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MANAGING THE CREATIVE EMPIRE: THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING ARTSY



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Synopsis:

This paper discusses collaborative practice within creative industries and the socio-technical benefits of being 'artsy' with an entrepreneurial mindset, rather than focusing on short-term financial predictions. Riding the ever-rising wave of the arts, it is imperative to acknowledge that the creative empire is hungry for fresh intellect and innovative minds, and STEAM is heading towards quenching the thirst for pioneering practices.

Managing the Creative Empire: The Advantages of Being Artsy

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You are so *artsy-fartsy*! By 1971, the term was widely in use, mimicking the original *artsy-craftsy* term from 1902¹, referring to ‘pretentiously artistic’, drawing a connection to the arts and crafts movement. Times are exponentially changing. A long history precedes the label ‘being artsy’, associated broadly with pretentiousness and a style that does not contribute to the growth of the general economy. It signifies creativity that is disruptive and with no financial benefits (besides only on macro-economic level), as it is described by some scholars. It took a turn, after crashing financial markets and destabilized traditional business models, to take more serious the role of ‘being artsy’ in consideration; as a force that can contribute to generating something new, by creative and innovate approaches, leading to what will become the creative industries and creative entrepreneurs of today. Creative disruptions became a welcoming force against stagnated and pragmatic approaches, driving creative management models forward.

Situating the paper in the context of New Zealand’s creative industry, this paper aims to map the turn to ‘being artsy’, and how it is being incorporated in the creative industry, and moreover what type of creativity is the ‘right’ creativity, when it comes to creative outcomes and innovation, that drives forward corporate and institutional profit-margins. What are the expectations of ‘being artsy’ and what are the approaches to managing the disruptive creativity, for contributing to the creative sector? Riding the ever-rising wave of the creative technologies and design, it is imperative to acknowledge that the creative empire is hungry for fresh intellect and minds, and the field of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics) is geared towards quenching the thirst for innovative practices and creative outputs.

¹ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/artsiness>

I. Badges of Creative Honour

Since 2017, Auckland officially joined the United Nations, UNESCO, Creative Cities Network, as a Creative City of Music². The creative status is quite important badge in today's creative economy. Auckland aims higher and higher to make itself in the image of 'a smart and global city'³. The article asks interestingly if "do these visions/slogans/brand identities even matter". A governmental report from 2017 shows that Auckland truly holds the hot pocket of the creative sector in New Zealand and it reshapes itself in the image of a creative incubator:

Half of all people employed in the creative sector in New Zealand are based in Auckland, and as high as 86 per cent for TV (a sub-sector). The sector in terms of employment grew by 2.2 per cent each year on average between 2000 and 2016, a similar growth rate to the total Auckland economy (of 2.3%). Creative sector firms are smaller in size, an average of 3.1 employees compared to 4.5 for all sectors. This varies by creative sub-sector however, from an average of 1.5 employees for firms in the music sub-sector to 59.4 employees for TV firms.⁴

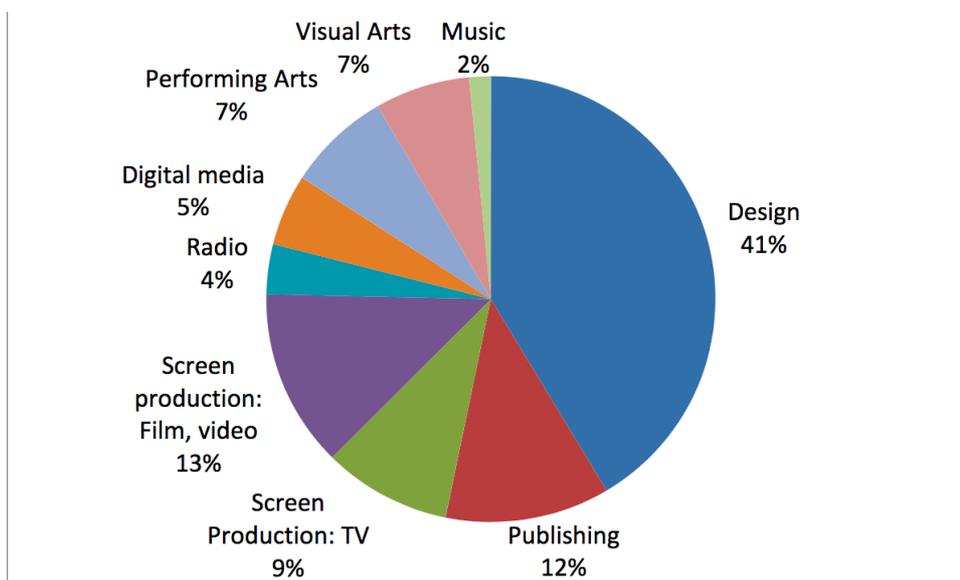


Figure 1. Statistics of the creative industry in New Zealand (2017)

