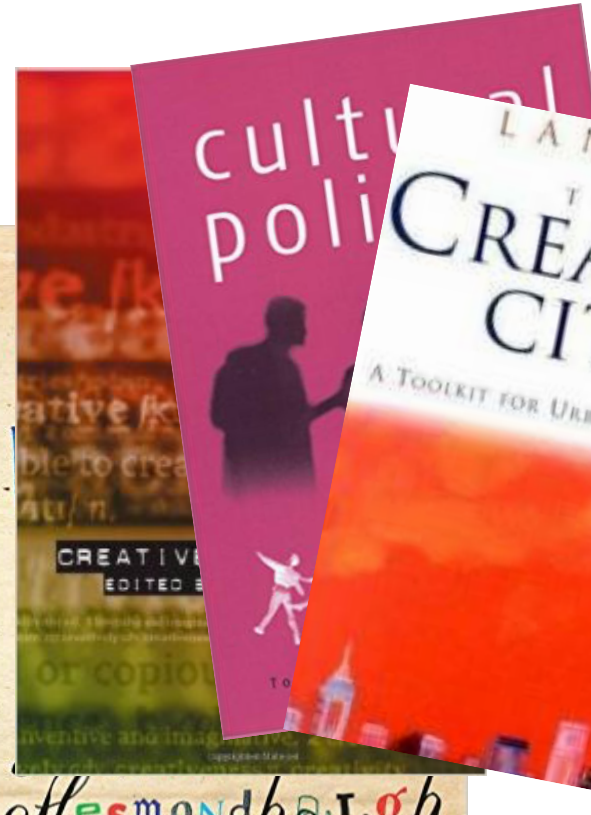
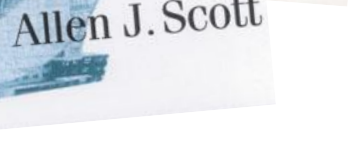
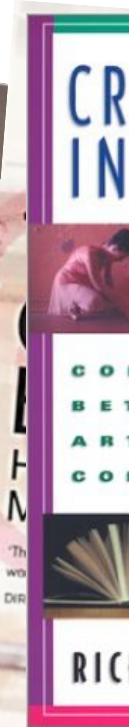
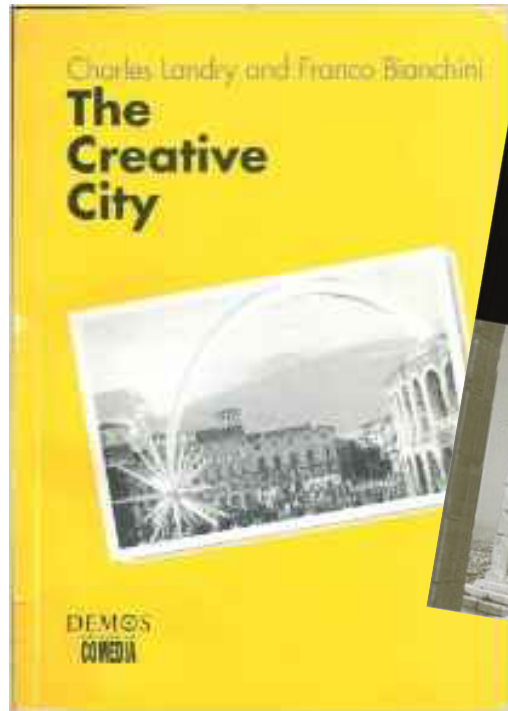


