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## **“CREATIVE?”... “ENTREPRENEUR?” – UNDERSTANDING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES ENTREPRENEUR**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the lived experience of being an entrepreneur in the creative industries. Entrepreneurial and creative organizations are frequently cited as necessary ingredients for thriving economies. While the individual/society nexus has been well documented by entrepreneurship scholars, the experiences of individuals within the creative industries remains under-theorized. This study seeks to contribute to an understanding of the life of the creative industries entrepreneur and is underpinned by a social constructionist philosophy.

Three creative industry entrepreneurs were interviewed twice, and the data were analyzed using the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Detailed idiographic accounts were created of each entrepreneur before cross-case analysis occurred.

While the sample size for the study is small, the results indicate that creative industry entrepreneurs do not align themselves with traditional entrepreneurship discourses. The need to express their creativity through products, experiences, and services is balanced against the need to generate income and varying strategies are employed to do so. Research findings have implications for the education and support of creative industry entrepreneurs, and for policy-makers.

### **Introduction**

Discourses surrounding creativity separate the creative person from the mainstream and present her as an interesting and slightly mysterious object of study (Caves, 2000; Dixon, 2010). Entrepreneurship debates meanwhile emphasize the benefits to society of a lively and productive entrepreneurial eco-system that contributes to economic growth (Henry and De Bruin, 2011). Countries seek to capitalize on entrepreneurial activity to drive employment and to promote innovation at the national level (Flew and Cunningham, 2010). This article aims to examine the experiences of the creative individual in the context of the broader “entrepreneurial society” (Audretsch, 2007) and to uncover the particular challenges that creative individuals face in the marketization of their creativity. In particular, this research recognizes that the constructs of the “creative industries” and of “entrepreneurship” are themselves ardently debated, and definitional and theoretical consensus on both has not been reached. The “creative industries” is chosen deliberately, as a rich site of “creative intensity” (Bakshi, Freeman and Higgs, 2012).

Entrepreneurship in the creative field is a phenomenon experienced by individuals, making sense of life experiences in different ways. Like other social life, entrepreneurship is a “collaborative social achievement” (Downing, 2005, p. 196). Meaning is constructed at an individual level based on ongoing experience within the social scheme, and is constantly changing to incorporate new experiences: although operating in an ostensibly similar environment, each creative industry entrepreneur experiences their own social reality. There is no single reality; multiple realities exist. Social constructionism regards social reality as “...not separate from us, but...social realities and ourselves are intimately interwoven as each shapes and is shaped by the other in everyday interactions” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 124). Entrepreneurs construct meaning from experience; the current study attempts to understand and interpret this meaning. The ontological position of social constructionism acknowledges that understandings of reality are context-based; the world originates in the thoughts and actions of individuals and is

“maintained as real by these” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 33). The situation is made more complex by “the temporal structure of everyday life” which “imposes itself” on every individual biography (p. 42). As the creative industry entrepreneur absorbs ever more experience, their own social reality and the meaning they take from their lived experience is modified: the phenomenon is not static.

The article is structured as follows: first, I combine the notion of the “creative individual” and the “entrepreneur”, drawing on the works of Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 1997, 2012) and Sarasvathy (2008). Consideration is given to definitional issues about creativity, creative processes, and the creative industries. The entrepreneurship theory base is consulted, in particular relating to entrepreneurial opportunity. Following, I offer three accounts of creative entrepreneurship, embedding analysis throughout. I conclude with a discussion of how these accounts add to an understanding of the “creative industries entrepreneur” as a center-stage actor within the entrepreneurial landscape.

### **Creative entrepreneurs**

The creative entrepreneur is positioned theoretically at the nexus of creativity and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship and creativity are closely linked (Schumpeter, 1934; Kirzner, 1978) and entrepreneurship can be considered to be creative in itself, as “entrepreneurial decisions are creative decisions” (Vaghely and Julien, 2010, p. 75). Commonalities in experiences, behaviors, and approaches between creative individuals and entrepreneurs can be identified: both are transformative and are characterized by innovation and both benefit from practice and reflection (Townley and Beech, 2010); entrepreneurs can be regarded as the “connective tissue” between creativity and business (Penaluna and Penaluna, 2011, p. 58). The “supposed antithesis” of creativity and management (Townley and Beech, 2010) can be challenged as each displays evidence of process, of discipline, and of problem-solving. Each benefits from practice and each uses specific systems to advance. Consequently, while I reject the separation thesis of creativity and entrepreneurship, I accept that it provides a useful framework within which to examine current theoretical debates.

