

## **From the Lab to the Factory: Bridging creators and industry**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper we are presenting part of a research project<sup>1</sup> that has focused on the relationships between two fields usually quite apart one from the other: art and industry. As part of a broader context of changes in economy and in the art practices, a general starting thesis could be that the need for growth and innovation in nowadays economy turns to creativity as a means for innovation, while looking for the artists to come into the industry scene, thus fostering their mutual collaboration. But how is this cooperation taking place and what does it entail?

This presentation is divided into 3 parts which will basically try to answer these questions, specifically covering: 1) the structure of such relationships 2) the concepts underlying such relationships and 3) a study case of collaboration between art and industry. So, firstly, we will approach structural concepts regarding creative industries, creative class and work conditions in the creative sector. Secondly, we will briefly look at the notions of creativity and innovation. And thirdly, we will concentrate on the study case 'Disonancias' in the Spanish territory, also examining within it both structural information regarding how these collaborative relationships are established in terms of authoring, contracts and work conditions, while relating them to the evolutions concerning the very concepts of creativity, artist or innovation.

### **1. Creativity and innovation**

Mark Runco (2007) defines creativity as involving originality (novelty, uniqueness) and at the same time effectivity, and it is also associated with the non-conventional or open-minded personality. But, since it involves originality, the very concept of creativity means 'building or producing something from nothing'. According to Boden (2003), this reinforces the mystery often surrounding creativity and it is not surprising then that the paradox of creation is explained in terms of divine inspiration or romantic intuition.

But the ideal of the romantic genius -brilliant yet mysterious- is usually tied to the suggestion that creativity implies a high price to be paid, sometimes even leading to self-destruction. The so-called "Faustic pact" (Gardner, 1994) would reinforce the common belief that creativity involves risk and resignations, as Sternberg & O'Hara (1997) point out.

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Not surprisingly, if we leave behind these old romantic concepts of creativity and turn into concepts of innovation within the economic arena, we can see how ideas of destruction and risk also resurface.

On the one hand, in 1950 Schumpeter described the process of innovation taking place in a market economy by the means of new businesses and products destroying old ones. His theory of this process of 'creative destruction' is well known and is thought to be an essential part of capitalism.

On the other hand, Sternberg, O'Hara and Lubart propose their "theory of creativity as an investment" where creative people would act as good investors do, that is to say: buying low and selling high, yet these activities would occur in the realm of ideas and not in the stock market. So the process would be to generate ideas which, as shares, are relatively cheap, unpopular or even openly scorned in the beginning. Then the creative 'investor' would attempt to convince others of the value of those ideas, thus being able to finally sell them high. Yet, as it is evident, this also implies a high risk of failure. The creative person is then acting under the dangerous conditions of a broker or an entrepreneur. (Sternberg, O'Hara and Lubart 1997, 9)

Again, ideas of inevitable toll to pay, possible destruction and risky investments are worth noting, since they will again resurface when we talk about the work conditions of such creative endeavours.

## **2. Creative Industries and subjects**

Hartley defines the idea of creative industries as 'The conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (individual talent) with the cultural industries (mass scale)' (Hartley 2005:5) Thus, according to Hartley the main feature of creative industries would be to join two originally separate worlds, that is to say the Fine Arts (traditionally based on individual talent) and the cultural industries (characterized by the mode of industrial production and mass scale).

The origin of the creative industries concept is usually related to the UK policies of the 90' and its Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Its first mapping document on the creative industries stated that they should be treated like any other industry ruled by a business model. While recognizing that some institutions and people would still need public support to produce their work, this was regarded as an investment with its corresponding owed return rather than as an altruist subsidy given to some dependent artists. (Ross 2009, 25) So the strategy was to end with the "something for nothing" policy. If money was to be invested in the arts, then they ought to do something in return, even if it was a social cohesive function. This is an important point, since it will arise again when we deal with our study case.

Another well-known concept is that of the Creative Class. For Richard Florida (2002) the centrality of creativity in the economy has resulted in a change of the class system - enabling the emergence of new so-called "creative class", which represents 30% of the power of American labour, and which consists of scientists, engineers, architects, academics, artists, musicians ... and also of an elite business and finance professionals. For Florida, all these professionals are conceived as a whole (a class), and depicted as wealthy and influential.

But in contrast to Florida's blissful picture, some other authors have pointed to existing less pleasurable conditions (Lazzarato 1996; McRobbie 2009; Ross 2009). According to them, workers are integrated into an increasing temporary labour order characterized by flexibility, mobility, free-lance work or multiple jobs and in many cases, precarity. This is a risk-tolerant style that rewards the initiative in a kind of lottery format, where the seduction of possible astronomical profits lets the security aside. (Ross 2009, 45)

### **3. Our case study: Disonancias**

Under the prism of the complex panorama of creative industries, creativity and innovation, we will look into a real case of collaboration between arts and industries. But before presenting our study case, it will be useful to briefly mention some existing models of collaboration, of which the "Experiments of Art and Technology" (1966) is considered as a pioneer for promoting contacts between artists and engineers. In short, we could say that there's the 'Media Lab' model, where artists are selected for a residence program with the aim of developing a media research project. Then there's another model of collaboration which takes place in scientific institutes and University laboratories. And finally there's an emerging model that is characterized by the mediation between companies and independent creators, most notably artists. Here is where our study case on Disonancias fits in.