2 <https://mch.govt.nz/auckland-now-unesco-creative-city-music>

3 <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/@boardroom/2017/08/16/42912/making-auckland-a-smart-and-global-city>

4 <http://www.knowledgeauckland.org.nz/assets/publications/TR2017-023-Creative-sector-2017-industry-snapshot-for-Auckland.pdf>

The creative industries sector is gaining more and more momentum, and perhaps it will hit ‘pick creativity’ in the next years to come. The arts are contributing as well towards the creative entrepreneurship, as the Creative New Zealand surveys shows: “New Zealanders believe the arts make their communities better places to live and agree they should be a part of everyone’s education”. Furthermore: “Eight out of ten New Zealanders have participated in the arts or attended an arts event, or both, in the last 12 months resulting in a record high for arts engagement (80%)”⁵. The benefits of the arts, as stated in the survey, are plentiful: boost of confidence, creativity, sense of belonging; all the signifying badges of well-being and effective impact. “New Zealanders recognise the positive contribution the arts make to supporting strong, thriving communities and the development of happy, confident young New Zealanders,” said Creative New Zealand Chief Executive Stephen Wainwright⁶. ‘Art for the many, not for the few’, as the New Zealand Prime Minister and Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage voiced in an opinion piece⁷. The media drums are calling for the march of creativity, while in the same time artists have to cope with the burden of artistic labour, as pointed out in ‘Passing the Bucks: A Living Wage for Artists’ (Randerson, 2018)⁸. As quoted: “We have to make sure legally that everyone we contract achieves the living wage”, this also includes artists. The discrepancy between promises and setting national creative agenda is not something new or aweing. To take into consideration supply and demand, there is a niche in the market for creativity, and creativity for the market. The creative empire needs to be supported, and the creative communities are providing the content. The crucial question here becomes: which is the ‘right’ creativity and what is the ‘right’ to creativity?

II. The Right to Creativity and Being Creative

In support and consideration of the ‘badge of creativity’, one has to ask: what is the right creativity to strive and aim for? Who are the managers of creativity and how the creative empire is managed? In 1963, the marketing guru Theodor Levitt wrote ‘Creativity Is Not Enough’⁹, in which he critiques the concept of talented young people who were disrupting

⁵ <http://www.creativenz.govt.nz/news/art-makes-new-zealand-a-better-place-to-live-new-zealanders>

⁶ <http://www.knowledgeauckland.org.nz/assets/publications/TR2017-023-Creative-sector-2017-industry-snapshot-for-Auckland.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.thebigidea.nz/stories/soapbox-opinion-piece-by-jacinda-ardern>

⁸ <https://www.thebigidea.nz/stories/passing-the-bucks-a-living-wage-for-artists>

⁹ Levitt, T. “Creativity is not Enough”. <https://hbr.org/2002/08/creativity-is-not-enough>

and distracting management, by failing to adapt their ‘creativity’ to the core competences of the particular firm. Levitt’s writing was significant, taking in consideration that is situated in times that ‘creativity’ was already emerging as a new buzzword in business, particularly in advertising, and the enthusiasm for creativity among business academics and managers was growing more and more. Against Levitt and his argument that creativity is essentially opposed to management and control, the 1980s witness the emergence of an ‘enterprise culture’¹⁰ and the need to respond to fluctuating and becoming increasingly unstable market demands. Who is more unstable, unpredictable, bringing ‘creative destruction’ (Schumpeter 1939)¹¹, neuroticism and social maladjustment (Freud 1985, Plato 1987), than the creative bunch of artists? In times that the creative entrepreneurial was not a thing yet, or clear how creativity and entrepreneurship mix together at all, it was important that “the new generation of managers saw creativity as a desirable attribute, not a distraction confined to the margins of artistic and cultural practice, as Chris Bilton (2010) writes¹². Moreover, “The change in attitude reflected a loss of confidence in the Anglo-American concept of business management based on the multi-divisional, multi-national corporation, building outwards from a sustainable strategic position...”¹³ Thus, from being perceived as a destruction and contributing only on macro-economic level, as Levitt wrote, creativity in business became a source of flexibility, innovation and change. It became desirable to produce and market ‘creative destruction’, to be neurotic and social maladjustment, in order to revitalise the economy, breaking up established systems and opening up/inventing new markets. The right to creativity and being artsy became gradually more and more sought after and desirable; from managers, to cultural institutions, who were learning to embrace managerialism and enterprise. Bilton reflects on this convergence:

This convergence had occurred at both ends of the spectrum. In the cultural sector, a growing emphasis on earned income and accountability to the marketplace, together with a recognition of the economic significance of the commercial cultural industries, had encouraged cultural institutions and policy-makers to adopt managerial practices and rhetoric.¹⁴

¹⁰ Bagguley, P. “Post-Fordism and Enterprise Culture: flexibility, autonomy and changes in economic organisation”, in Keat, R. and Abercrombie, N. (Eds.) *Enterprise Culture*, London: Routledge, pp. 151-68

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_destruction

¹² Bilton, C (Editor) “Creativity and Cultural Practice” Routledge, New York, 2012

¹³ *Ibid*, p.256

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.257

To unpack this statement, Bilton states that in business, “creativity had emerged as a key business asset”, while cultural policy-makers has become increasingly ‘managerial’, “reflecting a general shift to engage with the newly significant commercial cultural industries”. Thus, ‘creativity’ was relocated at the intersection between these commercial-managerial and cultural-aesthetic worldviews. Stemming from this, a need for ‘manageable creativity’ came to be highly needed, to be well-packaged, and to assign creative managers to supervise the creative flow.

III. Managing Being Artsy

Turning the attention to the Bachelor of Creative Technologies programme at AUT University, and especially its students, it is worthy to explore how students deal with the paradoxes and contradiction, which are at the core of most theoretical definitions of creativity (Bilton and Cummings 2010)¹⁵, and how their creative work is being managed, structured, and developed. How to remain experimental and daring, diving into ‘creative destruction’, and in the same time to keep in mind and respond to the demands of the creative empire? One way the students are let into the paradoxes and contradictions of the creative empire is through different practices and applying cross-disciplinary approaches. That includes: applying technologies from different areas to create a new solution for problems that exists now or in the future time; focusing on problem-solving projects and applying technologies to create new solutions; involving preparations for future-yet-to-come and jobs that do not exist yet. ‘Industry Ready Graduates’, as the AUT slogan stands, perhaps even for industries yet-to-come. No future is future-proof, but at least some students have a well-developed and integrated STEAM orientated ground to step towards that future-yet-to-come, and to respond to that possible future demands. In order to ground the ground and students to find their own niche and style not catered towards economic benefits, the Bachelor of Creative Technologies programme at AUT, provides a space that holds the potential for students to dare to be bold and creative, to become as ‘artsy’ as they wish, while at the same time through industry engagement, and problem-solving projects boundaries are pushed to explore how deep the creative empire goes. In terms of the cost-effectiveness of being artsy and students facing financial situations in different degrees, the link to lectures, ‘creative gurus’, and industry specialist, reassures that being artsy does pay in the end. In that way, the slogan ‘Industry

¹⁵ Bilton, S. & Cummings, S. “Creative Strategy: Reconnecting Business and Innovation”. Oxford & Hoboken, NY:Wiley, 2010

Ready Graduates’, can be interpreted as: take a break from thinking about the industry, in order to be incorporated back into it afterwards. Students must inhabit a space to think free from the industry, in order to be incorporated back to it later. They need be *entrepreneurially effective*; not just cost-effective.

Another strong side to the STEAM approach of the Creative Technologies undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is the focus on collaboration and inter-disciplinary approach, compare to the idealized and often glamourized image of the lonely stoic artist. Bilton calls this ‘heroic creativity’, one that locates creativity in minority of exceptional individuals:

What we can say if heroic creativity is that it, firstly, represents a one-sided definition of creative processes and people, weighted towards the process of ideation rather than the longer process of idea development and application and favouring the individualistic, irrational process of ‘divergent thinking’ over the collective, deliberate processes of ‘convergent thinking’ which convert new ideas into valuable innovations.¹⁶

The collaborative aspect is something heavily emphasized in the Bachelor of Creative Technologies , which is evident from the continuously emerging creative projects, reflecting on cross-discipline outcomes and exchange of skills and experience. The programme offers and allows choice and opportunities for the students, to choose from a variety of electives or minors, and combine them across the faculties, as the students find what trajectory suits them and their creative visions. The programme is currently being developed to allow students to also do an additional major to enhance the student learning experience and broaden a skillset. To sum it up: “this shift towards collective creativity is apparent also in the ‘creative industries’, with a growing emphasis on the creativity of management and systems which facilitate creative talent, rather than on the creative talent itself”.¹⁷ The focus shifts from the traditional ‘one-off creative idea’ to the process-orientated goal of managing creativity and ‘being artsy’, as an ongoing creative endeavour. In this scenario, the artist/student/creative persona is not seen as an end in itself but embedded within a process of innovation and entrepreneurship. Hence, the management of the whole infrastructure and process of

¹⁶ Bilton, C. http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/3362/1/WRAP_Bilton_Manageable_Creativity-prepublication_%282%29.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid, p.246

becoming artsy is crucial to look at, rather than just the isolated case of supervising and managing someone ‘being artsy’.