### **Creativity**

Scholarly debate on the creative individual, that is, the person who works within creative settings and generates output considered by the domain to demonstrate creativity (Caves, 2000; Hackley and Kover, 2007) has shifted from a traits approach centering on the “lone artist” (Guildford, 1950; Torrance, 1962) towards a grand narrative in which organizations are urged to commercialize creativity, and to treat it as yet another economic resource (Caves, 2000) to be leveraged in supplying the insatiable market. Creative people display contrasting qualities: they are considered to be prolific and at the center of a set of activities (Townley and Beech, 2010) but also marginal and capable of drawing inspiration from across social groups (Burt, 2004). They are positioned as being “different” (Hackley and Kover, 2007) yet the drive to normalize creativity surely requires a sameness, which can offer organizations standards of measurement for recruitment practices and performance measurement. The “creative class” (Florida, 2014) can either accept or reject the place allocated to it by outside forces.

Definitions of creativity converge around the concepts of “novelty” and “usefulness” (Runco, 2014; Amabile, 1996) and to be recognized in their domain, creative individuals must be

able to produce output that can fulfil these criteria. The creative act whereby “that which is unknown, or known in another way, becomes translated into an image to be re-presented to itself” (Townley and Beech, 2010, p. 12) must be stripped of its mystery if it is to become operationalized within organizational settings. Within creative studies, it is accepted that “innovation”, that is, creativity which can change a domain, can only happen after years of technical knowledge and immersion in a field. Organizations serious about creativity must invest significantly and absorb the risk that such investment may not yield hoped for, but still expected, results. Creative work encompasses the ethereal and the mundane, the autotelic, suspended state of the creative act (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and the prosaic view of creative work in which “works of art can be made in an orderly, rational and manageable manner” (Dixon, 2010, p. 48).

### **Process models of creativity**

Process models of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Amabile, 2012) offer frameworks for considering how creativity functions within social systems. Creativity occurs at the intersection of the domain, the field, and the person. Domains (such as poetry, branches of science, architecture) are knowledge bases based around symbols, rules, and notation systems which allow things to be understood, “...an isolated little world in which a person can think and act with clarity and concentration” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 37). Fields, made up of experts in a given domain whose job involves passing judgment on performance in that domain, allowing it to be accepted or not, and including teachers, critics, gate-keepers, and other domain experts, represent the “gate” (Cooper, 2002) through which the creative work passes. The person, as the third element in the model, displays intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Amabile, 1996). The extent to which creative individuals respond to intrinsic motivators (satisfaction, fulfilment) doing things for which they expect “neither fame nor fortune” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004) as opposed to extrinsic motivations such as market demands, financial reward and domain recognition (Fletcher, 2006) is a matter of choice and personal agency. Positioning themselves along the continuum of behaviors from “a total focus on creative output to a complete commitment to economic performance” (Tjemkes, 2013, p. 122) can result in liberation or oppression from the status quo. Different levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be traced to different sectors within the creative industries (Penaluna and Penaluna, 2011, p. 65): fine artists have “primarily intrinsic desires to feed their creativity” while designers have to respond to problems identified by clients, and are less “what I want” and more “what they want”. Research conducted by Gluck (2002) indicates that “free” creative industries professional (those not restricted by external constraints) hold different conceptions of creativity to their fellow “constrained” counterparts.

Within the creative industries (DCMS, 1998), tacit knowledge, gained through practice and reflection, operates to challenge individuals to “...develop their own creative repertoires.” (Taylor, 2011, p42). Constraints presented by industry structure, funding, level of porosity, or development of the field provide opportunities for creative individuals, as would-be entrepreneurs, to identify or make opportunities.

The need for autonomy (Penaluna and Penaluna, 2011), the attitude to risk (Taylor, 2011) and traits of curiosity, tenacity, and collaboration of creative people (Rabideau, 2015), also commonly cited as entrepreneurial characteristics (Ko and Butler, 2007), provide a useful bridge to consider current debates in entrepreneurship. Creative ideas must be tradable, either

economically or symbolically, to function as capital (Townley et al, 2009) and creators must by extension be willing to trade. Reconceptualizing the domain and the field (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) to include the market, allows us to examine how creative goods are consumed. Creative outputs can constitute “experience goods” or “aesthetic goods” and the buyer’s satisfaction is a subjective response. Because the market is unknown prior to production of creative goods, production costs cannot be predicted and the future is inherently unknowable. (Caves, 2000; Townley et al, 2009). The audience for a creative work responds emotionally, making it difficult to successfully locate the “cultural product within the accepted norms of economic practice” (Roodhouse 2008, p. 15). The market often rejects the creative product because the creative innovator may challenge vested interests within it (Sternberg, Kaufman, and Prettz, 2002). The market may not recognize the value of the creation, particularly if it is radical or disruptive, posing difficulties for the creative individual. Creative individuals are challenged to create products and services that are different enough, but not too different, to be accepted within the domain (Ward, 2004).

