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Social creativity: Re-qualifying the creative economy

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Social creativity: Re-qualifying the creative economy

Dr Nick Wilson

Despite a strong rhetoric of inclusion, both cultural and economic policies in the UK continue to reinforce the deep-seated belief that creativity is something (only) talented and artistic individuals do. This individualistic conception of creativity extends to the framing of the creative industries and the creative economy, where creativity is treated as either a quasi-commodity or the preserve of the so-called 'creative class'. I suggest that at this time of economic, social and environmental 'melt-down' we need to re-claim creativity as a social phenomenon, often resulting from human interaction across boundaries (e.g. across nation states, professions, industries, organisations, disciplines, social and cultural groupings, methods, epistemologies and rationalities). The paper offers a bold agenda for re-qualifying the creative economy according to this fundamentally social conception, including how this can be achieved through the embedding of a new discipline of social creativity.

Key words

Creative economy; creative industries; qualification; social creativity

Introduction

This paper encourages us to re-think our approach towards creativity, the creative industries, and the creative economy, including how we understand the relations between them. This re-think is needed, not least because there is a danger that cultural policy now prioritises the rhetoric of the 'creative industries' over and above any further exploration of creativity and its wider role in our economic, social and cultural welfare. This increasingly entrenched position threatens to undermine cultural policy's potential to play its (much needed) part in promoting creativity as not only an individualistic phenomenon, the preserve of the talented few, but also as a social concept, founded on our relational consciousness, and holding the promise of a genuinely creative economy.

I begin the paper by drawing attention to the somewhat paradoxical situation emerging in which on the one hand, creativity is seen as very fashionable (Florida, 2002, Lord Puttnam, 2009), even hailed as the potential saviour from the financial mess we find ourselves in at present (Bewick and Wright, 2009), whilst on the other hand, there appears to be an increasing reluctance to talk about creativity at all (Hesmondhalgh, 2005, 2007b; O'Connor, 2007). In the UK at least, the creative industries have 'come of age' (Bakhshi, 2009), taking their place at the high table alongside the now beleaguered financial and business services sector. Statistics on creative industries output and productivity are regularly banded about to indicate their primary significance to the national economy. Nearly all English regions have creative industries as 'priority sectors'. Meanwhile, discussion of creativity itself increasingly takes a back seat, on the grounds that it is either too confusing or too ubiquitous to warrant meaningful discussion (Pratt, 2005, Oakley, 2006). Tellingly, Government cultural policy is now predicated upon a definition of the creative sector which avoids using the word 'creativity', preferring 'expressive value'

instead (Work Foundation, 2007). So, as Oakley (2006: 271) suggests “The particular mix of cultural, economic and social assumptions buried in the term ‘creativity’, now need to be unpicked and critically examined if we are to progress either in economically developing the creative industries, or in understanding the role of creative activities in society more generally”.

By way of initial unpicking, I suggest that we need to re-think the boundaries of the creative economy and the particular role and nature of creativity as a primary input in this context. Over the last decade, we have re-drawn boundaries around the ‘creative industries’ which unwittingly threaten to exclude and promote division. Though these boundaries are based on an apparently justifiable division of labour – including a number of specific industries which are deemed ‘creative’ – they also threaten to promote a ‘labour of division’ (the proactive continued separation of peoples, cultures, knowledge and wealth) on the basis of creativity as an output i.e. whether or not you work, or have the potential to work in the creative industries.

To the extent that cultural policy is concerned with enabling a creative economy that would impact positively on the many problems facing the world, I suggest that we are prone to continue looking for solutions in the wrong places, unless, that is, we begin to pay more attention to the intrinsically social nature of creativity. After all, creativity is a boundary phenomenon (see Ibbotson and Darsø, 2008). It thrives at the edge of things, between the gaps, as it were. The creativity of the marginalised is as valuable (if not more so) as that of those who visibly work in the creative industries. Cultural policy is not solely concerned with getting more people from diverse backgrounds into the creative industries (though clearly this is a worthy goal to strive for - see Florida, 2002; Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008). Notwithstanding cultural policy’s concern for a complex set of issues at the intersection of culture and economics (see Hesmondhalgh, 2007a) it must surely have a fundamental interest in supporting and enabling the creative potential in all of us. Such an inclusivist perspective implicitly acknowledges the potential benefits of creativity across social and economic policy agendas, rather than relying on what amounts to a form of social policy in disguise (see Holden, 2004).

