

On the Production of Creative Subjectivity

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ABSTRACT

Businesses today are requiring higher levels of creativity and innovation in the face of rapid change, fierce competition and increasingly complex markets. Nowhere is the more obvious than in digital media, where new approaches are being sought to creative concept development.

Grounded in psychology, academic research into creativity has focused almost exclusively on the individual, acknowledging social and cultural environment as passive factors. This paper proposes an approach that radically de-centers the individual, suggesting that creativity emerges from within a complex engagement of individuals, processes, resources, structures and limitations. The model proposed draws on the notions of 'distributed cognition' and 'machinic subjectivity' to provide a framework that encompasses the creative potential of the individual, but situates it within other equally critical environmental elements.

Given this understanding of the creative endeavour, the term 'manager' becomes too limited and prescriptive, and might best be replaced with a more suitable term such as 'facilitator' or 'catalyst'. There is a clear consensus on the value of 'creative generalists' who are able to bridge discourses and act as catalysts for creative connection. Such generalists as these appear to be ideally placed to facilitate the creative assemblages that are taking shape inside digital media agencies.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.7.2 [THE COMPUTING PROFESSION]: Organizations – *digital media agency, creative agency*

General Terms

Management, Human Factors, Theory.

Keywords

Creativity, Subjectivity, Machinic Assemblages, Embedded Cognition, Cross-disciplinarity

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Conference '04, Month 1–2, 2004, City, State, Country.
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1. INTRODUCTION

While creativity has always had artistic and social importance [25], the last fifty years have seen a dramatic increase in its perceived role within the sphere of industry. Businesses today are requiring higher levels of creativity and innovation [12] in the face of rapid change, fierce competition and increasingly complex markets [25]. Authors stress the pragmatic benefits of creativity to businesses [14, 24, 35] while CEOs of blue-chip corporates such as 3M and Chrysler advocate dramatic change to improve the creative of organizations wishing to succeed [27]. In a 'multi-disciplinary world' [13] where "[c]reativity and imagination are two of the most coveted qualities of modern organizations" [24], "creative people and processes distinguish one organization from another" [27].

Nowhere is the critical importance of creativity more obvious than in digital media broadly, and specifically in the field of digital communications. Existing in an environment of rapid technological innovation and constantly shifting market forces, digital media companies must strive to attract and foster creativity. This management challenge is particularly difficult given the current preparatory processes for those in positions responsible for managing this talent. Proposing more inter-disciplinary courses for management in the creative industries, Russell Davies suggests that "traditional MBAs are really poorly equipped to handle the increasingly creative requirements of the modern business world - having ideas, managing creative projects, working with aesthetic decisions" [13].

This paper explores how creativity has been managed in advertising and marketing agencies historically, and more recently in digital media companies. The academic literature on creativity is then briefly reviewed, providing a foundation for building a model of creativity management in keeping with recent movement toward more complex and inter-dependent conceptions of both creativity and organizational management.

1.1 Defining Creativity

Before examining the history of creative management within agencies, it is important to provide a definition of 'creativity'. Creativity has emerged as a field of serious academic study over the past fifty or sixty years. During that time scholars have put forward numerous definitions. While there is surprising commonality across definitions, it is worth noting an evolution in the way creativity has been understood.

One of the most influential academic definitions was provided by psychologist Joy Paul Guilford, who suggested that “[c]reativity refers to the abilities that are most characteristic of creative people” [25]. Beyond this, he elaborated somewhat arbitrarily that the resulting creative behaviour may include “such activities as inventing, designing, contriving, composing and planning” [25].

Like many early definitions, Guilford defined creativity in terms of the creative act or process. Most critically, others have characterized creativity as bringing into being something new [14, 32], “produc[ing] new knowledge”, [12] or “generating that which is new, original, unique” [19]. Such definitions stress the importance of novelty, rarity, unexpectedness [5, 12]. While these are considered necessary factors, definitions also extended to the need for creations to be of value [27], either through social recognition [32], or given criteria for value as understood by their creator [25].

