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for Digital Career Stories

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Collective and individual identities in an era of cultural co-creation

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Abstract

This chapter considers the background and contexts of individual and collective identity formation as part of a search for creating more powerful and holistic digital career stories that balance our individual nature with a more collective understanding of ourselves as human beings. This chapter was written as part of an effort by an Erasmus+-funded European group of pedagogues, who developed insights and tools for supporting creatives to form more powerful digital narratives of their often-fragmented career stories.

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1. *Critical and conceptual frameworks*

This chapter covers the underpinning theories, critical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the pedagogies that are provided in a separate chapter[1] and that make up a workshop that explores both the critical frameworks as well as delivers experiential learning in allowing individual narratives to be contextualised within a collective, and allowing individuals to see and present their personal journey in a layered manner.

Together with this workshop, the underpinning framework provided in this chapter should allow participants to contextualise their individual career progression within

a) a wider community,
b) a societal challenge and
c) a collective experience.

It does this by continually attending to both the collaborative nature of us humans and the perception of individual identity within our career narratives. It thus re-balances the individual with the collective perspectives of ourselves as creative human beings.

The background to this is that historically, in much of our culture and society, we have focussed on the individual, which has been called high individualism, lasting throughout what has been called the long 20th century[2]. We see this starting with the cult/myth of the genius artist (19th century)[3] and continuing with discourses on creativity contextualised in a hyper-individualistic context, with a value judgement given for individual creative processes (the value judgement often being "good"), as, for example, the rise of the celebrity designer, to collective creative processes ("not so good"), as, for example, community artists, who are less known. In recent times, value judgments impacted on the eligibility of funding and investment for affected collective creative movements, such as the voluntary arts movements, some popular art, community art, religious art forms, etc.[4].

The work presented in this chapter and its associated workshop description builds upon prior research, dealing with themes of both individual or collective creativity, bringing together topics such as:

a) Culture 3.0, co-creation, co-production: my work on co-creation and culture 3.0 can be primarily found in two publications, one article and one recent book, and these detail what I have called the co-production turn of the economy and cultural sectors, or, as Sacco as labelled it: Culture 3.0[5].

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[1] Boehm 2023.
[2] Arrighi 1994; Raunig 2007.
[3] Köhne 2016.
[4] Boehm 2022, tableau #2.
[5] Boehm 2016, 2022.

b) Initiating creative processes: back in the noughts, I wrote a few publications that documented my development of pedagogical-oriented processes for facilitating various learners, from undergraduate to adult learners, to understand the existence of a rich diversity of methods that we humans use to initiate a creative process. This fed into the current work in understanding how concepts of culture 3.0 can be implemented as a set of learning tasks[6].

2. *Individualism and collectivism*

Over the past decade, we have seen an increase in discourses related to the phenomena of co-creation and co-production. As a recent report noted:

in considering the practice of co-creation (and associated practices) at this time, we must acknowledge that there have been significant shifts in recent years. There has been a move from discourse about the democratisation of culture to more expansive discussions about cultural democracy, specifically in terms of supporting everyone's cultural capability and the substantive freedom to co-create versions of culture[7].

These terms and their discourses point toward a growing and nuanced understanding of how we as humans collaborate and how we see ourselves both as individuals and as part of a collective entity at different scales, from groups with common interests and neighbourhoods of common purpose to humanity as a whole.

Collaborative cultures have been given new momentum, one which includes different forms of working, owning, living and creating as part of a richly diverse set of different types of collaborations. These could be seen as having been part of creative practice in the arts for a long time but not explicitly emphasised in a highly individually conceptualised world, where only now the collective nature of humanity is beginning to be prioritised again by various practices.

