Introducing the Creative Industries

From Theory to Practice

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The Changing Economic Landscape

Change is constant in the creative industries, because they generate new things without guarantees that they will be embraced by audiences, consumers, customers or clients. Films bomb, music goes unheard, advertising campaigns sink without a trace. This makes working in the creative industries both compelling and challenging. On the one hand, they offer opportunities to work in exciting environments with intelligent, stylish and talented people; on the other hand, they constantly challenge workers to keep up with new developments and new skills. There is always the risk of one's experience and training becoming technically outdated or aesthetically outmoded. In this closing chapter we look at the three overarching themes of the book in terms of how they relate to *change*. How does the relationship between culture and commerce change? How do personal circumstances and work routines change? And how do structures and models in the creative industries change over time?

Recall that we started this book by pointing out that the category "creative industries" is not found in nature: it is made to serve a particular purpose, for government, businesses and institutions. The concept of the creative industries is born out of changes in government priorities and policy, themselves pushed along by technological and cultural changes. As we saw in Chapter 1, the creative industries concept was an attempt to bring together what was previously termed cultural policy and industrial policy, bringing the arts into contact with large-scale industries such as mass-media entertainment and the information technology sector (Garnham 2005; Hartley 2005).

The "creative industries" might lose their relevance and meaning under new, changed circumstances. In the 1990s, the mingling of the creative arts with industry represented a profound change in funding for the arts. Instead of being seen as an expenditure, arts funding began to be seen as an investment in an area that directly and indirectly fed into commerce (McRobbie 2002), and supported innovation, jobs and investment beyond the confines of "the art world". Viewed in this way, the very

idea of creative industries represents a collapse of the distinction between art and commerce, so dearly held by the artistic **avant-garde** (Bürger 1984). As a result, if the creative industries, including the fine arts, start to be seen as a general source of innovation and creativity, feeding into other sectors, such as services and manufacturing, then it's possible that they cannot be so easily distinguished from the rest of the economy on the basis of "creativity" or expressive value anymore. We may, in other words, find ourselves in a moment "after the creative industries" (Banks and O'Connor 2009). Therefore, we cannot take the terminology of this book for granted. The concept of the creative industries may itself fall victim to the rapidly changing socio-economic activities and relationships that it was intended to describe in the late 1990s. Circumstances, technologies, and the experiences of the people on the ground may eventually put new terms and new concepts in its place.

The iPhone Will Fail: Published just after the release of the first iPhone, a short opinion-article predicted: "Apple iPhone Will Fail, in a Late Defensive Move." The iPhone, proclaimed Matthew Lynn, was a doomed product from the start, because Apple was entering a crowded market for mobile phones, already dominated by giants like Nokia, Motorola and Sony Ericsson; the network operators would resist this new kind of mobile phone; and finally "the iPhone is a defensive product. It is mainly designed to protect the iPod, which is coming under attack from mobile manufacturers adding music players to their handsets. Yet defensive products don't usually work — consumers are interested in new things, not reheated versions of old things" (Lynn 2007). This article does the rounds on Twitter every time a new version of the iPhone comes out, as a joke. However funny it is, Lynn's article is far more valuable as a lesson in how novelty is sometimes perceived. The article itself was perfectly reasonable *at the time*. The arguments about the competition and the network providers were relevant, but years later it's easy to see that by focusing on things as they were, the author couldn't see the potential for success in the innovations that the iPhone introduced: a touchscreen that actually worked, the iOS operating system and interface, and the ability to run apps. None of this was self-evident in 2007.

CREATIVITY AND COMMERCE: NOVELTY, RISK AND CHANGE

Cultural change, aesthetic change, technological change, economic change – the list goes on. These changes are not easily separated; they come along all at once, wrapped up in one another: As we finish this manuscript for a book intended for printed publication, the publishing industry is going through enormous changes driven, in part, by the rise of e-publishing, the easy availability of convenient e-readers, and the commercial success of mass-market electronic books. This is a technological change that affects the economics of book publishing (and therefore employment opportunities), the aesthetics of book design (why bother designing for printing on paper if the majority of readers will see a novel on the screen of a smartphone, tablet computer, Kindle, Kobo, Nook, or other e-reading device?), and in the long run we will see some cultural changes in the way we relate to books, magazines, long-form journalism and other written forms of communication that have been shaped by print over the course of centuries (see Chapter 2).