More recently, a number of writers have defined creativity in terms of its product rather than the person or process responsible. Teresa Amabile suggested that the determination of a person or process as being creative must be based on the ‘fruit’ of that process, or that person’s efforts. She proposed that in the first instance “creativity can be regarded as the quality of products or responses judged to be creative by appropriate observers”, and then also following form this “as the process by which something so judged is produced” [1]. Such a definition underlines the importance of the audience within the creative process, situating creative work within “social systems making judgments about individual’s products” [3]. Criteria for creativity cannot then be objective, but requires a specific historical social context [2].

While this more situated, subjective definition of creativity may lack the individual-centric simplicity of previous definitions, it does provide an excellent framework for business oriented analysis of creativity. In the digital communication agency setting, for instance, the ‘creativity’ of a product or idea is most pragmatically understood as a judgment made by those associated with the process – whether that be managers, clients, customers, or award judges.

2. CREATIVITY IN COMMUNICATIONS

Before building on these definitions to construct a model for managing creativity, it is useful to review brief history of creativity within the communications industry. While digital media and communication differs from the traditional advertising and marketing model in important ways, the field has to a considerable extent inherited the creative legacy of these forebears [8, 13].

2.1 Creative Agencies

Since the inception of advertising, creativity has played an important role in the industry. This role originated in the creation of in-house writing departments by media agencies wanting to ensure that clients received the best responses to newspaper ad placements. These copywriters were termed ‘creative’, stressing that they were to strive for originality, novelty, and impact.

Interestingly, it was at around this time that Guilford conducted what he claimed was the first successful attempt to measure the

creativity of advertisers – a study in which he demonstrated that ‘creative’ copywriters fared better on tests for creative ability than other ‘non-creative’ members of the organizations he studied [18].

As advertising became more visual (initially in print and then with the advent of television) copywriters were paired with more visually literate art directors. These pairings, or ‘creative dyads’ because the traditional archetype of the advertising creative in the golden era of creatives such as Leo Burnett, William Bernbach and David Ogilvy.

As creativity was professionalized and copywriters and art directors began to be referred to as ‘creatives’ they were placed under ‘creative directors’ who headed up ‘creative departments’. Following a heyday of several decades, the last twenty years has seen a number of challenges to the primacy of these ‘creatives’ within the creative process. [8, 40]

2.2 Media and Planning Agencies

As media planning (and more recently communications planning), have increased in importance [40], these agencies have sought to regain a degree of creative control. While the ‘creatives’ may still write the ads, more often it is the planners within media or communications planning agencies that will come up with ‘the big idea’. With the continuing proliferation of specialist agencies to the counterpoint of increasingly large integrated agencies, emerging roles such as media strategists, creative planners, and creative strategists continue to appear. Such roles demonstrate the fragmentation of creativity within the industry, while pure traditional ‘creatives’ often feel disempowered by their diminishing part in the process.

2.3 Digital Agencies

Despite considerable flux during the dot com boom, crash, and resurgence, digital marketing communications has established itself as a significant industry. Companies in this space merge the creative needs of the advertising sector with the high-paced technological innovation of the digital media space. For this reason, it is an excellent environment within which to examine new approaches to creativity.

One of the areas of most interest regarding new forms of creativity is the full service digital agency.¹ These agencies offer a suite of services including web development, online media planning and buying, email marketing, online advertising, online public relations, and digital strategy. Unlike traditional creative agencies that outsource much of the production of television commercials or mail-packs, full service digital agencies have internal departments responsible for the deployment of these solutions.

These agencies provide a unique challenge in terms of creativity for two reasons. Firstly, they offer integrated digital media solutions, encompassing a range of disciplinary offerings. A single campaign may include advertisements placed in online media, a website, and an email or mobile component.

¹ This paper is written from my perspective as creative director of OneDigital, one of Australia’s longest established digital agencies.

Conceptualizing such complex cross-disciplinary solutions is a creative challenge.

Secondly, these agencies have at their disposal a diverse collection of staff – from graphic designers and copywriters to application developers and online media planners. Each of these disciplines possess deep specialist knowledge that may be critical in any given campaign concept. Leveraging this cross-disciplinary resource is the other half of the creative challenge.