Co-creation, co-ownership and co-production models have also become more important during a time when the divide between the rich and the poor has widened, where power differentials are more keenly felt, or as put in the recently published report *Considering Co-Creation*, put together by the Heart of Glass and Battersea Arts Centre in 2021, that there

is a growing appetite to interrogate notions of power, both in the formation and delivery of projects, but also in the structures we rely upon to support cultural practices. There is

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[6] Boehm 2008.
[7] Heart of Glass and Battersea Arts Centre 2021, p. 5.

a wider demand, in our opinion, for a deeper level of connection and collaboration, and a much broader sense of who gets to be part of the making of meaning, and where that meaning takes form, and how it can affect change, both personal, and at a community and structural level[8].

This can be seen as an increasing movement with more and more artists working in this way. It should be noted that in critical art theory, there have been long-standing discourses around co-authorship and co-ownership, and a direct line can be traced back to (at least) Barthes seminal 1967 essay *The Death of the Author*[9]. Barthes here managed to position the concept of an author as a modern invention, one that is intractably linked to the rise of what some have called "high individualism", or as Barthes suggests, that is produced by the "prestige of the individual".

This prioritisation of the individual in our 20th-century cultural production models, and thus the focus on the author, is suggested to not allow us to see a piece of work as a text consisting of «multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation». For Barthes, «there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader»[10].

As I wrote in my recent book *Arts and Academia*[11], even in large-scale collaborations of multiple creators, specifically in the anglosphere, it feels as if we are still prioritising the individual above the collective. There is a tendency to emphasise the director, the composer, the conductor, or anyone that can be represented as the leader of a collective creative effort, and this still remains a strong instinct within our creative endeavours. Celebrity cultures have increased this tendency even more, and it is not a coincidence that those countries in the western world with the least wealth inequalities have much less of a tendency to foreground, celebrate and promote individuals seen to be the solely responsible creative leaders for what is often a collective effort. So I feel it is no coincidence that *El Sistema*, a music-educational program that fosters group tuition rather than individual tuition, emerged from the south and is foregrounded as a system for social change[12]. In contrast, in England, during the same decades, school-based and local authority-funded class-based music instruction was shrinking, including collective acts of music-making such as orchestras and ensemble work. Music and arts were cut in mainstream schools and local authority provisions, whilst private schools

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[8] *Ibidem*.
[9] Barthes 1977, pp. 142-148.
[10] Barthes 1977, p. 148.
[11] Boehm 2022.
[12] Baker *et al*. 2016, p. 24; Booth, Tunstall 2016.

became increasingly the places where individual music tuition could still be provided to individuals who could afford it. Jonathan Savage recently suggested «government intervention in music education has disempowered music education communities wherever they are located»[13], and this marginalisation of music in English mainstream schools is happening «despite it being a statutory requirement as part of the national curriculum»[14]. But more than a cut to the arts, this is also a privileged individualism keeping a stranglehold in our cultures, where the choice of individual families to spend their money on private education of their children is perceived to be an act of freedom and choice, taking priority over the collective needs of all children requiring access to arts and culture.

The wealth distribution, here, is also a cultural distribution. In England, the country in the European space with one of the highest wealth inequalities, the average person struggles to access as much and as regularly arts and culture on a daily basis as compared to some other countries with much lower wealth inequality, as for instance, Finland. Thus it could be suggested that wealth distribution strongly correlates to cultural distribution and, with it, general well-being of society. This is connected to an emphasis on individualism, which – in a neoliberal economic conceptualisation – is one of the causes of inequalities, be it culturally or economically.

However, new thinking is emerging in our discourses and cultural expressions, one that positions various neo-liberal trajectories, built upon decades of high individualism, as being without sufficient balance with a critical mass of collectivism. One example of this in a cultural output can be seen in the newest of the Curtis Films published in 2021, exploring the tensions between the east and the west as a metaphor for tensions between individualism and collectivism. His starting point is a perceived powerlessness to change our world for the better:

we are living through strange days. Across Britain, Europe and America, societies have become split and polarised. There is anger at the inequality and the ever-growing corruption – and a widespread distrust of the elites. Into this has come the pandemic that has brutally dramatised those divisions. But despite the chaos, there is a paralysis – a sense that no one knows how to escape from this[15].

