

# **Creativity and Creative Industries: From Romanticism to Idiosyncratic Agency, Social Networks and Knowledge Systems.**

**Phillip McIntyre**

University of Newcastle

phillip.mcintyre@newcastle.edu.au

## **Abstract**

Dayan Thussu writes that ‘with the revolution in digital distribution, a whole range of new revenue earning opportunities has surfaced as the media and telecommunications sectors intersect globally’ (2006: 99). Some refer to the industries, both traditional and new, that have taken advantage of these developments as creative, cultural or copyright industries (Hartley, 2005: 30-31). Terry Flew writes in his recent book *The Creative Industries: Culture and Policy* (2012), terminology in reference to these industries ‘changes across countries, with some referring to the cultural industries, the copyright industries, the digital content industries, and even the cultural and creative industries or – as in China – the cultural creative industries’ (2012: 4). As Flew argues, no matter what the nomenclature each shares the same issues, concerns and ‘underlying questions opened up by the creative industries debate’ (ibid). Since the notion of creativity is central to these debates it would be pertinent to understand what is meant by this term. The first step in that process is to ask; what do we already know about creativity? This question necessitates a perusal of the research literature on creativity. In surveying this literature (McIntyre, 2012) there appears to be some emerging consensus that the structures that characterise social networks and knowledge systems coupled with the application of idiosyncratic agency produce creativity; in other words what we may be looking at is the idea that creativity emerges from a system in action (Hennessey and Amabile 2010). Armed with these research efforts this paper makes a comparison of this body of literature with the literature coming from creative industries. In doing so it observes the correspondences and disjunctures found there since the term creativity appears to have been conceived differently, at different times, by the various scholars who pursue the issues that swirl around the notion of creative, cultural or copyright industries. Nonetheless the narrative trajectory or movement of thought for each body of literature seems to be similar. The paper concludes by addressing what appears to the current destination for both bodies of literature, that is, the idea that creativity is systemic.

**Keywords:** creativity, creative industries, romanticism, agency, systems, emergence, cultural production.

Dayan Thussu writes that 'with the revolution in digital distribution, a whole range of new revenue earning opportunities has surfaced as the media and telecommunications sectors intersect globally' (2006: 99). Some refer to the industries, both traditional and new, that have taken advantage of these developments as creative, cultural or copyright industries (Hartley, 2005: 30-31). Terry Flew writes in his recent book *The Creative Industries: Culture and Policy* (2012), terminology in reference to these industries 'changes across countries, with some referring to the cultural industries, the copyright industries, the digital content industries, and even the cultural and creative industries or – as in China – the cultural creative industries' (2012: 4). As Flew argues, no matter what the nomenclature each shares the same issues, concerns and 'underlying questions opened up by the creative industries debate' (ibid). That debate often references a foundational definition derived from the Creative Industries Task Force Mapping Document from the UK. This definition encompasses 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (Cunningham, 2002: 1). Since the notion of creativity is central to this definition it would be pertinent to understand what is meant by this term.

The first step in that process of understanding creativity is to ask; what do we already know about creativity? This question necessitates a lengthy perusal of the research literature on creativity. This extensive body of research has drawn on a number of areas. These include: the foundational material from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Lombroso, Galton and Freud (collected in Rothenberg and Hausman, 1976); the wide-ranging work undertaken within psychology (for summaries see Sternberg, 1999; Runco and Pritzker, 1999; Kaufman and Sternberg, 2010; Sawyer, 2006; 2011); the numerous concerns with art and cultural production produced by sociology (for summaries see Zolberg, 1990, Alexander, 2003); the arguments important to literary criticism (summarised well by Pope, 2005); and the comparatively limited work focused specifically at creativity carried out in communication and cultural studies (e.g. Negus and Pickering, 2004). In

