Shoring up our Creative Industries – Can we Imagine a Post COVID-19 Creative Militia?

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In a media landscape filled with pandemic-induced information and disinformation, there is one aspect of reporting that is both systemic and global – the emergence of creative and artistic performances and acts. Across the world, these non-medical images and stories that have provided hope and connection have centred on individuals, communities, organisations and institutions coming together to perform for others. From the early images of Italian citizens coming out onto their balconies to sing in union, through to Couch Choir the reimagined Pub Choir performing the Carpenter's "Close to you", the human need to connect and create has never been more necessary or more evident.

These formal and informal outpourings of heart-felt creativity are particularly moving given that it is the very industries that support the training, education, promotion, distribution and development of these activities – the creative industries that have been decimated by the pandemic.

Prior to Covid19, the Creative Industries contributed just under 112 Billion AUD to the Australian economy. By comparison, Mining contributed 148Billion AUD. In Australia, financial packages aimed at capturing and supporting the "suddenly" unemployed, have not extended to creative industries with more than 600000 Australians finding themselves ineligible for the newly created Jobkeeper funds.

In broad terms, we have watched as an entire workforce, already economically besieged by a broader lack of concern for their sustainability (see the rise of the gig economy) now become unemployed – indefinitely.

This raises urgent questions about the future sustainability of our creative industries and its workforce. It may well be that now is the time to think boldy about the business models that will support creativity in the future. If we have learnt anything in the past 2 months, it is that resilient business models for the creative industries must take into account major global demographic, social, political and economic developments.

In this short piece I'd like to consider the problem of shoring up our creative industries postCovid 19 from two distinct angles: one that proposes a "sovereign capability" approach to the sector, thus the proposition of a creative militia; and the other, an educational approach that considers what training this distinctive workforce will need into the future.

Creative Militia – is it such a mad idea?

Have you ever worked with someone who trained in the military? Having spent 3/1/2 years in Canberra, I was privileged to work with many ex-military colleagues and in my experience, they are a different class of people. They turn up on time, carry out their duties, leave on time and do it over and over again to the best of their abilities. There are in short, a civilian logistics capability that is readily deployed if and when required – a clandestine sleeper unit that I admired tremendously and that give me pause in this difficult time.

The link that I propose between this civilian militia and the creative industries workforce is one that was originally identified in the Cunningham and Higgs report *(2009)*[1] . At the time, the vast majority of creatives were working as 'embedded'[2] within other industries. This was more a result of lack of sustainable employment within their own fields than a conscious choice to transfer existing skills into other domains. These embedded creatives brought with them the skills and practices of their sector, one that relied on network development, resilience and continuous upskilling.

What if we funded a creative militia?

One of the distinctive features of the creative industries workforce is its heavy reliance on the "soft" skills of relationship building and embedded nature of socio-technological network development[3] . *Potts et al (2008)*[4] describes how the continuous interactions amongst 'agents' in complex social networks' generate their distinctive production and consumption dynamics. This is driven by 'word-of-mouth' evaluation by peers, which leads to recognition, particularly in the craft sector, [1] and that in turn leads to sales and further funding. In this critical time of innovation in skills development, we propose that creative practice has the 'new skills' of networking, relationship development, lean and agile, built into its very fabric. Could we mobilise this 'craft knowledge' and fund it as durable infrastructure, ready to be deployed in other industries as required, particularly in times of need?

What if we prioritized creative industries 'craft knowledge'?

What if we valued those skills in the same way that we value the skills and practices of the military? Could we create training for those outside of the sector, offering the knowledge embedded in the creative industries to further the project of "the future workplace"?

This line of inquiry occurs against the backdrop of the four major consulting firms *(KPMG, PWC, EY and Deloitte)* all of which offer in-house training (both to their own employees and to others) to contend with the convergence of industries and the new value and business opportunities that this provides. PWC's "New World, New Skills" *(2019)* survey showed that 69% of adult were prepared to learn new skills or completely retrain in order to improve future employability yet only 23% were currently upskilling through their employer.

Creative Training – Future practices

These are hypotheticals against the backdrop of significant international forums rushing to reimagine the future of the creative industries.

In the UK, The Creative Industries Policy and Engagement Centre led by NESTA is assisting policymakers by providing a 'one stop shop' for the rapidly growing number of initiatives to collect survey data on the impacts of the virus.

Similarly, the OECD has established a series of forums for the cultural and creative sectors in order to capture the impact, innovations and planning for post crisis.

What is self-evident is that designing public supports both short and long term will be vital to the continued success of the sector and those who work within it. The only real question we need to ask ourselves is: how bold are we willing to be?
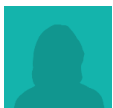
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[3] Xxxx (2020) The Relationship is the Project.

[4] Potts et al (2008) Social Network Markets, a new definition of creative industries (Journal of Cultural Economics 32 (2): 165-85

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