His six-part BBC documentary series «tells the story of how we got to the strange days we are now experiencing. And why both those in power – and we – find it so difficult to move on»[16]. In the director's own words,

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13 Savage 2021, p. 483.
14 Bath *et al*. 2020, p. 443.
15 Curtis 2021.
16 *Ibidem*.

at its heart is the strange story of what happened when people's inner feelings got mixed up with power in the age of individualism. How the hopes and dreams and uncertainties inside people's minds met the decaying forces of old power in Britain, America, Russia and China. What resulted was a block not just in the society – but also inside our own heads – that stops us imagining anything else than this[17].

As Curtis almost hints at but never states outright, we in the neoliberal, marketised world seemed to have associated concepts of individualism with concepts of freedom, forgetting that collective endeavours have also historically secured us the collective freedoms we needed to fight for.

There is, he argues in collages of documentary footage, a continuing tension and balancing act between individualism and collectivism: the old powers in the "western world" went to the extremes of individualism and became corrupted, resulting in nepotism and elitism. And Russia and China flirted with extreme collectivism in forms of communism, which in turn became corrupted, resulting in fascism and authoritarianism. In his documentary, he does not have an answer to how we could break our collective paralysis beyond quoting David Graeber (1961-2020) in the final ending screen: «the ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something we make. And could just as easily make differently»[18].

I would suggest that the answer lies exactly in finding that balance between policies and systems that support individualism and collectivism and that we see this already emerging as societies demand this rebalancing act without explicitly naming it as such. I have argued before that

if we see our history of cultural engagement on a linear trajectory, which is fraught with its own dangers of generalisations, we can slowly see a move away from high individualism to a more balanced inclusion of 'collectivistic' approaches, or 'co-creation'. Increasingly our creative communities are moving away from 'high individualism' or are, at least, adding more co-creative approaches to the mix. This is also supported by an increased use of digital tools and connectivity that make process collaboration more readily available than ever before. Thus creative clusters and networks, and within these, the cultural artefacts or processes, are increasingly more often than not developed in co-operation, in collaboration and in co-authorship. Often it is not clear who produces and who consumes, when the process starts and when it stops, and what is being produced and what it is exactly[19].

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[17] *Ibidem.*
[18] *Ibidem.*
[19] Boehm 2022, pp. 37-38.

3. *Culture 3.0: a balancing act*

It is useful here to consider Pier Luigi Sacco's concept of culture 3.0, which not only foregrounds the collective nature of cultural production in the modern era but also, with it less explicitly, foregrounds solutions for a more diverse and more accessible cultural engagement.

Oversimplified Sacco's tracing of how we as humans culturally engage moves from patronage (Culture 1.0) to intellectual property (Culture 2.0) to co-production (Culture 3.0) as key aspects of our society's engagement with culture and arts. The question of engagement could thus be informed by considering the question of patronage, access and gatekeeping. Are we – as Pier Luigi Sacco suggested already in 2011[20] – still too hung up on Culture 1.0 (with a key aspect being gatekeeping and patronage), and was this holding Europe back in terms of productivity by constraining access to cultural engagement? And in the UK, are we – as I suggested in 2017[21] – still hung up on Culture 2.0 (key aspects being gatekeeping, mass production and copyright), with less but similar negative effects on nationally dispersed productivity? And for the future, do we need, as both Sacco and I advocate, a move towards a rebalancing between the different ways we engage in arts and culture, ensuring there is sufficient support and investment and activity of the more diversity-loving type of Culture 3.0 engagement? This type of engagement is also enabled digitally and characterised by using open platforms, democratic systems, ubiquitously available production tools and individuals constantly shifting and renegotiating their roles between producing and consuming content.