The paper continues by setting out the case for why we need to re-think creativity, the creative industries and the creative economy at this time. This raises the somewhat awkward contention that a potential barrier to achieving a genuinely creative economy is, in fact, the creative industries, premised as they are upon a predominantly individualistic notion of creativity. I suggest that we now need to re-qualify the creative economy in terms that allow for a stronger social conceptualisation of creativity. ‘Social creativity’ is introduced as a means of understanding how interaction across boundaries (including those of the creative industries) enables, motivates and constrains the reproduction and/or transformation of social values, and the realisation of human beings’ creative potential. In the final section of the paper I put forward some initial thoughts as to how social creativity as a discipline of practical idealism, practiced first within the Higher Education sector, could begin to be embedded in practice.

Time to re-think creativity?

It is perhaps no coincidence that the run-away hit of the 2009 Oscars was *Slumdog Millionaire*, a 'feel good' movie, set in the slums of Mumbai. It reflects a deep-seated desire to transcend the problems and challenges of the world about us. Well before we became enmeshed in the gloom of the biggest global recession since the 1930s, it was apparent that we are living through a profound crisis of rationality and problems of moral and epistemological incommensurability. There are great ills, great injustices, great asymmetries of power, and yet we lack a system of rational inquiry that can persuade people into a better social order and form of social existence. We also remain in search of a better mode of working and being with nature (see Bhaskar, 2007). In the words of the author, Ben Okri (The Times, October 30, 2008) - "the meltdown in the economy is a harsh metaphor of the meltdown of some of our value systems...Individualism has been raised almost to a religion, appearance made more important than substance...Scientific rationality has proved inadequate to the unpredictabilities of the times". The means by which we educate (and are educated) is also facing crisis (see Scott, 1997; Barnett, 2000; Bauman, 2001). As Robinson (2001) maintains, Western education systems have been built on the precepts of a post-Enlightenment perspective, which maximises industrial utility rather than human vitality. At this time of credit crunch and serious global economic downturn, we might well argue that education is facing its own 'credibility crunch'. The current model appears incapable of dealing with the uncertainty (Beck, 1992; Taylor, 2004; Beare, 2006) and supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000) characteristic of our age. Not only have technological advances developed to the point where we can be in constant touch with limitless forms of new data and knowledge, whether on our mobiles, computers, PDAs or other devices, but the authority and legitimacy of this knowledge is also increasingly difficult to verify. The fundamental frameworks and models by which we understand the world are multiplying. In Ronald Barnett's words "of the multiplication of frameworks, there shall be no end" (Barnett, 2000: 6).

And yet, we are also living through a profoundly exciting phase of human existence where our distinctively human capacity to generate new ideas, and to rely on our creativity is opening up opportunities and benefits that earlier generations could not even have dreamed of (e.g. the Internet, mobile communications, Web 2.0 and 3.0 developments, user generated content (UGC) as well as many advances in science, medicine, and technology). Whilst the last decades of the twentieth century have been linked to a rise in cultural pessimism (Bennett, 2001), we might suggest that the early years of the twenty-first century have given some cause for a new wave of optimism around the notion of creativity. Certainly it does not appear unreasonable to put faith in our potential to act creatively, especially in times of difficulty, and to look to those working in the creative industries in particular to pull us out of the current global recession. Creativity, after all, has become emblematic of what we aspire to, and what animates the new creative economy (O'Connor, 2007: 53).