Making something new, commercially, is an inherently risky business. On the one hand, audiences are easily bored, they want to see, hear and experience something interesting or different; except when they don't. Knowing in advance what will work, sell, attract an audience, become popular – the best market research in the world cannot say anything with certainty. It is this inherent risk that puts pressure on businesses in the creative industries, if they are successful, to attempt to preserve that success and increase the return on investment by hedging against future risks through diversification, increased size, new partnerships and extended networks. Even when public funding is involved, for example in subsidized arts, there is risk – the use of public money is subject to popular disapproval, restrictions on what can be done with it, and the shrinking of the government's purse in lean times.

The risks that businesses take on tend to get passed on to all those with a stake in them, not least the employees, freelancers and portfolio workers. In this book we have frequently referred to Georgina Born's *Uncertain Vision* (2004), which documents the cultural, organizational and economic shift from in-house production to commissioning at the BBC during the 1990s. One way of reading Born's book is as a study of change, and how people dealt with it in their professional lives. What began as a political change cascaded down through the BBC and other publicly-funded broadcasters in the UK, vastly increasing the market opportunities for independent production companies. In the space of little more than a decade, they have become a powerful force in UK media production, with international "**super-indies**" exporting both finished programmes for broadcast in the international markets, and branded formats for licensing and adaptation for various national languages and national contexts. At the moment, these players look firmly established and invincible, just as the integrated production model did in the 1980s – and we don't know what might be around the corner for them.

CHANGING WORK ROUTINES AND WORK CULTURES

We do know, however, that many of our interviewees owe their careers to their ability to deal with change, and to adapt their talents, skills and experience to new circumstances. This often means that while it's useful to leave school, college or university with specific knowledge, skills and training, the most valuable skills our informants point to have to do with the underlying "soft skills" of research, communication (written and verbal presentation), and a certain confidence in trying new tools, new ideas and new ways of working. For example, a recent film studies graduate, working as a runner at a large production house in Soho, remarked that she would have liked to have come away from university with a bit of training in InDesign, PhotoShop, Adobe Bridge and Final Cut 7, but she had picked up what she needed on the job. To her own surprise, years of studying film theory turned out to be immediately useful for researching treatments for advertising, along with a "breadth of reference" – her ability to recognize films cited by the directors and creatives who write the briefs.

From the (very different) point of view of an employer, Jess, who manages a research team at a large media agency, sees training in social sciences and journalism as a great asset, because she needs researchers who are interested in people and are able to look beyond themselves and their own prejudices and frames of reference when gathering background information for marketing campaigns:

> "I tend to hire people who have done sociology, psychology, and anthropology [because they] have an interest in people. And that's fundamentally what we do. And if you don't have that interest, all the numbers in the world and creating pretty charts isn't going to work, you're going to have to create an insight from that. […] That's why I tend to hire people who have a different background, so I just hired a journalist, for example, who's changing direction […] because they know how to question, they know how to think about something and have an opinion but they're not scared of changing that opinion." (Jess, 2010)

Jess speaks from a position of a manager. The availability of trained journalists for work in marketing, in this case, is a by-product of the changing fortunes of other businesses in the creative industries. Newspapers had been shedding staff at the time of the interview, while Jess's media agency was in need of researchers. Recent research indicates that, at present "advertising, architecture and writing and publishing are the ones offering more job stability and higher economic rewards, while craft, performing arts, film and television and fine arts graduates are facing uncertainty and poorer work conditions" (Comunian, Faggian, and Jewell 2011: 305). This uneven distribution of jobs indicates that creative workers, from graduates and newcomers to more seasoned professionals, will sometimes have to switch sectors. For them, the ability to adapt their skills to new contexts is essential.