surveying this literature (McIntyre, 2012) it can be seen that there has been a discernible narrative trajectory in the movement of thought away from Romantic assumptions about the individual, toward what has been characterised by Dean Keith Simonton (2003) as a primarily psychological reductionist approach, a disavowal of the notion of authorship in favour of seeing consumption as the point of creation, and then a move toward the idea that creativity emerges from the confluence of a multiple set of factors (e.g. Dacey and Lennon, 1998; Sternberg and Lubart, 1991; Amabile, 1983, 1996; Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1993, 1996; Wolff, 1993). There also now appears to be some emerging consensus in this literature that the structures that characterise social networks and knowledge systems coupled with the application of idiosyncratic agency produce creativity; in other words what we may be looking at is the idea that creativity emerges from a system in action (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). Armed with these research efforts we can now make some comparisons of this body of literature with the literature coming from creative industries and in doing so observe the correspondences and disjunctures in those movements of thought to be found there. The question we are trying to answer is: are the narrative trajectories or the basic movements of thought about creativity similar for each body of literature?

What is first revealed in answering this question is that the term 'creativity' appears to have been conceived differently, at different times, by the various scholars who pursue the issues that swirl around the notion of creative, cultural or copyright industries. For example, David Hesmondhalgh, who favours the term cultural industries, has argued persuasively that 'if I am right in focusing attention on the role of the cultural industries as systems for the management of symbolic creativity then a key issue here will be the relationship between symbol creators and cultural industry organisations' (2011: 69). In concluding his exceptional work, largely from a political economist's perspective, Hesmondhalgh argues, via Bill Ryan, that 'if the "fundamentally irrational" process of symbolic creativity "conflicts with the calculating, accumulative logic of modern capitalism" (Ryan, 1992: 104), this helps to explain the very tangled and contradictory dynamics we have observed' (Hesmondhalgh, 2011: 306) in the cultural industries.

Ryan himself characterises creativity as a process that ‘presumes the free flight of the imagination unbounded by non-artistic considerations’ (1992: 154). However, if creativity is *not* fundamentally irrational, as Weisberg for one argues (1988 and 1993), then this creates a problematic for Ryan’s overall critique. Despite this, it is clear that ‘however dubious the romantic conceptions of opposing creativity or art to commerce may be, it has had the long term effect of generating very important tensions between creativity and commerce, which are vital to understanding the cultural industries’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2011: 20). He justifiably reinforces this idea by also stating that ‘it is impossible to understand the distinctive nature of cultural production without an understanding of the commerce/creativity dialectic’ (2011: 20-21). This is of course pragmatically important as this dialectic is often treated by those working within many forms of cultural production as though it was an absolute and concrete entity, rather than a discursive construct, as Hesmondhalgh points out. It therefore needs to be taken seriously.

In this regard Pierre Bourdieu, in his book *Rules of Art: The Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1996), pointed to the acceptance of this dialectic, seen in the idea of the supposed existence of heteronomous art and autonomous art within the field of art itself (Bourdieu, 1996: 217-218). He, most importantly, also points to the *illusio* held there, that is, ‘the collective adhesion to the game that is both cause and effect of the existence of the game’ (1996: 167). By this *illusio* he means the illusion that results from the collective internalisation of the structures of the field of art which are so well naturalised they are no longer obvious to the players in that field. Bourdieu’s research reveals that the emperor of Art has no clothes other than the illusion of the universe the field of art has constructed for itself. From this position the art versus commerce debate is only a valid opposition because the rules of art have us believe it is so. This illusion is now embedded as a tacit form of *doxa* in the field and used continually by that field to justify its own beliefs and action (Bourdieu, 1996: 215-216). It thus operates within a neatly contained circle of logic. But, as Thomas’ dictum states, ‘if men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences’ (1929: 572). Once a person takes on the belief and acts as though it is in effect real then ‘gradually a whole life-

policy and the personality of the individual himself [sic]' (Thomas, 1967: 42) becomes premised on the belief system and they act according to that belief system.