Interest in the link between creativity and the economy reached new heights with the publishing of Richard Florida's book *The rise of the creative class*, in 2002. The underlying premise of the creative economy was that for the first time in history, the knowledge and new ideas of a so-called 'creative class' had become the primary source of

economic productivity (Seltzer and Bentley, 1999; Florida, 2002)¹. The lure of harnessing creativity for sustained economic growth spawned a frenzy of activity in the UK and elsewhere, both in terms of increased policy attention and skills development (e.g. Work Foundation, 2007; NESTA, 2007, 2006; Cox, 2005; DCMS, 2005). According to John Howkins (2001), “creativity is not new and neither is economics, but what is new is the nature and extent of the relationship between them, and how they combine to create extraordinary value and wealth” (p.8). For all the hype, the nature of the relationship remains difficult to pin-down. In the first instance it may be that the all-too-easy rhetorical slippage between creativity, creative industries and the creative economy does little to help. There are also deep-seated concerns about the possibility that creativity is being called into service of the economy, with an ‘instrumental rationality’ that recalls Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1944) criticism of the Enlightenment ‘project’. Putting this another way, there are fears about the tendency to subordinate creativity to innovation (Schlesinger, 2009). Understanding precisely what are the ‘qualities’ and features of the much discussed creative economy becomes something of a pressing concern, therefore.

(Re)-qualifying the creative economy

The term ‘qualification’ refers to the processes “through which qualities are attributed, stabilized, objectified and arranged” (Callon et al, 2002: 199). Although the term was introduced primarily in relation to the stabilisation of the characteristics of products traded in a market (rather than the characteristics of a whole industry or even economy), there is a good argument for suggesting that the creative industries have now been stabilised with a constellation of characteristics, allowing them to be compared with other sectors or types of economic activity (see DCMS, 2009). Indeed, successive reports about the creative industries have aimed at providing a means of clarifying their distinctiveness and singularity, allowing comparison with other sectors, where appropriate, in terms of economic and social inputs and outputs. We can see how their singularisation according to certain qualities such as ‘individual skills, talents and creativity’ etc. (DCMS, 1998 & 2001), or more recently the production of ‘expressive value’ (Work Foundation, 2007) allows for comparison with other industrial sectors. Notwithstanding the ongoing definitional difficulties associated with this process (see Hesmondhalgh, 2007a; Markusen et al, 2008; Throsby, 2008; UNCTAD, 2008) this is clearly a useful and important exercise from a policy perspective.

When it comes to the concept of the ‘creative economy’, however, I suggest that the process of qualification is not so far advanced. The designation of the creative economy is necessarily political (see Banks, 2007) in the sense of affecting the power-base of two groups of stakeholders that have traditionally been quite separate (i.e. the target-groups of cultural and economic policies respectively). The notion of the creative economy as currently conceived, therefore, is characterised by inherently competing forces and the tendency for the swing of the ‘political pendulum’ to move too far in either direction. On

¹ The very act of classifying a ‘creative class’ is of course divisive and potentially self-limiting.

the one hand, there is a danger of the creative economy standing accused of the instrumentalisation, or quasi-commodification of creativity, subservient to the capitalistic objectives of wealth accumulation and economic gain. When the Government talk of moving the creative industries “from the margins to the mainstream” (BERR, 2008:4) they are primarily interested in the very real economic potential of the creative economy, rather than in some form of cultural externality that sees an increase in the number of musicians, artists, film-makers and so on. In other words, there is an implicit interest in creativity within a particular context – that of market exchange. On the other hand, the creative economy might be (unfairly) seen as creatives and artists effectively claiming too much on behalf of their particular brand of creativity within the wider realm of the ostensibly ‘uncreative’ economy.

This separation between creativity and innovation runs deep in our education system. Although the Design Council, for example, call for business and creative disciplines to be brought closer together, so that “tomorrow’s companies will be run by managers who understand creativity and creative specialists who understand the business environment” (Design Council website, 2007), our education system remains structured in such a way as to reinforce traditional 19th century cultural values, unhelpful stereotypes, the status quo and the “great divide” (Bilton, 2007: 13) between creativity and commerce. Universities remain largely unprepared to adapt to the changing work environment of the creative economy (even where individuals within them want to), despite the many policy incentives and funding opportunities which are driving change at this time.