Changing personal circumstances

Creative workers do not remain in their twenties forever. Maturing, having relationships, children and responsibilities – a career in the creative industries involves dealing with changes on the home front as well as in the workplace. Freelance or portfolio work, particularly if the job is flexible about when the work is done, can be a way for parents to accommodate work alongside family responsibilities. Debra Osnowitz, in her study of freelance professionals in the USA, cites the example of Sherry, an editor, translator and project manager:

> [Sherry] thought she might solicit work that she could intersperse with household tasks. She might confine herself to small projects while her children were young, she speculated, without compromising her credibility as a professional. As long as she met commitments, she believed, she would remain professionally viable, and as her children grew older, she could again seek projects she found more demanding. (Osnowitz 2010: 159)

However, a career in some areas of the creative industries can be hard to sustain through different life-stages. On average, across the sector, a freelancer worked 77% of a full working year in 2009 (down from 83% in 2005). On average, 69% of freelancers have a contract:

> The average contract length at one month was enjoyed by 38% of the freelance workforce, followed by more than one month but less than three (26%). Only 16% enjoy a contract of over six months. […] Overall, 55% of contracts contained provision for holiday credits, 23% for sick leave and 6% for maternity/paternity leave. (Skillset 2011: 29)

These numbers indicate that there is a great deal of research to be done in topics beyond the scope of this book (because we focus on introducing the creative industries to those starting out), particularly about questions of sustainability. How do creative media workers convert their training and experience from their years of freelancing into other kinds of work when their life circumstances change, for example when having children? Shalane, the assistant film editor, mentioned this:

> "Quite a lot of people I know have children. Most of them… no I take that back. I was going to say that most of them have partners with more sensible jobs, but that's not true at all. It is a big pressure when you have a family and a mortgage because if you're not working for X amount of months, you know, if it's just you can sort of take care of it but if you've got kids, there is that sort of pressure to just take whatever comes up, so that you're working. I'm not really sure how they've balanced it, to be honest, it seems quite a scary thing to do, especially if you're being self-employed, so as a woman, if you have a baby I'd take a year off, six months off. Which can be a career-killer – just gone for a year." (Shalane, 2011)

As it turns out, there is a significant cohort of people who "move on" to something that's more sustainable than project-based freelancing, particularly for parents. When asked about people she knows who have left film/TV production and post-production, Shalane is both reluctant to think about alternative career paths for herself and aware that some of her friends have left to work in other sectors, and that there are other options open to her with the kind of skills and experience she has:

> "People who I know, 'cause I'm a bit younger – well I'm not younger but I started later so I'm younger in the industry – people I know who have left, just completely left and have gone – I know a guy who works in a bank now – a lot of people go towards advertising, which is sort of a natural trajectory for it because you're still in media. But like I said a lot of them left because they either didn't have a ton of interest in the industry to begin with, or they just couldn't hack it for as long as was necessary." (Shalane, 2011)

Not being able to "hack it" for younger people is often related to the challenge of living, working and eating in London on a tight budget while gaining a foothold in the industry.

> "Internships are often unpaid, running is minimum wage – national minimum wage is £11.70, that's barely enough to live on in London. If you don't have somebody helping you out, and it's really a low wage to be asking somebody to be on for an extended period of time, and you either stick it out and get what you want or you leave the industry, or – this has happened as well to a lot of my friends – they'll take whatever the first promotion is. It's hard to see when you're 20 years old and you make £12,000 a year in London, you're just going to take whatever comes along." (Shalane, 2011)

"Sticking it out" as a runner, Shalane says, can feel like there is no reward for the hard work, so the temptation to go elsewhere is always present:

> "Yeah, and a lot of them have changed their minds and they've decided that they maybe don't want to be editors 'cause they don't know how to go down that road, or whatever, and you just really have to sort of stick it out there, and it's increasingly difficult to do the longer you have to work for a small wage or it just seems like there's nothing at the end of the – when you're running it seems like 'what's going on here? I can make more money working in a bar.'" (Shalane, 2011)

Of course, those who decide *not* to persist in the creative media industries, whether they're young people trying to get into the game or older workers looking for a career change, don't just fall off the edge of the map. They tend to have cultural capital that is valuable in other lines of work – their education, skills and experience translate into work elsewhere in the creative industries. For example, with a background in media, some of Shalane's acquaintances have successfully migrated into marketing communications:

> "[They have gone into the] bookings and project management side of things [because] something with a softer skillset is easier to learn, so they'll go to other places where they can do some similar work as far as managing teams of people and managing times. [They look] after accounts, money and things like that." (Shalane, 2011)

For Shalane, who is seriously invested in her identity as a creative professional, the thought of a change of direction at this point in her career is understandably not particularly attractive. When asked what she might do if she decided to leave the post-production sector, Shalane comes up short. It's a difficult question, asking someone to imagine alternative uses for the experience, skills and contacts they've built over the past five years.