Despite these critiques of the *doxa* of art, and the distinctions between art and commerce that reside within them, they appear to have been also accepted uncritically by Richard Caves. In his book, *Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce* (2000) Caves tends to see creativity through the narrow prism of artistic activity. However, much of the research literature on creativity does recognise that creativity is a basic human attribute just as applicable to science, engineering and mathematics as it is to painting, sculpture, movie-making and music production (e.g. Weisberg, 2006; Simonton, 2004). This is what Richard Florida (2002) was pointing to when he saw that the future of cities around the planet depended on their capacity to attract the creative people necessary to sustain and motivate economic activity. He introduced the notion of 'super creatives', those located in both the arts and sciences, who are charged with the function of creating new ideas, objects, technologies and cultural content, all of which are necessary for a modern economy to survive. Florida also adds another group to that of the 'super creatives'. This secondary hierarchical group of 'creative professionals' includes those in law, business, finance and other necessary areas who convert the work of the 'super creatives' into a usable form to be exploited in the broader economy. The point here is that Florida implicitly recognises that creativity is not simply the same thing as artistic activity since creative industries, as do many others, depend on all sorts of creative activity in order to function. Stuart Cunningham (2012) hints at this in his elucidation of Howkins' broad definition of creative industries. The problem in defining creativity as simply the function of the arts and culture and excluding the creative aspects of other industries perpetuates, to use Cunningham's phrase, 'the arts-science divide that has bedevilled the west' (2012: 208). This is a divide that is premised on the oppositions developed by the revolution in thinking that was Romanticism and, as Peter Watson asserts, 'we are still living with the consequences of that revolution. The rival ways of looking at the world – the cool detached light of disinterested scientific reason, and the red blooded, passionate creations of the artist – constitute the modern incoherence' (Watson, 2005: 610). This

incoherence is not part of eastern thinking where they appear not to be 'hung up on associated artistic bohemian values' (O'Conner and Gu Xin, 2012: 220). It is, instead, a belief that is peculiar to the west and one could claim therefore not a universal way to understand the phenomenon of creativity (Niu and Sternberg, 2006: 18-38).

Patrik Wikstrom (2010: 27-31), on the other hand, attempts to eschew the notion of creative industries altogether, preferring the term copyright industries. In outlining his understanding of creativity he relies heavily on Teresa Amabile's (1983) earliest work on intrinsic motivation. Amabile, according to Wikstrom:

stresses the importance of finding your own, internal motivation and being able to stay independent of demands and reactions from the environment. A symbol creator's primary driver has to be the joy, will or need to create for its own sake, independent of whether the product will be received by good reviews or commercial success. Amabile summarizes her conclusions by stating that 'intrinsic motivation is conducive to creativity, but extrinsic motivation is detrimental' (Amabile, 1996: 155). (Wikstrom, 2009: 29).

Wikstrom uses this position to then justify the continuation of the art versus commerce dichotomy. He writes that 'to achieve authenticity, culture should be created by a symbol creator who is independent of any commercial pressure' (2009: 28). Wikstrom then suggests that 'symbol creators in the copyright industries follow "an algorithm" in order to deliver products that fulfil certain criteria and hence are commercially successful in the marketplace' (2009: 29). It should be noted here that an algorithmic task is one where the procedures are methodically laid out in an almost mathematical way and a heuristic one is a self-driven process of discovery. However, once again, what underpins these ideas is an implicit reliance on some basic, and now archaic, cultural assumptions about Art. From this older perspective good Art is discovered, not pre-planned, as R.G. Collingwood argues in his book *The Principles of Art* (1963). But as Sharon Bailin (1988: 90) explains:

For Collingwood, the essence of art lies in the fact that the end does not really exist until the work is completed. It involves, essentially, the expression of emotions and this is achieved only in the course of the execution of the work. If this is the case then the essence of art cannot lie in the perfection of technique. Making something purely technically is a feature of craft and implies a preconceived end...this sort of claim about the impossibility of foreknowledge is made frequently in art theory and has something in common with the divine inspiration view.