Broadly speaking, digital agencies have addressed the need of creative concept development in one of two distinct ways – through brainstorm culture or through a creative design team. Brainstorm culture will often be the choice of smaller agencies, particularly those who advocate an egalitarian ‘flat structure’. These organizations develop creative ideas through open brainstorming workshops, often inviting all members of the organization, including support staff such as receptionists.

As agencies grow, they often find this unwieldy, and will move to the creative design team model. In this model, the team responsible for visual design will be nominated as the creative team, headed by a creative director (often the most senior graphic designer). By the time agencies reach this point, they generally have a defined account service team who will be responsible for writing creative briefs that the creative team then respond to. This model is based loosely on the traditional agency model, with the exception that the ‘creatives’ are primarily visual, and play a dual role of design.

2.4 New approaches to digital creativity

As the digital space becomes more complex, and digital agencies begin to compete creatively with mainstream agencies, new approaches are being sought to creative concept development.

As discussed above, the first creatives were copywriters, selected for their narrative expression, their capacity for compelling storytelling. They were followed by art directors in traditional agencies and graphic designers in digital agencies – these creatives brought an aesthetic strength, a creativity of sensuality. The rise of media and planning agencies has seen the arrival of creatives chosen for their analytical abilities, driving innovation through logic. In response to more challenging environments and an ever-increasing demand for creative thought, David Armano proposes a ‘new creative mind’, bringing together expressive, sensual and analytical ability, and infusing them with a fourth strength – curiosity. It is this ‘renaissance’ creative, Armano believes, that has the potential to take digital agencies forward creatively [4].

Armano is not alone in drawing attention to these generalist creatives. Several other thought leaders have identified the need for cross-disciplinary approaches to creativity that reflect the complex and multifaceted environment in which ideas will be deployed. [13, 24, 26] It is suggested that not only are these individuals able to generate creative ideas themselves, but as discussed below, they are ideally suited to manage the creative process within organizations.

This paper proposes that digital media companies and creative agencies – and digital agencies in particular – must move to a more flexible model of creativity. Such a model will use the skills of ‘creative generalists’ to engage the wide range of creative

resources an agency has at hand. Unlike the established creative processes in many organizations, this engagement will ideally be variable and fluid in order to maximize the potentiality of the solutions produced.

As a starting point for developing this model it is important to review the considerable academic analysis of creativity that has occurred over the past fifty years. Beyond this, the model will then incorporate notions from the emerging trans-disciplinary fields of distributed cognition and machinic subjectivity to sketch a conceptual approach which provides normative suggestions for managing creativity.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scientific study of creativity is relatively young, with key foundational work by Guilford in 1950 suggesting the area, while socially seen to be important, had been neglected by psychologists [23]. To date it has generally been psychology (and more recently social psychology) that have provided most of the academic discourse on creativity. As late as 2006, Sawyer reiterated that “creativity has not received much attention from scientists” [36].

Given psychology’s focus on the individual, it is unsurprising that creativity has almost exclusively been seen as the domain of the individual. This focus was clearly shown in the approach of numerous authors who methodology has involved case studies, examining the lives of exemplary creative people – from Anais Nin to Charles Darwin [45]. Even when social psychologists began to examine social processes and cultural factors, these were seen as influencing the individual’s capacity for creativity. Whether trait-based, universal, teachable, or innate, creativity has generally been believed to reside in what Guilford describes as the ‘creative person’. [23]

3.1 Creative People

Psychological research into the creative person began with attempts to define a set of combinatorial factors that make up the ‘creative personality’. Guilford was the first author to explicitly differentiate between creativity and intelligence and propose a tentative set of creative traits [23]. His model would be ratified and extended, as various researchers discussed and debated to structure of the creative ability [3, 11, 12].

Having established a general understanding of critical traits, a number of researchers focused on cognitive and social processes surrounding creative behaviour [12, 14, 41, 42]. While some have looked at creativity exclusively as the result of these processes [14], most have proposed a core creative potential of the individual that is then expressed through innate or learned processes [12].