### **Entrepreneurial opportunity**

The entrepreneurship theory base has established opportunity identification and enactment as a key aspect of entrepreneurial behavior (Schumpeter, 1934; Kirzner, 1973; Shane and Venkataraman, 2003; Fletcher, 2006; Short et al, 2009; Carlsson et al, 2013), adding a new dimension to earlier studies of the traits and behaviors of entrepreneurs (McClelland, 1961, Geertz, 1973, Gartner 1988) which took an individualistic focus and pointed to the specific entrepreneur as the key force in entrepreneurial action. Current debates on the sources of opportunities highlight that the process of opportunity identification has a strong relationship with creativity and with prior knowledge of the entrepreneur (Shane, 2000; Gartner, 2007; Short et al, 2009). The perspective of treating entrepreneurial opportunity as a process has been adopted here, following Shane and Venkataraman (2000). The process of identifying opportunities is more than an exploration of the “individual-opportunity nexus” (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000): it involves investigation of other relational factors between the entrepreneur and their various social, cultural, and economic situations (Fletcher, 2006) such as opportunity sources, knowledge, the dimension of time, insight, action, and factors of particular relevance in the creative industries. Entrepreneurs exploit opportunities related to their previous experience (Shane 2000). They must have prior knowledge to be able to identify opportunities (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000 referenced in Vaghely and Julien, p. 75). Individuals draw on prior knowledge within the opportunity domain, and develop skills and competencies to realize opportunities: “...prior knowledge of the opportunity domain influences the generation and number of one’s ideas (Shane et al quoted in Dimov, 2007, p. 562). Individuals have different stocks of knowledge based on their life experiences and each person’s prior knowledge creates a “knowledge corridor” that allows them to recognize certain opportunities but not others (Venkataraman, 1997 in Shane 2000, p. 452). The knowledge corridor for individuals are personal, socially constructed phenomena and creative entrepreneurs display differences in knowledge depth and quantity not only with other entrepreneurs, but with each other. Within the creative industries the construct of knowledge encompasses creativity and all of the skills and competencies that that entails.

**Sources of opportunity.** For entrepreneurs to act, opportunities must be available whether discovered or created (Eckhardt and Shane, 2003). The understanding of entrepreneurial opportunity brought to this article draws on the conceptualization of opportunity identification as a subjective phenomenon whereby individuals draw on their personal prior experience and enact subsequent events (Yli-Renko and Edelman, 2010). Entrepreneurs do not exist in a world where opportunities are equally obvious to all (Kirzner, 1973). Some people are “alert” to opportunities while others are not. The “alert” entrepreneur (Kirzner, 1973) uses knowledge to discover opportunities and acts as an equilibrating force in the market. New opportunities are created by purposeful exploration by nascent entrepreneurs (Edelman and Yli-Renko, 2010). Gorling and Rehn contest this position by exploring the nature of different opportunities and concluding that “total arbitrariness” characterizes some entrepreneurial discovery (2008, p. 101). While Kirzner includes surprise as a characteristic of the entrepreneurial opportunity process, Gorling and Rehn go further and suggest that some opportunities far from being anticipated, “...a brilliant opportunity cunningly identified...” are instead, “...random attempts made good despite themselves as surprising successes” (Gorling and Rehn, 2008, p. 101).

Opportunity discovery is aligned with a realist position that opportunities exist “out there” waiting for the alert entrepreneur to uncover and act upon, and relies on an objective treatment of opportunities. The more subjective creation view holds that the entrepreneur’s “perceptions and socio-cognitive enactment processes” (Edelman and Yli-Renko, 2010) are the source of opportunities, which are as a result actively constructed by the entrepreneur. The opportunity does not exist separate to the entrepreneur. Discovered opportunities come about due to “exogenous shocks” in the industry or market (Alvarez and Barney, 2007): the entrepreneur only reacts to such shocks. Such a “shock” creates a new set of circumstances (or information) that the entrepreneur can exploit before others do. “Ordinary” and “extraordinary” discoveries can further be differentiated (Ko and Butler, 2007, p. 366) by their levels of creativity, although no basis for the differentiation is offered.