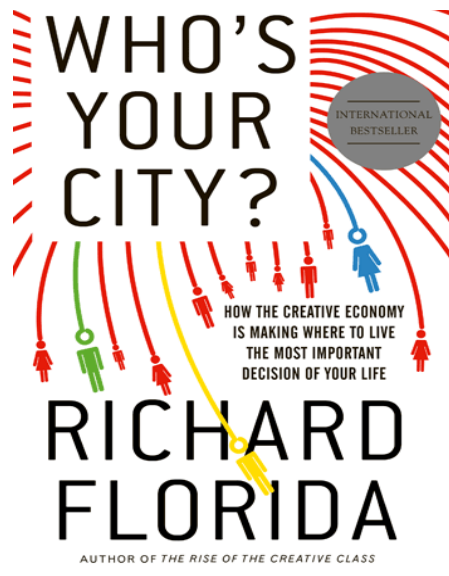
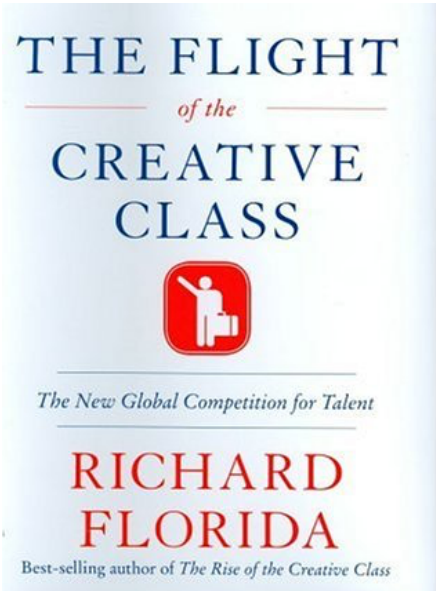
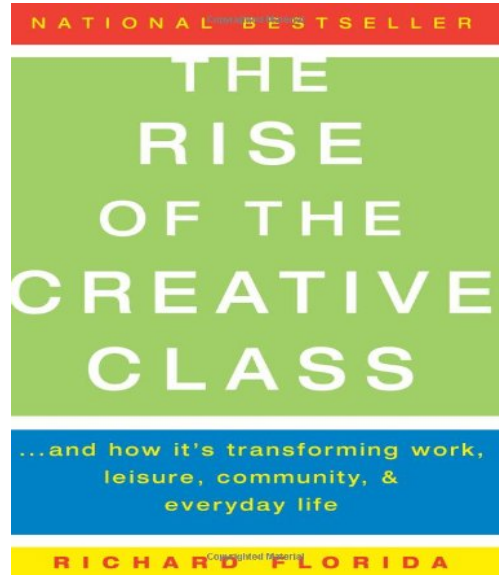
“Grauman’s Chinese Theater”, Hollywood Boulevard



Capitol Records Tower, the house “that Nat built”

Coining the term



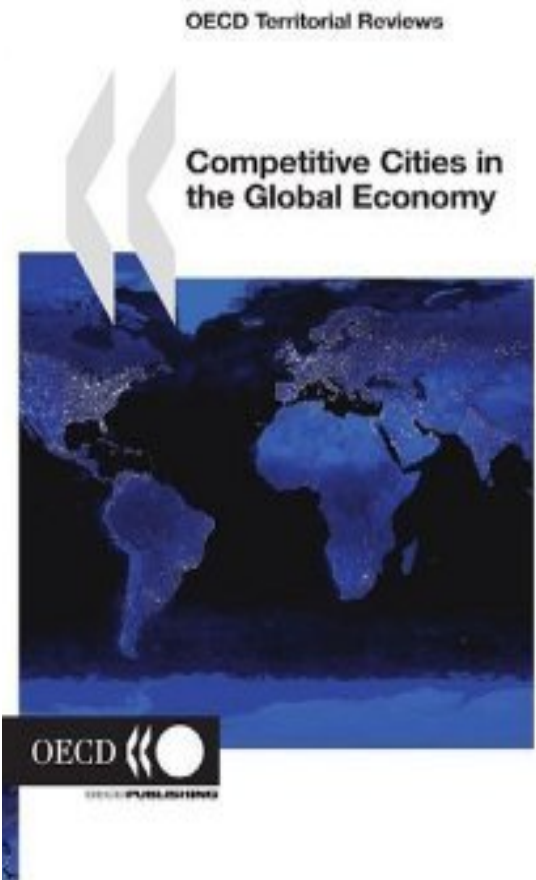


The 'creative city'- hype



**TROCC -
world
tour**

Spreading the gospel



'All that is gold does not glitter'