Many of the tensions so far discussed arise, in no small part, from the contested concept of creativity itself. Notwithstanding the many different definitions in use, there is general agreement that creativity depends upon two central characteristics which are rooted in a Western philosophical tradition (Bilton, 2007; Sternberg and Lubart, 1999). The first of these is difference (or novelty). Creativity can be understood as the generation of new ideas (Cox, 2005) or as the ideation component of innovation (West and Farr, 1990). It is the government’s interest in the overall process of how ideas are generated and then turned into commercially viable products and services which is the underlying rationale behind the DCMS’s Creative Economy Programme set up in 2005, for example. The second characteristic is individual talent or vision which is expressed through creative individuals. The traditional roots of the study of creativity “have focused overwhelmingly on the individual as the main, and often only, contributor to creativity” (Ford and Gioia, 1995: xxi). This is despite the fact that the analysis of creative people and creative objects has demonstrated that most scientific and artistic innovations emerge from joint thinking, passionate conversations, and shared struggles among different people, emphasising the importance of the social dimension of creativity (John-Steiner, 2000; Fischer, 2005). At the heart of the UK Government’s agenda for the creative economy is a commitment to the notion of building individual creativity (see Work Foundation, 2007). This commitment is most recently defined in the Government’s strategic document titled “unlocking”...“new talents for the new economy” (BERR, 2008).

The dominant individualistic model of creativity then perpetuates the notion that creativity is the exclusive property of a particular type of talented person. This notion is enduring (again despite being persuasively debunked as the “genius myth” – see Weisberg,

1993 and in this volume), not least because of our eagerness to present creatives, and especially artists (i.e. musicians, actors, visual artists) as in some way different to the rest of us. Towse, for example, notes that “artists’ labour markets do not work quite like the other labour markets” (Towse, 1995: 36). Elsewhere, Abbing (2002) draws attention to what he describes as ‘the *exceptional* economy of the arts’. Despite Florida’s (2002) relatively pluralist approach to the creative class, interest in the creative economy remains committed to a reading of creativity which is primarily associated with the arts and cultural sector, rather than our universal human potential for creativity. Furthermore, it is a particular reading of artistic creativity which threatens to strip out certain aspects of artistic practice – innovation, the shock of the new, risk-taking – at the expense of other characteristics of this phenomenon, including creativity as play, and as a social good (see O’Connor, 2007; Banaji *et al*, 2006; Boden, 2004).

The qualities of the creative economy then are proving difficult to singularise. Either we restrict our conceptualisation of the creative economy too narrowly, with the emphasis resting on the ‘economy’ rather than the ‘creative’, or we are in danger of taking too broad a take on being creative. Stating “we are all creative” quickly falls foul of a meaningless relativism, from where it is only a small step to a position of ‘creativity denial’ – where we choose not to refer to creativity at all (see Pratt, 2005; O’Connor, 2007; Hesmondhalgh, 2007b). I suggest that what we need to do, therefore, is to re-qualify the creative economy to take better account of the social as well as the individual aspects of creativity, and to challenge traditional disciplinary boundaries that might be restricting who we consider to be central to the creative economy. This is very much in keeping with Negus and Pickering’s (2004) viewpoint that creativity can be comprehended as exceptional and ordinary, elevated and mundane, with the one feeding off the other. In the spirit of this ‘both and’ rather than ‘either or’ approach, our newly qualified account of the creative economy is founded on both the creative potential of all individuals and the social conditions, especially the relations between ourselves, which enable this potential to be realised.

Introducing social creativity

To assert that creativity results from the social interaction between human beings is far from new, of course. Bourdieu’s work in outlining the nature of the cultural field (1993) situates artistic works within the social conditions of their production, circulation and consumption. Putnam’s (2000) influential book on social capital drew renewed attention to the importance of our relations with each other, and their impact on the fulfilment of our creative potential. Systems approaches to the study of creativity have helped us to consider peoples’ “complex interactions and feedback cycles” (Amabile, 1995: 425), for example. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) systems model (which is perhaps the most widely known), focuses on the interrelations between the *domain*, the *field* and the creative *person*. Fundamental to this conceptualisation of creativity is an acceptance of boundaries around specific domains of knowledge and a reliance on experts (the so-called ‘field’) to pass judgment on what constitutes creativity. However, there are limitations with this perspective. First, as we have already observed, the dynamic nature of the creative economy calls into question the continuing validity of discreet domains of knowledge.