Culture 3.0, with its focus on co-production and multiple author cultures, emerges at a time when technological developments make it easy to build new works as collages, assemblages, remixes or patchworks. Culture 3.0 can be understood as a historical, linear trajectory of cultural engagement. However, this simplification does not sufficiently consider that at this stage of our human evolution, we have all three categories of cultural engagement (Culture 1.0, Culture 2.0, Culture 3.0) existing in multiple layers and intractably networked into each other.

Additionally, the content created through a Culture 3.0 phenomena, often using disruptive technologies, ubiquitously available content, and consumer-producer ambiguity, has created new tensions all to do with who owns what and what to do with our gatekeepers[22]. The era of individualism seems to be receding, and co-creation and co-ownership are increasingly taking their place.

[20] Sacco 2011.
[21] Boehm 2017.
[22] Sacco 2011.

In short, Culture 3.0 is the third iteration in this cultural evolution. The conceptualised evolution of cultural engagement traces a journey from Culture 1.0 to Culture 3.0. Culture 1.0 is «characterised by a distinction of high-brow vs low-brow, arts patronage, gatekeepers and value absorption»[23]. It is worth noting again and emphasising why it is so important. Sacco contends that Europe is hung up on Culture 1.0 type of cultural engagements and that this is holding us back in terms of productivity, creativity and diversity. I have suggested that in its creative industry and cultural policy, the UK is still focused on Culture 2.0, characterised by a focus on intellectual property (IP), and still has gatekeeping functions in place that create challenges when wanting to support open access to cultural and creative engagements and with it challenges for increasing diversity and wider access to the arts. My work suggests that the UK's focus on Culture 2.0 type of creative engagements subsequently resulted in creating policy that still relies on capitalistic, extractive processes focussing on commodifying outputs of creative endeavour based on individualistic conceptualised identities (e.g. intellectual property), inherently extractive, pooling wealth to the top and based on the high individualism of the 20th century.

But Culture 3.0 provides some ways forward, supported by a high amount of digital content production and digital connectivity. With its ubiquitously available production tools, mass distribution of content happens without mediators. One example of this is the relatively new medium of the podcast, which is highly distributed, low tech, low effort, and results in diversity-rich, active participation with high audience listenership. These are also often enabled through open platforms, with social media supporting these platforms and co-production occurring at various levels. This type of cultural engagement is often seen as democratic with constantly shifting roles of content producers and users. Today, I might listen to a podcast; tomorrow, I am recording one. Economic and social value is produced in sales and participation, and thus it does not absorb value anymore. As it is ubiquitous, it is hard to demarcate the industry. With no pre-determined market channel bottlenecks, the creative and cultural industries in the extreme may cease to exist, with culture no longer an aspect of free time use but entrenched in the fabric of everyday life. It is immersive.

This is important because this new conceptualisation can completely bypass the attachment of value judgement to art and cultural engagements, e.g. it simply does not have a high-brow vs low-brow division. This divide has wreaked havoc on our understanding of what art is, what should be funded, and how diverse it actually is. Accepting a high-brow vs low-brow divide leads to exclusivity. However, Culture 3.0 concepts provide a conceptualisation to understand creative and cultural engagement without needing a value judge-

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[23] Boehm 2016, p. 37.

ment or a patronage model. Thus, the concepts around Culture 3.0 are worthy of being highlighted, with related terminology including "community arts", "socially engaged arts", "non-traditional arts", and "everyday creativity". But these terms are often associated with a value judgment in itself. This problem has long since been recognised. Compare Stephenson below.

If one accepts a broader definition of 'the arts', then it immediately becomes apparent that large areas of arts activity, especially those centred in youth cultures, are essentially ignored by public sector funding. The discussion can become circular in that young people are often categorised as having little or no interest in the arts, but as Rachel Feldman points out, "The real problem isn't that young people aren't interested in the arts – many are, with a knowledge and commitment which puts adults to shame [...] it's just that traditional arts provision has failed to engage their input, enthusiasm and creativity"[24].