The 'creative city'-agenda is denounced as a wolf in sheep's clothing:

- It is snobby & elitist (aimed at the highly educated, culture-rich, mobile workers) >> **who are the 'real' or 'true' creatives in a city?**
- It is inner city-centred, and accelerates super-gentrification & dead of authentic places >> **who's urban agenda is it serving?**
- It stays silent about the often precarious and poorly paid nature of creative jobs, and the service 'precarariat' working for the 'creative class' >> **who is left in the cold?**
- It prioritises restrictive and unsustainable forms of urban economic growth >> **who profits from it?**

Urban cultural policies after WOI

- From classic 'elitist' towards the new middle classes >> **adjusting urban cultural policies to the Keynesian welfare state**
- Giving space to the demands of the new grassroots urban movements from the end of the '60 onwards >> **aimed at civic participation and social emancipation (left-wing inspired)**
- Tying cultural policies much stricter to economics and 'return on investment'-thinking from the '80 onwards >> **aimed at revitalising cities and triggering economic growth (right wing and new-left inspired)**



'Creative city'-agenda: perfect foil to give 'scientific credibility' and avant-garde like 'hipness' to new urban cultural policies

The present-day 'creative city'-debate as 'historical assemblage'

- 'Creative city'-idea from the middle of the 1990s:
 - Hegemonic narrative
 - Policy agenda
 - Materialisation in city & experience of citizens
- 'Creative city'-idea from 2008 onwards:
 - Unmasked as particular successful form of cultural policy spinning
 - Unmasked as cover for concrete time and place specific political-economic interests and powers

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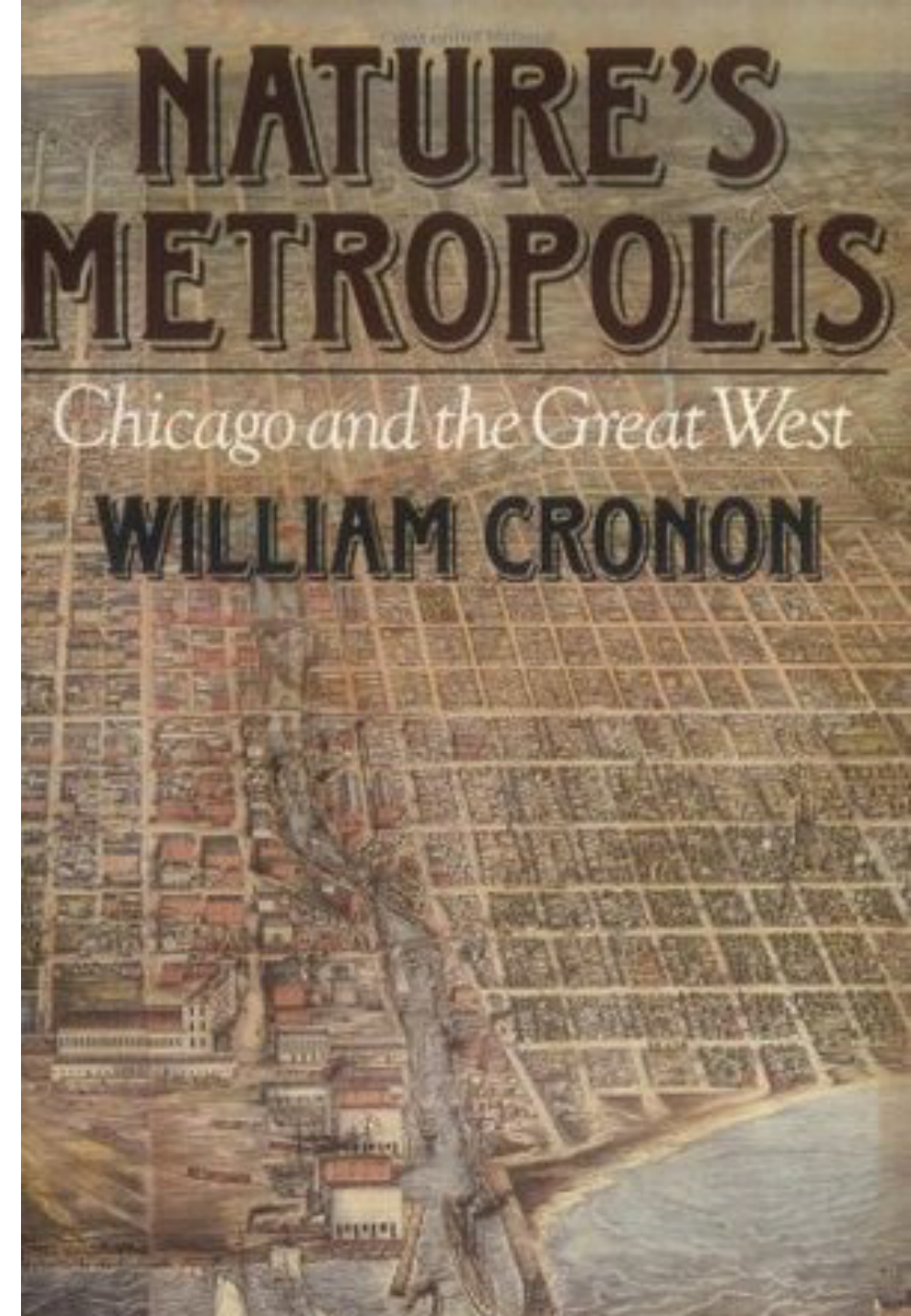
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3. Why do we assume 'agency' to cities?