Much of what is most exciting, creative, and valuable² happens at the edges of both our spheres of knowledge and interest. Second, the role of the 'expert' (typically associated with out-dated 'Mode 1' thinking – see Gibbons et al, 1994) is increasingly problematic in a world where socially distributed expertise and knowledge production (e.g. peer-to-peer 'lay-thinking', as facilitated by the Internet) is widespread. Third, despite the inclusion of the 'social', there remains an assumption that creativity springs from the actions of the creative individual, as opposed to being the emergent property which arises from the relations between domains, fields and individuals (i.e. co-creation). Indeed, it is evident that the individualistic notion of creativity remains ascendant, even where an explicitly structural or social account is concerned. Under these conditions, this paper now calls for a re-energising of the debate around how we identify and then implement the conditions which will allow for all individuals to fulfil their creative potential, for the benefit of humankind. In short, this requires us to re-focus on what I term 'social creativity'.

Social creativity calls us to re-think the relationship between creativity and the economy through re-focusing attention on the collective and relational nature of creative practice, where divergent thinking (Koestler, 1975), trans-disciplinarity (Cox, 2005), co-ownership (see Bellers, 1695), heterogeneous knowledge production (Nowotny *et al*, 2001), boundary-spanning, technology-brokering (Hargadon, 2003), collaboration, dialogue and reflexivity (Göranzon *et al*, 2006), are all important features. It also involves learning how to combine the insights of science while not losing sight of the need 'not to know', but rather to imagine and feel. By studying and then implementing these and other relevant conditions and practices, we can then begin to re-qualify the creative economy.

In keeping with the conceptualisation of creativity as a boundary phenomenon, social creativity involves the study of our relational consciousness towards others and with 'the other'. It seeks to understand how interaction across boundaries enables, motivates and constrains the reproduction and/or transformation of social values, and the realisation of human beings' creative potential. Amongst the boundaries to be reconsidered are those between traditional disciplines (arts and science; the so-called 't-shirts', 'suits' and 'anoraks'); social groupings (students, academics, professionals, practitioners, lay people etc.); spaces (real, virtual; scientific; embodied; metaphorical); countries (nation-states; citizenship; globalisation); epistemologies (scientific rationalism; postmodernism; critical realism); methods (quantitative, qualitative, interpretive, hermeneutic, social constructionist); organisations (organisational hierarchies; rhizomes; plateaus – see Deleuze and Guattari, 1980); and modes of communication (dialogue; narration; myth and story-telling; aesthetics; artful interventions; theatre; and reflection). It also encourages us to reflect upon more personal boundaries – such as those between our thoughts, our rationalities, our feelings and emotions.

Though it can be seen to have roots in philosophy, education, economic sociology, political economy, institutional economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, organisational studies, knowledge management, the humanities and arts, creative and

² *Value* in the context of the creative economy, can be understood on a variety of levels – economic, aesthetic, socio-cultural, artistic & political. Although not mutually exclusive, these levels are often in tension with each other.

media studies, and peace studies, the emerging concept of social creativity is not merely a logical continuation of any one of these, but is advocating something new, and very much 'of its time'. As a response to a context of uncertainty, complexity and creative opportunity, social creativity challenges the authorship and authority of knowledge, and considers our relationship with different kinds of knowledge (e.g. scientific, embodied, practised and performed), focusing attention on how this knowledge is shared, learned and communicated. This is not merely a case of undertaking uncritical and instrumental research 'in the context of application' (see Nowotny et al, 2001 on Mode 2 knowledge production) as has been discussed in relation to the increasing socialisation of (scientific) research, but moves beyond application to promote a culture of reflexivity and dialogue. In so doing, it questions what constitutes better or worse grounds for our beliefs, and challenges some underlying assumptions about what we might otherwise take for granted – such as, in the context of creativity and the creative economy, the dependence upon individual talent rather than collective processes and shared experience.