Disonancias<sup>2</sup> is a program promoted by the private company Grupo Xabide in association with some partners, which usually are local governments. Disonancias aims to connect artists (in the broad sense of the term) and units of R & D in corporations or technology centres, with the aim of promoting innovation. The first edition of Disonancias took place in 2005, under the name 'Divergentes' and consisted of international artists' residences in business and technology centres. Thus, this first version had a highly artistic profile since the end result of the collaboration was thought in terms of an artwork that would fit into the Art World. This was eliminated in the subsequent editions, and now artists are clearly advised not to develop an autonomous project of creation, but to work around the industry's particular demands. So far, Disonancias has undergone 4 editions and has managed more than 40 projects of collaboration, its role being that of the mediator between both parties: artists and companies. Before the collaboration even begins, Disonancias first chooses the interested companies with which it will work. Once the companies are elected and its needs known, then an open call to artists is launched, where Disonancias establishes the possible lines of collaboration, given the interests or worries announced by the companies.

As far as the conditions of the collaboration are concerned, this is a 9 month alliance - at the beginning of which there are some joint meetings where all projects, artists and companies come together with the intention to get to know each other and to learn useful methodologies. At the end of this 9 month period, there are also joint meetings to evaluate and present the results in a kind of tour through the Spanish territory -which also serves as a marketing mechanism.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.disonancias.com/en>

Disonancias makes it very clear in the call for artists that those artists ‘committed to society’ will be given precedence. As well as artists who are collaborative, multidisciplinary, have an international vision and think of their work as a hybrid process of investigation and of creation. The principal objective is the research or development of a prototype, procedure or idea that responds to the needs of the industry. The calls are open to artists or artists’ collectives of any age, nationality or place of residence. As far as the economic conditions are concerned, each artist or artist group selected will receive a sum of 10,000 - 12,000 euros to cover the fees for the work carried out, travel expenses, lodging and subsistence allowance, and the economic compensation for the exploitation rights granted.

The exploitation rights foresee 4 options, among which the companies choose before the collaboration begins.

1. Non-commercial, share alike: CC
2. Exclusive granting to company - remuneration to artist at fixed rate
3. Exclusive granting to company - remuneration to artist proportional to exploitation income
4. Exclusive granting to company - except for transformation rights. No remuneration to the artist

As far as the concepts underlying this collaboration, we will only address two aspects, one concerning methodology and the other concerning the very definition of artist or creator.

For Disonancias, one of the key points in the mediator’s role is that of providing a framework for the relationship to take place and, most specially, offering a useful methodology. We’ve already mentioned the joint methodology meetings, but there is an array of other actions (like methodology audits by external consultants) which come to demonstrate the importance of methodology. This can be somehow linked to the need of systematizing creativity carrying it from the non-defined to the practical terrain. Or, in other words, from the non-useful to the profitable. Again, this sounds familiar when we reconsider the original UK policies regarding the creative industries. Let’s recall that they intended to treat the arts as another plain business, of which profitable returns were expected.

Within Disonancias, the artist is envisioned as a researcher. As the director of Disonancias says: “The artist today is not the mythical bohemian of art literature. Today many of the artists who participate in DISONANCIAS are a good example of this. They have diverse experience and technical training, are used to team work whether in stable organizations or in flexible environments, have a clear systematic work, and explore new areas of expression that often intersect the scientific, the technological and the social spheres, new materials, new ways of acting and new relational dynamics, new activity, new channels of communication and new languages”. –This description is indeed far away from the idea of the romantic genius or the unconventional artist that we have seen before. Yet, on the other hand, if we take into account the opinions of some of the participant companies, they see the creator as the person who “thinks out of the box”, “comes with an unconventional idea”, or “breaks our frame of mind”. And, after all, the name of the program is Disonancias, which means ‘disonance’ or ‘discord’.

This ambivalent conception of the artist can also be found in another case we studied (Pagès, San Cornelio, Roig, 2009), which will only be mentioned here as a means to an end. The case was that of Digitalent, another initiative of mediators between art and -in this case- digital industry. As we can see, there prevailed stereotypes of the artist as unstructured, uncommercial or not able to materialize ideas. Also, talented people were seen as outsiders in a very romantic way. And there was a fear that talent would be lost if it was not integrated into an industry logic.

#### **4. Conclusions**

From a conceptual point of view, it could be stated that the Disonancias case, and more generally the projects of mediation and collaboration between artists and industries, present ambivalent and contradictory concepts of both creativity, art and industry. This is not a trivial point, mainly for two reasons: the first one is that the way these concepts are defined is very much related with the role that artists can play in our societies nowadays and the second one is that these conceptions affect and influence the structural or labour conditions of the artistic or creative professions, and as many authors point out, not for the good.

These contradictory discourses seem to be far from being solved in the short-term, because the initiatives of mediation are quite new, but at the same time they are very attractive for governments especially in a context of economic crisis. In this paper we have only delved into the more conceptual aspects but it is to be seen if the results of such initiatives will have a real impact on the economy, and particularly what is more interesting for our research purpose: how the creative processes take place and finally if these experiences provide equal benefits for both parts involved, artists and industries. But this is the next step in our research.

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