Created opportunities, on the other hand, are generated endogenously by individuals seeking to explore new product or service possibilities. The final iteration of the opportunity cannot be perceived from the beginning and emerges through the exploration stage (Alvarez and Barney, 2007), as “entrepreneurs and consumers may be able to recognize an opportunity to produce new products or services once it is created, but be unable to anticipate such an opportunity before it is created” (Alvarez and Barney, 2007, p. 17). Because the process is emergent and iterative, the final outcome may in fact not be the opportunity that was originally thought of. It is not clear in this context what drives the entrepreneur in the process, if so much uncertainty as to future success exists.

Entrepreneurs may demonstrate creativity not only in their own creative output, but by their ability to identify resources needed to complete work (Kirzner, 1973, Sarasvathy, 2008). Awareness of the limitations of one’s own knowledge prompts alert entrepreneurs to take action by using others’ skills and to thereby profit from the input of third parties. The concept of entrepreneurship “as a form of expertise” (Sarasvathy, 2008) resonates strongly with the “effectual” creative industries entrepreneur, “who ends up fabricating [opportunities] from the mundane realities of her life and value system” (p. 10). Creative industry entrepreneurs draw on their creative expertise within a domain and build entrepreneurial possibilities around this expertise.

## Creative Entrepreneur Case Studies

### Methods

The protagonist of this research, the creative industries entrepreneur, does not have a standard profile. She specializes within specific domains but also operates across domains inside and outside the creative industries; she may run a solitary enterprise from remote, rural hinterlands far away from the world, or lead a large organization in a frenetic urban center. The type of work she engages in can involve detailed, intimate crafting but also strategic and collaborative negotiations. She is firmly situated within a creative world but demonstrates incisive business acumen. It was important to capture the diversity of activities and attitudes that are at play within this complex arena at an individual level. Equally important was the desire to draw meaningful conclusions about entrepreneurship across the creative industries making visible this sector.

My criteria for approaching participants were that they had set up and run their own business and that they operated within one of the sub-sectors of the creative industries (DCMS, 1998). The site of study provided a convenient context in which to set my study, as both the individuals themselves and the relevant policy bodies regards all of these businesses as creative and they represent a particular instance of “creative intensity” (Bakshi, Freeman and Higgs, 2012).

Following Mishler (2003, 2009), in-depth interviewing was selected as the most fitting data collection method to elicit lived experiences of individuals working as entrepreneurs in the creative industries. My focus was on constructing knowledge in communication with the creative industries entrepreneur and to be part of the process, not to stand on the outside as an unattached observer. All interviews took place at the place of work of the research participants to provide a familiar setting for a conversation to take place. Each entrepreneur took part in two interviews, each lasting one hour. The first interview involved questions about the lived experience of being a creative individual and being an entrepreneur, and the second interview was an exploration of how constructs such as “the creative industries” were understood and embraced.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides a method of compiling detailed analyses of individual experiences while also allowing a cross-case comparison at a later stage. It specifically recommends small sample sizes to allow the idiographic account to emerge. IPA principles informed the data collection and the data analysis stages: my emphasis is on aiming to understand the experiences of each of the participants as individuals before attempting to analyze broader cross-case themes.

My approach to writing up this research emerges from the epistemological belief that the individual account should be heard; it consequently draws significantly on the creative entrepreneurs’ own words. Three individual accounts of “Creative Entrepreneurial Lives” are presented, offering three perspectives and demonstrating the diversity among creative industry entrepreneurs. Interview subjects are quoted verbatim from their interviews.

### Creative entrepreneurial lives 1 - Peter

Peter has run his business in content marketing for the last 15 years, and currently employs 25 people in the north-west of Ireland. He creates digital publishing solutions for clients around the world and has experienced first-hand the impact that fast-changing technology has on creativity and product development.

**The experience of entrepreneurship.** Peter regards his life as a creative entrepreneur as a collage of all the experiences he has had in life, both professionally and personally, “these jigsaw pieces I saw, I picked up along the way...” He absorbed knowledge and acquired skills that interested him, while not actively planning to make a business from them. Looking back, he can see how the pieces fit together to lead him to his current position. When speaking about early money-making ventures he pursued as a teenager, he claims that “as informal as it was, all of those little things affect your mindset, and shape...your development.” Again, when discussing product development and how different enabling software was used, he repeats that “it’s funny how all those little things influence... entrepreneurialism I think definitely comes from your branches of knowledge and experience, so in my case it was all about those little bits...”