Social creativity encourages actionable crossing of boundaries that isolate parochial identities and reductionist ideas, through participative learning and inventive co-creation of social and economic justice. Clearly this has important implications for education – for both research and teaching. It might be argued that the conception of social creativity put forward challenges the legitimacy of traditional approaches to research, highlighting the need for 'subject-to-subject' relations between researcher and those being researched. It questions to what extent the practised, embodied and performed knowledge of 'interviewees' and 'respondents' (as opposed to the scientific knowledge of the 'researcher') is given due weight and prominence in most research projects. It also challenges the efficacy of structures and institutions which are founded on a hierarchical model of expertise, rather than the social distribution of expertise. After all, with the massification of Higher Education, there are now many more 'experts' distributed across society than at any other time in our history. In addition, technological developments mean that we can now access information (and knowledge) at the touch of a button, almost anywhere on the planet. As such, social creativity raises important ethical and methodological questions in terms of how research facilitates the co-creation of knowledge, and the generation of uncertainty, in practice.

The relationship between social creativity and cultural policy is potentially one of mutual reinforcement. Arguably, both are dependent upon our transcendental capacity to imagine, feel and share what it is like to live in other (better) worlds, to be other people, think other thoughts, and hold other beliefs, whilst living fully as ourselves³. Both are also dependent upon the practical exigencies of economic life, where there are finite limits on resources. However, there are clearly differences in terms of motivation, as currently conceived. As I have discussed earlier in this paper, the focus on the creative industries is indicative of a shift in policy-thinking towards what might be understood as principally economic objectives. Social creativity offers something of a corrective to this position in terms of its primary focus on social justice (where individuals and groups have an impartial

³ See also Bakhtin's (1981; 1984; 1986) dialogical understanding of being and becoming.

share of the benefits of society) and empowerment (where individuals and groups have the opportunity to take an active role in creating this society).

To the extent that cultural and economic policies have always regarded each other with some suspicion (at best), I suggest that the application of social creativity to policy-making promises much. The practical idealism of social creativity offers a replacement to our current conception of the creative economy, characterised as it is, by the uneasy relationship between creativity and the economy. This brings with it a vision (i.e. the possibility) of a better and fairer society and economy for all to share. To the extent that cultural policy can enable this process, it will need to focus on supporting encounter, on learning from difference, and on crossing boundaries. It will also need to extend its vision well beyond its habitual target market of those working in the creative industries, to include those voices that are otherwise left out and marginalised.

In the 'double movement' of qualification (Callon et al, 2002: 201), it will only be possible to re-qualify the creative economy according to this social and inclusive perspective if there is first a detachment from the existing and the widely-held perceptions discussed. Merely bringing attention to the *social* nature of creativity will probably not be enough to dislodge our attachment to the prevailing individualistic conception. Rather, it will be through the (re)-linking of discourses of creativity, education and economy, reflexivity, social justice, and creative criticality (see Figure 1 below) *in practice* that this re-qualification can occur. The question then arises as to how we might achieve this aim. In the final section of this paper I discuss some first steps in introducing a new discipline of social creativity, and the particular role of Higher Education in this re-qualification of the creative economy.

Five steps to developing a discipline of social creativity

By focusing in a more holistic way on human experience and the context in which it occurs, social creativity potentially provides a more authentic framework for both understanding and acting in complex situations. The development of social creativity cannot be contained in 'just another' university research centre, however. The activities must be sufficiently independent of existing disciplines and their respective Faculties, Departments and Schools, whilst also becoming embedded within the epistemic and bureaucratic boundaries of educational institutions.

The central focus of social creativity can be summarised in terms of providing answers to the following indicative research questions:

- What is the relationship between creativity, economy, and social justice?
- How do we co-create knowledge and share learning?
- How do we encourage and support socially distributed and socially responsible expertise?
- How can we use creative criticality to facilitate and recognise new forms of knowing?
- What is the potential impact of these developments on us as individuals, our economy, and society as a whole?