3.2 Social and Cultural Factors

Increasing interest in creativity, particularly in organizational settings, has resulted in its study within social psychology. Based on research showing that certain organizational cultures and climates foster or repress creativity [17, 21, 27, 43, 46], a body of literature has appeared proving normative approaches to developing organizations that excel creatively. Such models generally stress the importance of creating norms and climates for creativity [46], often by addressing factors such as challenge,

freedom, resources, work-groups, supervisory encouragement, and organizational support [3].

3.3 Integrated Approaches

In recent years, many researchers have acknowledged the need for a more integrated approach to the study of creativity. Acknowledging that ‘creative people’ are the product of individual, social and cultural factors [12, 31, 36, 39, 46], authors have stressed the need to develop inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary [25] models to “explain creative people and their social and cultural constructs” [32]. One of the most comprehensive models has been that proposed by Dacey and Lennon, who structure creativity as a series of concentric layers with bi-directional interaction. At the model’s core is the biological aptitude of the individual. This is then wrapped with cognitive psychological factors, micro-societal (group) factors, and macro-societal (cultural) factors. [12]

While such work has extended the locus of study beyond the individual, it is still the individual which is seen as the agent of creative work – as shown by the individual’s central position in Dacey and Lennon’s model [12]. Creative climates, processes and structures serve to facilitate the creativity of the individuals around which they are constructed by providing “frameworks for encouraging and rewarding creative behaviour” [14]. Czikszenmihaly alludes to a more active role for cultural factors, suggesting that in order for an individual to be creative, the culture must provide “a set of rules and practices” that enable creation. These form the creative ‘domain’, composed of knowledge, tools, values, practices [11]. Drawing on Amabile’s subjective definition of creativity, the domain is the context in which creativity occurs and can be understood. In this way, culture is more than a passive provider of tools for creativity, it is an inherent component in the process.

The remainder of this paper proposes an approach that radically de-centers the individual, instead situating creativity within an integrated ‘assemblage’ of human and non-human components. Based on this model, normative suggestions are presented as to the how organizations can facilitate creativity within this de-individualised model.

4. CREATIVE SUBJECTIVITY

Creativity emerges from within a complex engagement of individuals, processes, resources, structures and limitations. Depending on the situation, these components can be brought together in endless different ways, each fostering or restricting the emergence of a creative product. In looking at these collections of components, Andy Clark’s work on ‘distributed cognition’ and Felix Guattari’s work on ‘machinic subjectivity’ provide a framework for the development of a model that encompasses the creative potential of the individual, but situates it within other equally critical environmental elements.

4.1 Distributed Cognition

The notion of creativity as the domain not of an individual, but of a number of individuals, engaged within objects and processes situated within a broader cultural environment fits well with the field of distributed cognition. Challenging the primacy of the

brain, this field positions creativity and other cognitive processes within assembled collections of individuals and objects within their environments.

Cognitive scientist and philosopher Andy Clark has championed the distributed cognition approach, where the brain, body and environment are interdependent aspects of a single complex and dynamic system [9]. Beyond the individual, Clark uses the term ‘scaffolding’ to refer to physical, cognitive and social structures within the environment with which we can engage, extending our abilities [9]. Such a definition has obvious resonance with components within the creative ‘domain’ outlined by Czikszenmihaly [11].

Distributed cognition provides a powerful framework for the examination of individual’s interaction with such components. Emphasizing the interplay between the (malleable) individual and (equally malleable) components of their environment, Clark’s notions of ‘scaffolding’ and ‘coalitions of shared control’ begin to structure thinking about such interactions. In this context, creative thought can only be explained when the assemblage of brain, body and environment is acknowledged [9].

4.2 Machines and Assemblages

The term ‘assemblage’ is drawn from a vocabulary used by radical philosophers Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. The notion of assemblage is grounded in the abstract conception of a ‘machine’ [30] as a nexus of relations; an entity of flows and stoppage [15]. Using this terminology, many things can be viewed as machines, from individuals and physical devices to groups and abstract concepts. Such machines – from the organic to the semiotic – articulate with one another to form ‘machinic assemblages’. Each of these assemblages is an “intermingling of bodies reacting to one another” [15] in what philosophers Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela described as ‘reciprocal deformation’ [30].