> "Nothing! There's nothing I could do. [...] Teaching, of course, but that would still be in the vein of – so I know, for example, people who do as a supplement to editing and things like that teach at [a] film school. [...] I don't know. I don't know what I would do if I left the industry.... Yes… sorry." (Shalane, 2012)

Nevertheless, many people do decide to pursue alternatives. Media occupations and professions have long seemed particularly prone to "a substantial outflow in mid-career" (Tunstall 2001: 5). According to more recent figures "there is a steady exit of people in their 30s and 40s" from the UK creative media industries such as film, television and radio (Skillset 2011: 48). Some of the reasons why older workers, free-lancers in particular, choose other occupations have to do with the relative inflexibility of deadline-driven project-working, so common in media production.

For older workers, there are further challenges that are not offset by experience and a long track record. First, there is the constant threat of one's skills and training becoming either outdated or falling out of fashion. Creative work is often as much about style as technical skills, and changing aesthetic standards can make as much of a difference as technical changes (Platman 2004: 589). Second, one's network of contacts can quickly become outdated. Given "the regular turnover of commission-ers" (Platman 2004: 585) there is a real risk of dropping off the radar of editors and commissioners without constant renewal and updating. Finally, an interruption in the flow of work, for example because of childrearing, other caring responsibilities or health problems, equally risks pushing the freelancer off the aforementioned radar.

CHANGING STRUCTURES AND MODELS

Institutions that were founded upon one medium, for example newspapers, have struggled to redefine themselves and reshape their business models to accommodate decreasing print circulation, with papers such as *The Guardian* shifting their busi-ness online and onto mobile media while still publishing a printed daily newspaper from an integrated newsroom that does not separate web from print. Meanwhile, *The Daily Mail*'s MailOnline website has had great success by being produced and pre-sented differently from the newspaper – becoming the world's most popular English-language website (pushing *The New York Times* to second place) in November 2011 (Wheeler 2012). While the older models of mass-market entertainment and broad-cast media are changing, they have not gone away and will not vanish anytime soon. As the example of *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail* shows, there's life yet in the old bones as they stumble from print to digital.

The music industry in the UK, to take a different example of an established media business, is still dominated by big players despite their loss of size, revenue and power in recent years (Cluley 2009). In this context, we have previously mentioned the UK's "super-indies" – film and TV production companies that have grown big from ownership of the content they've produced, the international market in TV programming, and the international sales of formats such as *X-Factor* and the *Idol* contests (see Chapter 9). However, there are good business reasons why investors put money into cross-platform content, with the intention to create tomorrow's media giants, as with the recent

expansion of Vice Media Group (Bercovici 2012). These content investments rely on new approaches to reaching audiences (and particular audience segments) through social media and various forms of sharing and engagement, as we explored in Chapter 10. Obviously, they are ripe with potential for structural changes – not least at the level of content commissioning that creative workers encounter in their professional lives.

Case study: apps

App development for smartphones and tablets is one of the most vibrant, innovative areas of the creative industries. It is a cottage industry of sorts, unlike large-scale software development or games development for consoles and computers, but has generated many small businesses. Apple's App Store created a marketplace and a model for selling simple software straight from developer to the user (with Apple serving as intermediary and taking a cut for billing, cataloguing and vetting the apps on offer). App developers can be individuals with a good idea, a simple product and a straightforward business model, ranging from individuals to small studios and teams. We might say that the Apple App Store and Google Play represent a form of crowdsourcing – hundreds of thousands of apps are available, with only a fraction of them gaining an audience share and generating revenues. This works like the crowd-sourced creative work we mentioned in Chapter 10, with the consumers standing in for judges in the contest of the apps. The apps that do make an impression and gain visibility through trending on the "most downloaded" lists are the ones that succeed, then. For example, Marco Arment created Instapaper, an app for saving web pages for reading later on a mobile device, and has turned it into a little business through the App Store. When interviewed in early 2012, he was still the only employee of Instapaper (Planet Money 2012).