The urge to be self-sufficient drove Peter to make money in the US in a non-related business. However, he was still “looking for opportunities there as well” and the financial gains were significant, “we were doing other things...to generate revenue...” Financial security allowed him to fulfil his ambition of being self-sufficient, “it isn’t for achievement that I do it and I think I know that in myself now.” The quest for self-sufficiency is a source of satisfaction for him, as “everything I have in my life I got myself”.

Peter differentiates between achievement and recognition, suggesting that the achievement is important, but the recognition of that achievement, less so, “I don’t want to succeed because people will say, ‘oh look at him, he’s done well’.”

**Creative talent.** Peter claims that he is “not artistic in any way”, but identifies strongly with showing specific types of creative behaviors, “I would have always, since I was a kid, tried to figure out how things work and how people make money off things.” His broader conception of creativity encompasses, but is not restricted to, artistic creativity: “I think there’s a lot of people who think that the creative industry is just about people who can draw and do ‘arty’ stuff and I don’t really think that; I think it’s about mindset”, and “...when I think creative person, I think problem solver...”

When speaking of “entrepreneurial instincts” he distinguishes between “farmer” entrepreneurs and “media” entrepreneurs and places himself in the former category, uninterested in media hype about his business but “always bootstrapping” and “ducking and diving.” Thinking about things differently, “spawning creativity”, provides new insights and opportunities.

## **Creative entrepreneurial lives 2 - Lisa**

Lisa has been a graphic designer for 25 years. Winning a high-profile award at the end of her degree enabled her to work in the United States as an intern with a world-class design organization. She subsequently returned to Europe and worked in the Netherlands and Germany, before moving back to Ireland to run her own business. She currently services clients, both national and international, from an office at her home in rural Ireland.

**The experience of entrepreneurship.** Lisa has an almost visceral reaction to the notion of opportunity, “...I see opportunities right there in front of me”. Opportunities are simply there, and the fact that others don’t see them is because they “mightn’t be looking for the same thing.” Lisa believes that most people are looking for opportunities and “constantly scanning a particular horizon” but different people have different “filters” and “notice certain things.” One person might notice one thing and another a different thing, and some people then “don’t act...they

don't want to.” Opportunities are emphatically “out there” and discovering or creating opportunities are “inextricably bound.”

Lisa is insistent that she is not an entrepreneur, and neither are most other designers, “I wouldn't call myself an entrepreneur: I'm simply working for myself.” She is emphatic that she is “self-employed” and sees a clear difference between the two descriptors: entrepreneurs have more of a separation between themselves and their output than designers. Designers do not take much risk, and are, on the whole, not innovative, they are “basically coming up with the same solutions, one might be better than the other, but there's nothing innovative about what one person is doing...they do good or less good work...but I wouldn't equate that to innovation at all.”

Differentiating between self-employment and being an entrepreneur is a matter of strategy. “An entrepreneur is someone who from the outset has a plan.” The designer is always doing the work whereas the entrepreneur has a different relationship with the end product: “there isn't that direct relationship” between the producer and the product. Design is “very safe.”

Although Lisa made it clear that she did not have a clear career plan, she had an instinct that she would be self-employed, “I had an inclination that that's how I would work.” The freedom of doing things her own way was appealing, and it was “a natural progression...it's much more organic.” However, although she chose a life of self-employment, “there is choice and there isn't choice because once you start there's no choice after that, you're committed to it, like obviously you could let the thing go, you could drop it but I think once you decide to do something, you actually have very little choice after that.”

Lisa strongly rejects categorizing concepts believing that something is lost “once you start formalizing things...” She is irritated with the word “creativity”, she emphatically refuses to be called an “entrepreneur,” and she warns against “packaging” the creative industries. She believes that some things are not quantifiable: “it's not the nature of the people working in the creative industries to be kind of, not pigeon-holed, but categorized, and it just, it doesn't work.” The “return” on creative endeavor is not always apparent and by looking for such things people have an expectation, which if not met, may create dissatisfaction. Things can be labelled and named without being truly understood, leading to superficial and wasteful activities which don't benefit the people involved: “personally I don't find it very helpful” although for people not “as well versed” in the sector it probably is helpful. On the other hand, things have to be formalized to be organized, but on the whole “it can't be the only thing, there has to be scope for spontaneous thinking and spontaneous results.”