Reading more widely would reveal further critiques of Wikstrom's understanding of creativity and its reliance on the idea of intrinsic motivation. As Eisenberger and Shanock (2003) argue in their article 'Rewards, Intrinsic Motivation, and Creativity: A Case Study of Conceptual and Methodological Isolation', published in the *Creativity Research Journal* (2003), the characterisation of extrinsic motivation as a largely negative process can be traced to a quite particular view of creativity. They assert that 'Romanticism's emphasis on self-determination has had a strong influence on Western culture's view of intrinsic motivation and creativity' (2003: 122). The problem here is that, as Keith Sawyer indicates, a rational explanation of creativity 'requires us to look critically at our own cultural assumptions about how creativity works' (2006: 33) and furthermore, research studies into this phenomenon 'fail to support our most cherished beliefs about creativity' (ibid.).

Terry Flew, in his book *The Creative Industries: Culture and Policy* (2012: 102-103), also outlines some of the various assumptions made about creativity. He explores Raymond Williams' (1958) foundational and groundbreaking work on communication, culture and creativity and moves through a number of propositions to the work of Davis and Scase (2000). The latter see the creative process as having three important characteristics, that is, autonomy, non-conformity and indeterminacy (in Flew, 2012: 103). However, the idea of autonomy appears to be one aligned with a desire for an absence of constraint (Hume, 1952) and, if so, is linked to the idea of non-conformity in as much as they are both foundational characteristics of what Mario Praz et.al. (1970)

and Duncan Petrie (1991) call the Romantic agony. Davis and Scase appear to have made the same cultural assumptions as those Sawyer points out above. The evidence suggests that creation, even of the paradigm shifting sort, is reliant on a certain amount of conformity as it is 'is usually less radical a departure from the existing framework than we tend to believe' (Bailin, 1988: 89). Sharon Bailin (1988: 96) asserts that:

there is not a real discontinuity between achieving highly within the rules of a discipline and achieving highly when it entails going beyond or changing some rules. The latter is, rather, an extension of the former. It would be incorrect to view any discipline or creative activity as taking place within rigid boundaries and being totally delimited and defined by rules. Instead, the possibilities for what can be achieved are really open-ended. Furthermore, one never breaks down all the rules, since to do so would be to abandon the discipline.

There have also been problematics associated with the perceived relationship between creativity and innovation (McIntyre, 2011). For Jill Nemiro 'creativity and innovation, for the most part, have been characterized as two separate processes' (Nemiro, 2004: 14). For example, Rosenfeld and Servo contend that 'they are different. Creativity refers to the generation of novel ideas – innovation to making money with them. Creativity is the starting point for innovation' (1991: 29). However, Nemiro suggests that these supposedly different phenomena 'may be more closely related than their apparent separation may imply' (2004: 14). To say that creativity is just 'thinking up new things' and innovation is 'doing new things' is too narrow a view. It suggests that 'creativity is largely cognitive and innovation largely behavioural' (2004: 14). In a paper Nemiro and Mark Runco, the editor of the *Creativity Research Journal*, presented, they suggested that:

Surely innovation requires some thought, and creative insights may follow from actual activity. Just as surely there can be some interplay; a creative idea may suggest an innovation, which in turn suggests new and creative



possibilities. Part of the problem is the either-or assumption, the dichotomy that artificially separates creativity and innovation. (Nemiro and Runco, quoted in Nemiro, 2004: 14–5).

Others have also eschewed the common usage that ‘creativity is the ideas part of innovation’ (Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2009: 4) and now treat ‘innovation and creativity as “effects”, or emergent properties, rather than externalities or inputs’ (Pratt and Gornostaeva, in Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2009: 120). Similarly, John Hartley has more recently advocated for a general paradigm shift in thinking about creativity. He asserts that the objective now is to ‘understand creative innovation as a general cultural attribute rather than one restricted only to accredited experts such as artists, and thus to theorize creativity as a form of *emergence* for dynamic systems’ (Hartley, 2012: 199). This shift in thinking parallels the development of the term ‘creativity’ outlined in the more general research literature on creativity, summarised briefly above, and it also parallels the general conclusion coming from much of the specific research literature on creativity within psychology (Hennessy and Amabile, 2010). Hennessy and Amabile claim that more researchers in psychology are beginning to recognise ‘that creativity arises through a system of interrelated forces operating at multiple levels, often requiring interdisciplinary investigation ... in fact, the “whole” of the creative process must be viewed as much more than a simple sum of its parts’ (2010: 571).