Apps are small, relatively cheap to develop, and some of them become bestsellers. *Angry Birds*, a simple game in which the player shoots birds from a slingshot at fortresses built by pigs (they stole the eggs, hence all the anger) came to dominate the screens of smartphone users in 2011. The Apple App Store opened for business on 10 July 2008. Three years later, *The Economist* reported that this small "bite-sized software" (Economist 2011) had become the reason why Apple and Google dominate the smartphone market, while rival technology brands such as Nokia and RIM languished in the doldrums. "The bounty of software available for Android and iOS, as varied as racing games and apps for managing recordings on cable boxes, is a chief reason the mobile phone market has settled into a two-horse race" (Wingfield and Chen 2012). Meanwhile, Rovio Entertainment, the maker of *Angry Birds*, was seen as the leading hope of the European technology start-up sector (Pfanner 2012a) when a mere four years ago most people wouldn't have known what an app was.

Apps are an instructive example of how much and how quickly established business structures can change. In this case, it's not just the mobile phone, software and

games sector that's changed – consumers have come to regard their smartphones as the hub of their digital lives. That's where they get their email, their Facebook messages, Twitter updates, news, where they play games, and consume content that previously would have come to them via television, radio, newspaper or a desktop computer. In other words, this is an important development for the content industries – publishing, music, film, television, and so on. As we have seen with the examples of *Vice* and *Monocle*, content is increasingly seen as platform-agnostic, accessible on whatever device the consumer has at hand, and those devices do not differentiate between print, video or audio – it's data, content, entertainment, news, and so on.

JOBS THAT DON'T EXIST YET

The creative industries regularly generate job descriptions that previously did not exist – terms like "app developer" or "community manager" crop up suddenly and become ubiquitous. Attending industry events such as Social Media Week or Internet Week (both of which are international, taking place in many cities across the world), one is constantly reminded of how rapidly terms, contexts and expectations change. At a Social Media Week session (London, February 2012) titled "Social Media Skills Gap?", recruiters, talent managers, and social media professionals debated the skills that they look for in graduates they hire. A panelist who introduced herself as working for "a word-of-mouth agency" (itself a rather novel specialization) said that what she looked for in graduates were basic professional skills like organization, delegation, prioritization and crisis management – not to mention that they need to understand that to be a Facebook user is not the same as being able to use Facebook to fill an advertising or marketing brief. This raised a question from a student in the audience who remarked that this kind of information wasn't exactly on her university curriculum: "How do I find out what [employers] might want from me?" The answer she got was to start early, begin researching roles and professional pathways two years before she might expect to start applying for jobs, but at the same time, she was helpfully advised by another panelist that these roles and pathways change all the time.

There is no simple trick to reconciling these two imperatives, but it helps to be aware of them. In this book we have tried to help our readers do that by paying attention to the fundamentals that cut across the creative industries – the types of work, social encounters and relevant skills that the different creative sectors have in common. Working at a word-of-mouth agency sounds novel and interesting, but the core skills the panelist mentioned have nothing to do with gossip, chitchat, or rumour; she wants someone who can fulfil a brief (and handle a crisis, let's not forget). The same can be said of the other skills, activities, habits and structures that we describe as being shared across the creative industries. More importantly, they will apply to jobs that don't exist yet, in businesses yet to be established. The aim of this book has

therefore been to get our readers started in understanding how these fundamentals might apply to their own situation – doing the research while remembering that it will inevitably all change.

RECOMMENDED READING

Arden, Paul. 2003. *It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good You Want To Be*. London: Phaidon. A short, witty book on creative thinking and seeing things differently, drawing on Arden's long experience in the advertising industry.

Fendley, Alison. 1996. *Saatchi & Saatchi: The Inside Story*. London: Arcade. The story of the golden age of London advertising agencies in the 1980s, as seen through the story of what was briefly the world's largest advertising agency.

Goldman, William. 2000. *Which Lie Did I Tell?: More Adventures in the Screen Trade*. London: Bloomsbury. Highly entertaining essays about Goldman's own changing fortunes in the Hollywood film industry.

Knopper, Steve. 2009. *Appetite for Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Crash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age*. New York: Simon & Schuster. A history of the music recording industry and its ambivalent (and seemingly disastrous) relationship with technological development.

Muir, Gregor. 2009. *Lucky Kunst: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art*. London: Aurum. A memoir of the Young British Artists before they were famous, and of Hoxton and Shoreditch while they were still grotty.

Reynolds, Simon. 2011. *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*. London: Faber. Essays about the contemporary compulsion to mine the films, music and television of the past. Along the way, Reynolds offers a funny, provocative look at the role of change and novelty in the products of the creative industries.