**Creative talent.** Lisa is emphatic that creativity is not “owned” by a particular sector, organization, or type of person, and “some of the most creative people I know don't work in the creative industries.” She insists that creativity is about problem-solving and seeing beyond “the surface of things” suggesting that she believes that it is a feature of all human endeavor.

Within organizations widely acknowledged as themselves creative, creativity can take different forms. In one large American firm where she worked, and which she described as “exceptionally creative”, the atmosphere was “corporate...not corporate, but very business-like” suggesting that “corporate” and “creative” are antithetical. Not only the work produced by the firm, but “the way they went about everything, absolutely everything” was creative. This did not mean that it was a “playful form of creativity” but there was a seriousness that allowed creativity to emerge, it was “very hierarchical...it's just that the structure was very clear and the element of

work you were given was, too.” On the other hand, other creative organizations can be dominated by personality and are “too full of people who have egos” even though they were “brilliant designers.”

Lisa’s lived experience of creativity is a “feeling of...the satisfaction of knowing that you’re going about the job the right way...” and she is critical of the image of the agonized artist, “I’m very skeptical about these ‘creative impulses’.” For Lisa, creativity is not “a solitary activity”, something that she separates herself from the world to pursue, and is in some way at the mercy of being struck by. Rather, it is a reaction to a problem, “...a conversation...as much as anything.” “Sitting down and things just emerging and moving around in my soul and in my brain, that’s not me.” This co-construction of a solution is more common than is generally acknowledged, in her view. External forces are at play even in the output of fine artists, even though they might not admit it: “It is extremely difficult to work in isolation.” Doing creative work is, for her, not for herself, or at least not just for herself, it is being done “because two people want something, you and someone else”. Working with good clients means that both sides are satisfied, “...they generally tie in together...and good work is appreciated”. At the same time, creative work “is extremely difficult and takes a huge amount of energy and motivation” and it can be difficult to sustain this energy, “you get fed up trying to fight your corner.”

Carrying out creative work provides a sense of fulfillment. The notion of “enjoyment” recurs again and again during our sessions and it is important for Lisa to feel comfortable in the way she works. She turned down an opportunity to work with a prestigious firm because she didn’t feel comfortable there, opting instead to work in a place where “it was just the whole atmosphere of that I liked. I liked the personalities, I liked my boss, I just felt very at home.”

However, Lisa does believe that there is a scale of creativity, describing herself as “moderately creative” and not “exceptionally creative.” Expanding on this point, she explains, “...I find it hard to come up with ideas and I think a lot of my ideas are very good, but I would never consider myself a wonderful creative genius....”

Lisa says that working creatively for her is “certainly not for self-expression.” Rather, “the biggest motivator is the desire to do good work.” “Measuring up to [her own] standards” is how she experiences success, a point she emphasizes: “...if I didn’t feel like I was successful at things I think it would be pretty unsatisfactory.” Although she won prestigious awards and worked in top design agencies in the US and in Europe, Lisa doesn’t believe she is “that good.” This points to a disconnect between her internal experience and her external identity, which she attributes to being “...just personality...” The external validation she received right through her career was mirrored by a “lack of confidence.”

### **Creative entrepreneurial lives 3 - Helen**

Helen has worked as a designer/maker of bespoke jewelry since she graduated from college in the early 1990s. Her studio is in a small town in the northwest of Ireland although she travels frequently. Helen has been active in the region for the last 20 years in building infrastructure around the craft sector and is very familiar with how it operates.

**The experience of entrepreneurship.** Helen is strident in her views on how creative industry professionals run their businesses. She is angered by the low value that people, customers, and designer/makers themselves place on creative products. “I see over the years an awful lot of people viewed crafts as just hobbyists or just like ‘Ah, sure they’ll take this or they’ll

take that for it', but I don't approach my business like that because I trained in this so I feel, 'no, I'm charging for my -- there has to be a time cost, well there has to be a time cost as well as a design cost'."

It is clear that there is a spectrum of both creative talent and financial prowess, "...people I was in college with, they were, they weren't the most creative, but they were good businesspeople, you know, they could sell it, they can sell it well...some would sacrifice...the unique aspect of creativity for commercialism." Issues of confidence plague creative individuals attempting to monetize their output, however, "...I find that with creatives, they're very afraid to take chances...they're willing to keep it in a box somewhere, not willing to push it, they lack in confidence."