To trace this shift the editors of *Creative Industries: Critical Readings Vols 1-4* (2012), Brian Moeran and Ana Alacovska, have placed a set of varied entries about the concept of creativity in their collection which parallels some of the developments in thinking from the research literature on creativity mentioned above. Leaving aside the rhetoric of the fourth entry, the first that concerns us here, from Olsen, relies on seeing creativity as primarily cognitive, the second, from Negus and Pickering, moves beyond this to question many of the cultural assumptions that underpin thinking about creativity in the West, and the third, from Peter Tschmuck, accepts that creativity is a systemic process. To explore these movements of thought a little further the entry on ‘creativity’ in Hartley et. al.’s book *Key Concepts in Creative Industries* (2013: 65-69) initially highlights the

early views of creativity in the western philosophical tradition. It starts with the Biblical idea that things can be brought into being from nothing - *ex nihilo* as it were - and problematises this. The entry traces the narrative of the term 'creativity' through its secularisation 'derived from Kant's aesthetics and represented in the ideal type of the "creative genius"' (Hartley et al., 2013: 65-66) and arrives at Guilford's famous address to the APA in the 1950s seeing creativity as solely a cognitive attribute. Hartley et. al.'s narrative then briefly examines the application of the Torrance Tests which provided a utilitarian turning point, especially for behavioural psychologists, in the modern period in this etymological narrative.

This précis then takes a turn away from its parallels with the narrative trajectory revealed in the creativity research literature, as outlined briefly above at the beginning of the paper, via a brief examination of the related concept of 'creative industries' and its development out of cultural policy. But the story then rejoins the narrative at a similar point as much of the research literature on creativity. Confluence models of creativity start to appear in the narrative. The authors declare, citing Mockro and Csikszentmihalyi, that 'the key point to note therefore is that creativity is part of a complex dynamic system of feedback, one in which novel ideas and acts may result in creativity – but only in the context of an interaction with a symbolic system inherited from previous generations and with a social system qualified to evaluate and accept novelty' (Hartley et al., 2013: 67). Then the authors mention one of the more interesting ideas about western understandings of creativity.

While there is an emphasis on innovation, newness, originality or most often novelty in many western perceptions of creativity (Niu and Sternberg 2006), this cultural assumption, what Hartley et al. argue is primarily derived from an ideological base, neglects the fact that tradition and convention are just as essential to creativity as novelty is. As Negus and Pickering (2004: 91) have asserted:

Creativity doesn't emerge out of a vacuum, but builds on one or more existing cultural traditions ... In this sense creative talent requires a tradition

so that it can learn how to go further within it or beyond it. Innovation should be understood by rejecting those approaches which set it squarely against tradition and established cultural practice.

For Robert Weisberg, one of the central protagonists in many of the debates on creativity that occur within psychology, 'true originality evolves as the individual goes beyond what others had done before' (1988: 173). If this is the case, as Bailin (1988), Weisberg (1988) and Negus and Pickering (2004) have all argued, 'commitment, training, discipline and access to the traditions and conventions of the domain of knowledge are just as critical to creativity as rule-breaking and unconventional behaviour' (McIntyre, 2011: 246).