Such assemblages are partial and multiple – continually establishing connections to one another that result in decentralised, rhizomatic networks. Counter to the approach of many traditional fields of study, including psychology, these networks negate the primacy of a natural ‘subject’, or individual [30]. Subjectivity within such a philosophy is necessarily “plural and polyphonic” [22] – multiple and dynamic; overlapping and interacting. It is within Deleuze and Guattari that the notion of the individual is most problematised, from both directions. The human body is merely part of many complex momentary assemblages, and simultaneously is merely the transitory collection of other more granular machines. Any ‘individual’ form may be seen as part of another ‘individual’ that is “governed by another, more complex, relation, and so on to infinity.” [16] As a consequence, each individual is at once an “infinite multiplicity”, and the universe becomes “a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities.” [16]

4.3 Machinic Subjectivity

Following his collaboration with Deleuze, Felix Guattari’s writings on ‘machinic subjectivity’ provide a comprehensive analysis of the nature of subjectivity beyond the individual. Guattari suggested that the society within which an individual exists, and the other individuals and objects that they engage with – material, cognitive, affective and social – all form part of an

assemblage of which that individual is only a constituent part [22]. The resulting image of the elements involved in any creative process is multiple and heterogeneous, a highly connected machinic assemblage – a complex ensemble with which other systems can then engage.

Guattari proposed that the activity (or ‘performance’) of a collective assemblage necessarily produces a subjectivity, regardless of the nature of constituent machines. While the assemblage that is a human individual produces subjectivity, so too does the assemblage that is a piece of technical machinery, or the assemblage that is an ecosystem.

Beyond the individual, unusual (and hence potentially creative) expressions may be found in subjectivity that is not psychologically intrapersonal, but “transpersonal ... contained in the interactions between people” [29]. Such a worldview tends to privilege the connectivity of an assemblage over the identity of its constituent machines.

4.4 Creative Subjectivity

Within this paradigm, the creative process takes the shape of an evolving assemblage of heterogeneous parts. The nature of the output of this process is a result of the subjectivity of the assemblage. When Guattari proposes “a more transversalist conception of subjectivity”, he lists various types of machines that may form part of such assemblages; materials, forms, ideas, individuals, and socioculture components [22]. These are strongly congruent with the resources previously described as available to the organization striving to achieve creative excellence.

The specific components that make up the assemblage, and the way in which they are brought together are critical to the nature of the subjectivity that the assemblage possesses. “The machinic production of subjectivity can work for the better or for the worse ... everything depends on its articulation with collective assemblages of enunciation. At best there is the creation, or invention, of new Universes of reference” [22].

The complex and emergent nature of the creative process assemblage with its diverse and subtle connections means that managers must work the tension to locate the ‘ever-mobile sweet spot’ [***x3], balancing constantly between creating articulation with rigid, scientific machines (‘striated spaces’ or ‘Existential Territories’) and chaotic, artistic spaces (‘smooth spaces’ or ‘Incorporeal Universes’ (arts, smooth spaces). [22] It is in the liminal space on the ‘edge of chaos’ [34] that valuable creative innovation will occur.

5. MANAGING CREATIVITY

The notion of assemblages that facilitate creative subjectivity provides normative direction for organizations wishing to excel at innovation and creativity. In calling for a more holistic approach to the study of creativity, Abraham Maslow suggests an ‘organismic, or systemic’ approach [28], echoing the machinic model. Similarly, Richard Pascale recommends “[t]reating organizations as complex adaptive systems”, and describes the management of creativity as “shaping the edge of chaos” [34] – an excellent analogy for the challenge of balancing structured and chaotic influences within the creative assemblage.

Drawing pragmatic advice from the model described here, two key recommendations can be established. The first of these is that businesses identify a broad range of components that can be articulated into the creative process and ensure that these components are available when required. An important part of this is understanding the benefits of a multidisciplinary team and how that team is best used. The second recommendation is that businesses select and empower a facilitator for this process. Some time will be spent below examining academic and professional analysis of the types of people who will be most effective in this role as catalyst.