IV. Steaming the STEAM

A clear example of managing ‘being artsy’ in action can be found in one of the core papers of the Bachelor of Creative Technologies (BCT) programme, ‘Integrative Practice’¹⁸. The aim of this paper is to “Explore concepts, issues and problems from more than a single disciplinary perspective. Introduces methodologies for integrating knowledge and practices from different disciplines and allows students to both comprehend and directly address complex issues”¹⁹. Emphasis is put on interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration, to foster comprehension and skills “from more than one disciplinary perspective”. This approach is reflected through the student practices and their creative works.

To take as an example of the before mentioned skills in collaboration and interdisciplinary thinking, students from the BCT, Olivia Hobman and Kelly Rose Leece collaborated to extend their skillsets by co-creating the project *Metanoia*:

Metanoia is an interactive smart garment made to display donation data at a formal charity event. The project is a collaboration between myself and third year Creative Technologies student Kelly Rose Leece in response to the Interactive Smart Dress brief. The garment itself is a two piece dress with LED lit fibre optic strands lighting up the skirt. These LEDs are activated when donations to the charity come through, and react more extravagantly to larger donations.²⁰

¹⁸ <https://www.aut.ac.nz/study/study-options/creative-technologies>

¹⁹ <https://www.aut.ac.nz/study/study-options/creative-technologies/courses/bachelor-of-creative-technologies>

²⁰ <https://liv-hobman-bct.tumblr.com/post/179513983960/framework>



Figure 2. Metanoia, BCT Showcase, November 2018

The self-reflection writing on each step of the project shows as well how the collaborative element is highly visible and being acknowledged:

Our method of collaboration was extremely effective as we each played to our individual strengths while communicating our thoughts throughout the creation process. Kelz is extremely talented in design and garment construction, while I am more programming oriented, so the roles of “dress constructing” and “back end development” came naturally. The combination of our skills resulted in a stunning balance between tech and fashion, as per our goals and brief. We managed to achieve this level of integration with consistent communication on every decision and iteration of our work, and planning each section of our roles side by side.²¹

²¹ <https://liv-hobman-bct.tumblr.com/post/179513983960/framework>



Figure 3: Metanoia, created by Olivia Hobman and Kelly Rose Leece

The benefits of collaborative interdisciplinary practices have been a topic of discussion for a long time, gaining more and more popularity amongst the creative industry and technologies. Books such as “Creative Knowledge Environments: The Influence on Creativity in Research and Innovation” (2004)²², questions the often-romanticised image of the isolated genius, who in order to be creative have to strive and adopt an antagonistic isolationist attitude. This is not the case of Creative Technologies at AUT, as the role that collaborative creativity is playing is crucial to the success of the student’s projects and their influence when unleashed to the demands of the Creative Industries and other sectors beyond. Research literature reflects the breaking down of disciplinary boundaries and isolation antagonism, in articles such as “The Myth of the Isolated Genius: Legitimising the Artwork through Peer Relationships” (2011)²³ and *Disciplinary Borderlands* (2018)²⁴. STEAM-ing ahead, the role of STEAM should be acknowledged as a main engine for the broadening of the scope of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, bringing the ‘A’ into the A+ category.

²² <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/creative-knowledge-environments>

²³ https://marketing.conference-services.net/resources/327/2342/pdf/AM2011_0318.pdf

²⁴ Kraehe, A. M. “*Disciplinary Borderlands*” *Art Education*, March 2018, Vol. 71 Issue: 2 p4-7, 4

V. Conclusion

Going back to the beginning of this paper and the role of ‘destructive creativity’, one that disrupts and creates ruptures in organisational structures, the hunger of the creative industry becomes self-evident for more and more disruption and disruptive minds, in order to move ahead. In the words of the director of Colab, home of Creative Technologies at AUT: ‘if there is no industry demand why should we do it. They need disruptive technologies to continue forward’. It is time to be disruptively artsy, yet entrepreneurial keeping the industry in mind, while at the same time creating a space to think away from profit driven demands. This will achieve a mindset of no-margin-driven creativity to collaboratively emerge and spread across disciplines and departments.