Hartley et al. (2013) then highlight another of the debates that have circulated in the literature, particularly that coming from sociology. They present a seeming paradox suggesting that 'much value creation in the creative industries is due to 'mundane' or 'humdrum' labour, the work of accountants, lawyers and a range of technical staff located on the boundary where commerce meets art' (Hartley et al., 2013: 68). Attributing creativity only to those things that are done by those whose work is designated as a core activity, as opposed to a non-core activity done by humdrum or mundane workers, as Becker (1982) points out, is problematic. The temptation is to put the core activity at the centre of creative action. But once we move past having individual creators at the *centre* of creative action the supposed paradox ceases to be a paradox. To accomplish this one must accept the idea of creativity as an emergent property of a system at work. A system produces creativity, not individuals alone, and that system has many factors involved including a field of active contributors, some of whom would be seen in the earlier discourse as merely humdrum workers. What is needed instead is a less Ptolemaic and more Copernican approach to the matter (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988: 336). This necessary shift in thinking would go some way to resolving the issues raised by authors such as Dawson and Holmes when they argue in their book *Working in the Global Film and Television Industries: Creativity, Systems, Space, Patronage* (2012), in a manner similar to Howard Becker (1982), that 'the

practice of drawing sharp distinctions between above-the-line and below-the-line workers needs to be interrogated and that we need other ways to understand creativity in an industry with a complex social division of labour involving large numbers of people working cooperatively' (2012: 14). In short we need to see this set of actions as a creative system at work. As they conclude, 'creativity, then, is not a quality possessed by individuals but a characteristic determined by the social nature of production' (2012: 15). One may not necessarily agree with their use of the word 'determined' however.

As the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (1996) and Janet Wolff (1982) have at various times asserted, creativity is not some metaphysical process that operates beyond the action of external conditions but is deeply entwined with the structures it emerges from. As such creativity is circumscribed, not determined, by those structures which provide the conditions for its possible emergence. If this is the case it is misleading to only call these structural factors 'constraints' (e.g. Peterson, 1982) since they do both; they enable *and* constrain at one and the same time. They provide the conditions which give rise to the possibility of action, the decision-making and choice-making that is the hallmark of creativity. Bourdieu's own account of cultural production was itself an attempt to get past the oppositions and determinisms of the agency versus structure dichotomy and replace it with a view that centralised complementarity, not polar oppositions. For him:

it is the interplay between a *field of works* which presents possibilities of action to an individual who possesses the necessary *habitus*, partially composed of personal levels of *social, cultural, symbolic and economic capital* that then inclines them to act and react within particular structured and dynamic spaces called *fields*. These fields are arenas of production and circulation of goods, ideas and knowledges. They are populated by other agents who compete using various levels of the forms of capital pertinent to that field. Bourdieu suggests that it is the interplay between these various spheres of cultural production that makes practice possible. (McIntyre, 2009: 7)

This description has its parallels in psychology. The systems model of creativity, initially developed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the 1980s, proposes that three major factors, that is, a structure of knowledge manifest in a particular symbol system (*a domain*), a structured social organisation that understands and uses that body of knowledge (*a field*), and an active entity (*an agent*), with an idiosyncratic background, that makes changes to the stored information which pre-exists them, are all necessary for creativity to occur. Each component factor in the system is as equally important as the others as each 'affects the others and is affected by them in turn' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988: 329) indicating the system's essential non-linearity. It is from the system in action that creativity emerges. I believe this understanding of creativity and cultural production goes some way toward providing the answer to John Hartley's call to 'theorize creativity as a form of *emergence* for dynamic systems' (Hartley, 2012: 199).

Given this conclusion and the range of views about creativity, demonstrated above in outlining the movements of thought discernible in each body of literature, what this paper has attempted to do is place the various conceptions of creativity used in some of the literature on creative industries against the extensive research literature specifically focused on the phenomenon of creativity. In doing so I hope I have drawn out some of the parallels, disjunctures and similarities. In summary, both start their thinking on creativity from a set of common cultural assumptions or myths. For the creative industries literature this led to an early emphasis on the art versus commerce dichotomy itself grounded in Romantic assumptions on creativity. The problems with this approach have become evident when placed alongside the more focused research literature on creativity itself. Finally, we can claim that both sets of literature have moved or are moving toward viewing creativity as the emergent property of a dynamic system in action.

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