5.1 Components of an Assemblage

Understanding the wide range of elements that can be brought into the creative assemblage is critical. When Czikszenmihaly discusses the creative domain he defines it as including knowledge, tools, values, and practices [11]. This is one possible categorization of those components of the creative assemblage beyond the individual. Joan Erickson provides a broader scope with her suggestion that creativity is brought about through the use of creative play in concert with things, materials, tools, process, and forms [19]. Spatiality has also been raised by several authors as a key factor in creative effort [19, 27].

Looking at the creative process within digital agencies, the components available may include people (team members, the client, consumers, experts), processes (brainstorms, prototyping), knowledge (syndicated research, focus group responses), and tools (briefs, intranets). Only when all of these components are available when needed can an organization achieve its creative potential.

The task of bringing together a series of diverse components and disciplines to produce a creative assemblage is a challenging one. The issues facing the manager of such a process mirror the difficulties faced by academics that stray outside a single discipline and attempt some form of cross-disciplinary synthesis. For this reason, it is useful to draw on the work of several academic theorists who offer pragmatic advice on these challenges.

5.2 Connectedness and Heterogeneity

In facilitating creativity, many authors emphasise the critical importance of heterogeneity. Creativity is often described as involving “crossing the boundaries of domains” [10], spanning “multiple touch-points and experiences” [3], requiring that we “seek out fragments of possibility, information, ideas, expertise and worldview from their many scattered sources and try to put them together sensibly and productively.” [24]

Ideas, it is suggested, cannot be confined by the ‘silos’ of existing domains [24], and it is the identification of connections across boundaries that is crucial to creative work [33]. This situates creativity at “an intersection of fields, disciplines, or cultures” [26], an area rich in paradoxes, “born of ambiguity, complexity, and improvisation” [27].

Unsurprisingly, creative structures in such a space are seen as highly volatile, part of an ongoing process of exploration [27], as suggested by the model of a continually adapting assemblage.

Managing such an exploration requires tentative mastery of this tension between domains.

5.3 Creative Catalysts

Given this understanding of the creative endeavour, the term ‘manager’ becomes too limited and prescriptive, and might best be replaced with a more suitable term such as ‘facilitator’ or ‘catalyst’. The role of a creative catalyst is not to enforce and support the rigours of a predefined autocratic process, but to influence by alternately prodding, provoking, inspiring, and challenging. [27]

The process of generating ideas in this way requires “guardians who are generalists” [24], individuals Daniel Pink describes as “boundary crossers [who] understand the connections between diverse, and seemingly separate, disparate fields”, who “grasp the relationships between relationships” [35].

These individuals often follow the archetype of the creative generalists described earlier. These are individuals who appear best suited not only to individually developing creative ideas in the complex digital media space, but also to steering the broader organizational process of creativity.

Pink suggests that such catalysts tend to “develop expertise in multiple spheres, they speak different languages, and they find joy in the rich variety of human experience” [35]. This description is strongly congruent with Jon Steel’s advice on hiring creative account planners with diverse life experience and interests [40], and Russell Davies’ call for more eclectic training within the industry [13].

These descriptions are also very similar to Paul Feyerabend’s commentary on the importance of diversity for academic researchers. Feyerabend suggests that the “successful researcher frequently is a literate man, he knows many tricks, ideas, ways of speaking, he is familiar with the details of history and abstractions of cosmology, he can combine fragments of widely differing points of view and quickly switch from one framework to another. He is not tied to any particular language for he may speak the language of fact and the language of fairytale side by side and mix them up in the most unexpected ways.” [20]

This approach to academic study is echoed by Damien Broderick, who believes that the most effective way for both writers and readers to work effectively across multiple disciplines involves learning through participation [6]. Through involvement in a range of disciplines, the ability to work across them emerges as sufficient understanding develops.

5.4 Hybridity and Hyphenation

Michel Serres is one of the most radical scholars writing today, and clearly an exemplar of this archetype. As a philosopher, Serres has dedicated many years to describing a path through the separatist opposition of disciplines toward a more holistic approach which he describes as ‘interdisciplinary’ [38]. His work seamlessly draws together elements from diverse fields, yet maintains a non-specialist vocabulary. Serres achieves this by drawing on a deep knowledge in an astonishingly wide range of

fields. Such an approach demands that authors steep themselves in diverse disciplines over time, a hybrid education contrary to the channeling and specialisation of contemporary academia.