Agencies tasked with supporting entrepreneurs and the creative industries provide mixed benefits to Helen. While applauding the help given by individuals within certain bodies she is critical of the "agenda" of such bodies at an organizational level. "There was a lady in there...and she was so supportive when I started. I mean if I needed help, you know those agencies are very good; I've often sent people to them afterwards." This positive experience of dealing on a personal level with agency staff is counterbalanced by a deep suspicion of agency motive and performance, the resources that they absorb, "they employ staff, so a lot of money goes into a wage for people... and a lot of creatives would say it's better used on the ground"; the motivation that they demonstrate when they disburse funding, "If it's for the creative sector what they do is, because they're like...civil servants, administrators, they don't really understand creativity and business together. They understand business of course, but, maybe I'm being very critical but I think they, they lack an understanding of how to approach it." This attitude amounts almost to exploitation in Helen's mind, for example when agency staff, whose job it is to support the sector, instead put pressure on creators and get them "to do the work on a voluntary basis. They're bringing you over to meetings at 2 o'clock in the day and you're leaving a business of your own to do their work, to help assist with their work, and I've a problem with that." She goes further when discussing the fate of one member of a creative network whom she felt was actually ostracized from the group by the agency "because he didn't sort of you know, look the way they wanted it to look so it's like 'to hell with supporting a business'". To Helen, this is "disgraceful behavior": invested crafts people in regional areas are discriminated against in favor of other groups in what amounts to a two-tier support system.

**Creative talent.** For Helen, expressing herself through her creativity is necessary for her to live her life physically and emotionally, "it's just part of your life and for me now at this stage of my life I couldn't imagine not being creative." Going even further, she speaks of how at one stage, her health began to deteriorate and she realized that, as this happened during a period when she was not creating, suppressing her creativity was leading to physical ill-health. Her language emphasizes this: "...I nearly have withdrawal if I'm away from the workshop for a week." Tragedy befell her family soon after she graduated from college and creativity provided the means for her to get through this dark period, "I became a business and I was grieving badly, but through the grief the work became a great source of comfort to me. I just threw myself into work." Expressing herself creatively is more than a job: "I couldn't ever imagine retiring, that just wouldn't come into my..." although she recognizes that this is dependent on still having the ability to physically work "...I'm happy with what I do, as long as I have the power in my hands, actually, and my sight."

Being fulfilled through creativity does not, however, automatically provide a satisfactory means to live; Helen is challenged to generate income from her creativity and recognizes that market structures in the creative industries may not favor the creator. "Working for the shops and the galleries...you have to really earn your money for those people, and you've to nearly sometimes beg for your money and I thought 'I'm not going to go down that route, I want to do this and get paid for whenever I do it'."

When launching a new collection "each show is hugely important. It's like an artist creating a new album, you want to have [a reaction such as] 'oh my god, this is a fabulous new piece'." She is acutely aware of the demands of the market, acknowledging that there are different routes but, for her, being involved in the physical crafting of objects is "...an integral part of who I am and what I do." While it might be easier to position herself as a designer whose creations are made by a third party, her decision to instead be a designer/maker satisfies her urge to create.

Helen creates with specific people in mind, "when I'm designing pieces I'd think of two types of customer" and does not see that creating with constraints in mind such as how potential customers will like the product restricts her creativity.

### Discussion

Understanding the "diverse authenticities" (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998) of individuals within the creative industries was the basis for adopting a social constructionist view of entrepreneurship (Fletcher, 2006) when exploring the experiences of individual creative industry entrepreneurs, and examining the ways in which their narratives and actions relate to entrepreneurship and creative industry debates. Even among the three entrepreneurs who contributed to this debate, the diversity of creative experience and enactment is evident.

Entrepreneurs are considered to be a desirable economic presence and, generally, a good thing for society. Initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship often emphasize the benefits that entrepreneurs offer to economies in terms of job creation and decreasing dependency on foreign investors. Political manipulation of the entrepreneurship debate results in the setting of targets and agendas that encourage achievable results. By concentrating on macro-environmental outcomes such as these, entrepreneur support initiatives neglect to consider particular issues that face those embarking on or pursuing opportunities in the creative industries. Creative industry entrepreneurs have a different view. They see their output (products, services or experiences) as an expression of something that is woven into the fabric of the person and may reject both the "empty signifier" of entrepreneurship (Kenny and Scriver, 2012) and the attempt by policy-makers to claim credit for their achievements. While Peter accepts that he is an entrepreneur, it is a very specific type of entrepreneur, and one that operates under the radar of media and officialdom.

Contemporary economic ideologies result in attributing the creative industries with particular characteristics from the outside, not always recognized by creative individuals themselves, forming tensions between the individuals operating within the creative sectors and those support structures nominally established to aid their evolution. For Peter, the accepted image of the creative industries does not embrace his view on creativity as mindset rather than output. Helen, meanwhile, recognizes the supports given to some businesses but laments the favoritism which appears to mark the support system.