These questions clearly require contextualisation without being constrained within traditional disciplinary and industrial boundaries (i.e. not merely *learning* within education; *creativity* within psychology, the arts and the cultural sector; and *knowing* as a matter of philosophical and epistemological concern). This in itself is not as easy task. In order to avoid the disciplinary impulse towards essentialism, and in keeping the boundaries between ideas as open as possible whilst also allowing sufficient research focus, it is helpful to think in terms of a ‘constellation of concepts’ (Bernstein, 1991) – an interconnecting set of concepts which go some way to help explain the parameters of social creativity. An initial framework of research might be based on the following five constellations of concepts:

- The constellation of *creativity* (e.g. ideas; novelty; value; discovery; flow)
- The constellation of *self* (e.g. rationality, emotions, multiple intelligences; motivations)
- The constellation of *production* (e.g. markets; economies; work)
- The constellation of *networks* (e.g. social network sites; connectivity; digital technology)
- The constellation of *ethics* (e.g. citizenship; power; authority; CSR; inclusion)

These constellations, in turn, can be considered at various different levels of analysis, including research focusing on knowledge and learning, uncertainty, people, spaces and methods.

INSERT Figure 1 here

Following Barnett’s (2000: 104) classification of ‘conditions for realizing the university in an age of supercomplexity’, I now outline five steps that could be taken by Higher Education institutions (to begin with) to help embed the emerging discipline of social creativity.

Step 1: Enabling interdisciplinarity

The boundary-crossing nature of social creativity challenges the disciplinary borders that are all too often taken for granted. In an age of uncertainty there are no disciplinary givens. As Barnett (2000: 105) eloquently puts it “The university becomes more than an aircraft carrier of multiple discourses; it becomes engaged in assisting novel juxtapositions of its discourses and, in the process, in creating new forms of knowing.” Four approaches to assisting such novel juxtapositions and enabling interdisciplinarity can be highlighted here, in terms of the continued development of i) inter-institutional networks; ii) intra-institutional networks; iii) specific courses and research centres with an interdisciplinary focus; and iv) e-learning developments which have the potential to enable all of these in a variety of ways (for example, the development of virtual learning environments (VLEs) in

which 'students' have a forum to teach others, without being constrained by pre-assigned curricula) .

Step 2: Supporting collective critical reflection

Social creativity is a 'corrective' discipline in the sense that it encourages a constant re-evaluation and re-balancing of the status quo. The collective self-scrutiny of social creativity is unlikely to be endemic across the university without a 'top-down' as well as 'bottom up' commitment. In this respect, developments are likely to require the support of senior management who are themselves key players in the academic field (whether as panellists on the research assessment exercise (RAE), editors on journals or policy-level committee members), as well as from 'grass-roots' academics who interface with students.

The perceived benefits of critical reflection can contribute directly to social creativity in a number of ways (see Fooks and Gardner, 2007; Fooks, 1996), including allowing more choice about potential practices and therefore better decision-making and more creative practice; being better able to work with uncertainty and multiple perspectives (allowing better dialogue, collegiality and teamwork); and resolving personal/professional dilemmas, and recognising and using the power of emotion.

Step 3: Facilitating engagement

Many universities have long and established track-records of engagement with communities, businesses, practitioners, and policy-makers. Higher Education funding promotes this engagement in a variety of ways (e.g. HEFCE's Workforce development programme (2008-2011) which supports employer engagement). Social creativity can build on such initiatives and collaboration. It might be required to do so, however, in a way that is rather less self-conscious about the nature of the relationship between education and commerce. This, of course, is a challenging objective, not least because social creativity does not provide any guarantee of successful outcomes. It may require a leap of faith for individuals and organisations to get involved with projects that are premised on the possibility of positive, but unknown outcomes, rather than those where the metrics of 'success' have been carefully laid out upfront to re-assure funders and investors.

Engagement can also be facilitated closer to home. Each and every student and staff member possesses a unique and precious resource in respect of their skills, experiences and contacts – social capital (see Putnam, 2000). Social creativity encourages more fully utilising such resources, where possible.