At the core of Serres’ methodology is his personal development as a thinker and writer schooled in many disciplines. To achieve this extensive repertoire, he advocates an ‘apprenticeship’ that “excludes nothing” and “attempts to include everything.”

In traversing disciplines, Serres acknowledges that the academic will invariably become a foreigner within any given discipline. He insists on the need to abandon all reference points, leaving the individual “outside any community, but a little and just barely in all of them.” Crossing the river separating disciplines, the academic must fearlessly relinquish the safe conventions and comfortable assumptions of the familiar shore. In the process, the swimmer comes to find in the river itself a ‘third place’, an in-between with no sense of disciplinary belonging. [37] As a consequence, the academic becomes hybrid and multiple, coming to discover elements of all disciplines “brought together in himself” [38]. The notion of hybridity is also important to Pink, who believes that often creative ‘boundary crossers’ will “lead hyphenated lives filled with hyphenated jobs and enlivened by hyphenated identities.” [35]

This archetype of the generalist as transient resembles the marginalised peoples of diasporic emigration described by postcolonial feminist Trinh Minh-Ha. Emigrants are subject to a life of re-departures, pauses and arrivals where they are denied heritage; where their identity becomes multiplied through complexity of both time and space. Trinh describes these as ‘hyphenated people’, their space an “elsewhere that does not merely lie outside the center but radically striates it.” The people of the hyphen possess a ‘hybrid’ identity that is ‘neither one nor the other’, retaining the semblance of each yet ambiguously ‘in-between’. Nameless and marginalised, these people of the hyphen dare, by necessity, to mix, to cross borders, and to introduce into discourse everything repressed by limits. [44] Such a philosophy of heterogeneous praxis would serve the creative catalyst within digital media agencies well.

5.5 Creative Generalists

Given the importance of driving creativity within industries such as digital media, it is no surprise that thought leaders are beginning to identify the critical nature of identifying and nurturing individuals who are suitable for this type of catalytic role in the creative process.

Writing as a traditional account planner, Jon Steel has long advocated hiring planners with diverse and unusual backgrounds, and providing them the necessary freedoms and resources to be creative [40]. Russell Davies, previously a global planner for Nike, suggests that an ideal preparation for creative planning roles would constitute “classes in film editing, poetry, statistics, anthropology, business administration, copyright law, psychology, drama, the history of art, design, coffee appreciation and a thousand other things.” [13]

Whether we define them in Steve Hardy’s terms as ‘creative generalists’ [24], or possessing David Armano’s ‘new creative mind’ [4], there is a clear consensus on the value of these

renaissance thinkers, able to bridge discourses and act as catalysts for creative connection. Such generalists as these appear to be ideally placed to facilitate the creative assemblages that are taking shape inside digital media agencies.

Beyond their own creative ability as individuals, these catalysts can leverage the skills of specialists within an organization, bringing together individuals from disparate disciplines. Of particular interest are ‘T-shaped people’ – individuals which Tim Brown, founder of IDEO, describes as “creative people who are so inquisitive about the world that they’re willing to try to do what you do. ... They have a principal skill that describes the vertical leg of the T—they’re mechanical engineers or industrial designers. But they are so empathetic that they can branch out into other skills, such as anthropology, and do them as well. They are able to explore insights from many different perspectives and recognize patterns of behavior that point to a universal human need.” [7]

Not only are such thinkers valuable as a part of the creative process, they are also positioned as excellent potential generalists. Given the limitations of our current schooling and vocational training, it is perhaps those organizations that are best able to identify current and potential ‘new creatives’ that will be best positioned to drive creativity in the near future.

Creativity is an unusual ship to captain. You may not know the destination when you set out, and there’s a chance you may not recognise it when you arrive. Many of your crew may not understand the role they will play. Direction may be less a matter of keeping an even keel, and more of putting sails to the available winds at any time. You may have no idea what kind of weather to pack for, and unanticipated cargo may become useful in the most surprising ways. All these concerns will, however, pale into insignificance when you discover the distant lands of beauty and adventure to which creativity can take you.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Continuing thanks to the team at OneDigital and Isobar for their commitment to nurturing creativity.

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