



Tyler Denmead

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the role of the arts in transforming deindustrializing cities into sites for higher-end consumption, while at the same time, preparing low-wage service sector workers who embody notions of creativity now associated with that consumption. I consider Providence, Rhode Island, a city that has adopted the policy discourse of “the creative city” to refashion itself from a deindustrializing city into a hip city of leisure consumption for tourists and visitors. This transformation is now creating demand for workers who are both willing to work in low-wage grunt jobs, and, at the same time, embody the tastes and dispositions associated with creativity. By embodying notions of creativity, members of what I call the “creative underclass” construct a symbolic register now associated with consumption in the creative city. In other words, they imbue consumer transactions with notions of creativity through their affect. Drawing upon visual studies, I turn to representations of Providence from creative industries themselves, such as advertising and online travel magazines, to analyze this symbolic register. I argue that creative arts methodologies must be considered in relation to this new political economy in creative cities; they are inevitably entangled in the production of this creative underclass.

Bio

Tyler Denmead is an Assistant Professor at the School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Denmead has spent his career facilitating and researching highly collaborative community-based arts programs for youth, and his current research examines disparities facing youth in so-called creative cities. He is the founder of New Urban Arts, a youth arts collective for high school students and artists based in Providence, Rhode Island. His publications can be read in *Visual Arts Research*, *Art Education*, *Journal of Arts and Communities*, *International Journal of Education through Art*, and *the International Journal of Education and the Arts*. He is the co-editor of *Visual Arts Research* and serves on the editorial board of *the Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education*.