The diversity of the experiences of creative industry entrepreneurs, however, challenges a one-size-fits-all understanding. Entrepreneurs in the creative industries can be found in rural hinterlands or in large urban centers, their businesses can be sole traders or micro-enterprises, they can produce customized, one-off products or services, or create entertainment spectacles for the mass market. They may survive precariously economically, or generate significant commercial and private wealth. The “creative industries” is not a homogenous entity: creative practice is organized in different ways and varying methods of producing and perceiving value are evident (Rabideau, 2015). Struggles within the sector among and between “organizational sets” (Gulledge and Townley, 2010) add to the already tension-laden relationships with bodies outside the sector. Power struggles between members of organizational sets in monetizing creative output pitch creative entrepreneurs against each other in their attempts to survive, as in Helen’s experiences in trying to get paid by the big galleries. The power relations that exist within the “organization sets” of the creative industries play a significant role in the enactment of opportunity.

Idealization of the entrepreneur by powerful external stakeholders contrasts with the intimate experience of the people concerned. Responses vary from anger at the “system”, as in Helen’s case, to a resigned acceptance of the status quo in power relations between the individual and the support structure, Lisa’s view. As a reaction, the creative industries entrepreneur turns inward and applies effectual logic (Sarasvathy, 2008) to use existing resources in the form of their own creativity to achieve success. They reject orthodox labels of entrepreneurship and identify primarily with the occupation they do (designer/maker, digital publisher, graphic designer) and only secondly, and reluctantly, with being an entrepreneur. Creative industry entrepreneurs position creativity as central to their life experience and, as a consequence, to their entrepreneurial experience. Pursuing entrepreneurial activity, far from being a response to an external encouragement provided by government, is more likely to represent a mark of self-determination and self-expression. Discourses elevating the importance and the identity of “the entrepreneur” are seen as irrelevant at best and the identity work (Beech et al, 2012) of creative industry entrepreneurs leans towards the creative.

Creative industry entrepreneurs mediate the relationship between being creative and being an entrepreneur: in their narrative, the creative is often elevated above the business emphasis, but in their behaviors they demonstrate enactment of entrepreneurial actions (planning, strategy, etc.). The relationship between creative and commercial imperatives is clearly drawn and navigated consciously. Market logics are understood and incorporated into solutions and, in fact, are seen to be part of the creative process; boundaries imposed by the market, instead of restricting creativity, instead intensify it. Peter, Lisa and Helen all recognize the constraints of time, market demands, and competitive moves and incorporate these into their enactment of creative output.

Creative industry entrepreneurs are of the world and are consequently impacted by socio-cultural factors and by the social and temporal contexts within which they operate. Personal or family circumstances, for example the death of close family members, impose limits on dreams, forcing actions that may have been unanticipated but which are worked around. Far from being an ideal career choice, possessing and capitalizing on a creative ability may be the most obvious means of facilitating life choices. Opportunity is not something that creative industry entrepreneurs identify only at a certain stage, when they “become” entrepreneurs. Their

enactment of opportunity is a hallmark of their life as they make and take opportunities as they appear, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, creating their own fortunes along the way.

### Conclusion

In this article I argue that creative industry entrepreneurs (CIEs) display an effectual logic not only as they embark on commercial initiatives, but also in their lives prior to taking this step. Despite the prevailing rhetoric of government and policy makers, CIEs "do their own thing" and may ignore or even avoid the programs set up to support them, feeling instead that, as creative individuals, they are not understood by government agencies. They feel privileged by being creative and find ways to work in parallel with the official system if it is not seen to be working for them. They struggle with unknowns in creating their craft and in releasing the result to the world. Their opportunity is not responding to what is "out there" but concretizing what is "in here" in their creative hearts and minds.

The creative industries are as significant to some economies as the financial services sector (Fuller, Warner and Norman, 2011) and are growing twice as fast as the economy as a whole (Henry and De Bruin, 2011). This positions them as rich sites of study at a macro level. The creative industries are characterized by innovation and, often, unorthodox collaborations in which creative practice may be subversive or critical of the financial status quo. Given the particular dynamics of the creative industries, however, it may not be useful to apply organizational models appropriate to other sectors as a means to understanding them. A fine-grained analysis of the lives of creative industry entrepreneurs goes some way to achieving an understanding of individuals from the inside.

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