The imprint of classic, 'organological' urban theory

End of the 19th-beginning of the 20th century:

- The city embodies progress, civilization, culture
- The city is believed to be a distinctive organic body, a distinctive 'ecology' in its own right
- The city as urban body is ruled by 'laws', and these are 'knowable' and traceable
- The city 'does' something, it has 'agency'



THE ECONOMY OF CITIES

JANE JACOBS

Author of

THE DEATH AND LIFE
OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES

A Vintage Book



V-584

\$1.95

The imprint of positivistic economic-geography

Interbellum and post WWII:

- Cluster theory and economies of agglomeration
- Grasping the 'physics' of the urban body or ecology in models and mathematics
- Rise of spatial sciences
- Broader public: influence of Louis Mumford and Jane Jacobs
- Face-to-face interactions, cooperation networks, knowledge spillovers, etc.

‘a city does not compete for the Olympics, certain groups within it do, others often object mightily. This idea of the city as an actor is perhaps the most politically loaded (...) [of] usages, for it implies a harmony of interests within the city; what’s good for one (generally the business community) is good for all’

Peter Marcuse, ‘The city as perverse metaphor’, *CITY*, 9/2 (2005).

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The utopian city as Renaissance ideal

“The Florentines are in such harmony with this very noble and outstanding city that it seems they could never have lived anywhere else. Nor could the city, so skillfully created, have had any other kind of inhabitants”

Leonardo Bruni, *Panegyric of the city of Florence*, 1403

The School of Athens, Rafaël, 1511



The dark side of the ideal



The battle of San Romano,
Paolo Ucello, c. 1438



Ship-bridge and war activity on the Scheldt,
Anonymous master, c. 1570

4. Conclusion

Three concluding points to consider

- a. Urban creativity and innovation is a time and place specific 'assemblage process'
- b. Keep on experimenting with approaches and methodologies to research something as complex as creative city formation
- c. 'Creative city'-formation is connected to to time and place-bound forms of governance on the political-economic level



**KEEP
CALM
AND THANK
YOU FOR
YOUR ATTENTION**