Step 4: Developing communicative tolerance

Social creativity challenges the authorship and authority of knowledge, focusing attention on relational consciousness towards others and with 'the other'. Central to this project, therefore, is the objective of developing spaces for dialogue where the marginalised, excluded and otherwise 'invisible' will be given a voice. We may need to look in unlikely places and review our motivations carefully, in order to achieve this goal. For example, whilst we might legitimately undertake research of Rio's street-children in order to find ways of improving their social, cultural and economic situation, we may well completely over-look the very considerable creativity that they employ in their daily lives (see Imas,

Wilson and Weston, 2009), and from which we ourselves can learn. Nearer to home, it is all too easy to dismiss the apparent time-wasting of the millions of games-playing teenagers whose mental and physical dexterity in the virtual world baffles an older generation, without exploring ways in which their collective creativity might actually have the potential, if harnessed appropriately, to solve some of the biggest social and environmental problems we face today.

Step 5: Applying alternative methods

As a discipline of reflexive and dialogic practice, social creativity will require the exploration and use of methods that help us to share learning and develop new forms of knowing. As Nowotny et al state “A socially distributed and transgressive expert system needs to create and nourish a truly pluri-disciplinary knowledge base, which in turn can develop transdisciplinary methods of translating knowledge into action” (2001: 229). The emphasis here is not on ‘new’ methods, per se, but the application of methods across boundaries and in different contexts. Some examples, amongst many, might include action research and dialogue seminar method (see Göransson et al, 2006); forum and image theatre (Boal, 1993), and student quality circles (see Schmidt, Parmer and Bohn, 2006, for example).

Concluding remarks

My aim in this paper has been to provide a critique of our default position on creativity, creative industries, and most especially the creative economy. In doing so, I have been particularly mindful of the need to move from an individualistic conception of creativity to one that is inherently inclusive and social in nature, whilst not denying the creative individual. The need for this shift in thinking is particularly pressing given the many problems and challenges that face the global community. Though the intellectual rationale for the social conceptualisation of creativity put forward is strong, I have explained why, of itself, this is not enough to re-qualify the creative economy. Rather, we need to proactively embed a new discipline of social creativity, beginning in our (Higher) Education system. Through studying and practicing the principles of this discipline, we can begin to enable those conditions under which all human beings’ creativity can flourish.

It is important to stress in concluding this paper that my call for a stronger social conception of creativity does not mean we have to renounce our fascination with especially talented, skilled and creative people. Nor should we be denying the importance of the creative industries or the arts. A genuinely creative economy does not need to come at the expense of the distinctiveness of the creative industries and those working in the cultural sector. The creative industries are (and will remain) an extremely important sector of the economy. Indeed, it could be argued that artists, musicians, film-makers, storytellers and other cultural workers have a particularly important role to play in the creative economy, but this is not because they alone are creative. Rather it is because a significant part of their work involves imagining other (better) worlds, other (better) products and services, and even being other (better) people. It could also be that artists are already more in touch with the potential of social creativity to bring about reconciliation, than others. This is because art itself requires that artists give of themselves freely to others. The primary commerce of art, after all, is a gift exchange. As Lewis Hyde has put it “unless

the work is the realisation of the artist's gift and unless we, the audience, can feel the gift it carries, there is no art" (Hyde, 2006: 276).

At its most basic, social creativity requires us to find better spaces in our schools, universities, community organisations and workplaces, for talking, listening, sharing, and creating, where the language of learning is one of allowing, surrender, and humility; where all can find their voice and all voices can be heard; where human beings' creative potential can be realised. I have taken the education system as an important starting point in this paper. However, it is clearly vital that this doesn't abdicate what is a shared responsibility to just one group of key stakeholders. John Donne said 'no man is an island'. Creativity surely flourishes upon the shorelines of our humanity. As we see glimpses of the landscape of a genuinely creative economy, we need to have the courage to move forward together (teachers, academics, practitioners, policy-makers etc.) on a journey to re-claim creativity as our common and shared birth-right. We can begin by taking some of the practical steps put forward in this paper.

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Figure captions

Figure 1: Indicative research schema