The scope of these concepts has significant consequences on funding, including who and what can be funded and thus impacting the diversity of what art and culture are counted, which is funded and who has been able to retain a leadership position in these fields. The prospective positive impact, through balancing the Culture 1.0-3.0 ecosystem, makes it important for cultural policy. It has the potential to resolve the long-standing and real struggles for policy trajectories in this field, which go back in the UK to the – one might say – formation of the Arts Council (or CEMA) with its original focus on community well-being[25] and ending in a highly charged debate between art activists and the Arts Council. This struggle seems to wrangle and take ownership of concepts such as "cultural democracy"[26]. There are beneficial implications on how to shift funding to allow more diversity-rich participation in arts and culture but without the contentious or politicised debates between perceived metropolitan elitism vs democratic access.

Considering Culture 3.0 can drive new policy intervention by using a new understanding of the cultural phenomena. Here, the future of an increasing amount of cultural engagement lies in what I have suggested being a "co-production turn of the economy" based on the understanding that our organisations develop organically, that we achieve more sustainably for longer when we co-create, that we share in each other's "acts of creating" and that single ownership of intellectual property is often a method of gatekeeping, rather than a supportive tool of production.

This co-production turn of the economy, or Culture 3.0, is a conceptualisation which inherently minimises gatekeeping functionality and embeds

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[24] Feldberg in Stephenson 2000, p. 27.
[25] Hetherington 2014, p. 105.
[26] Wilson *et al.* 2016; Jeffers 2017; Hadley 2018; Hadley, Belfiore 2018; Romer 2018; ACE 2020.

a much more fluid access to content production. It is characterised as using open platforms, often being perceived as democratic, using value creation, ubiquitously available production tools and individuals constantly shifting and renegotiating their roles between producing and consuming content. The Culture 3.0 model focuses on co-production, co-curation and re-framing people as both cultural producers and users. In this evolution, power, resources and production are more equitably devolved. Wider society is involved in the co-production of art, so in turn, it better reflects society and its diversity and intersection of identities.

Thus, in summary, the Culture 3.0 conceptualisation allows for:

– a de-emphasis of the individual, which could be considered tied to historic notions of the 20th-century concept of high-individualism, and this de-emphasis provides a re-balance with an alternative based on collectivism or co-production, reacting to what I have coined the co-production turn of the economy;
– minimisation of gatekeeping functionality, thus allowing minority communities to more easily access leadership positions and funding structures for arts and culture;
– consideration of the problem of lack of diversity of arts to be one of definition and eligibility (e.g., gatekeeping and structural exclusionary practices) rather than lack of cultural engagement. Culture 3.0 thus redefines art and cultural engagement to be inclusive of those forms of activities that are already active in minority communities and recognises that the diversity problem in the arts and cultural sectors is one of leadership and funding, but not one of cultural engagement.

The Covid-19 pandemic gave us a halting point in our neo-liberally conceptualised trajectory built upon decades of high individualism without sufficient balancing with a critical mass of collectivism. I have recently structured this within a UK context, as in table 1 below.

Era	1951/53	80s-90s	1997-2010	2010	2015-2020 (up to Covid19)	Pandemic era
Imaginaries	Private cultural patronage	Public cultural patronage	Cool Britannia/ Creative Industries	Austerity Britain	Brexit Britain	Post-Pandemic Recovery
Lenses	Culture 1.1 and 1.2	Culture 1.X	Culture 2.0	Culture 2.0	Culture 2.0 (policy) Culture 3.0 (civil society)	Culture 3.0
Characteristics	High Individualism	High Individualism	Cultural Turn	Corporatocracy	Co-production Turn	Placemaking
Which crisis	Post-war trauma	Mass vs Class	Manufacturing/ Industry	Deficit/ Austerity	Immigration Europe	Pandemic
Political Goals	Welfare vs Prestige	Education vs Excellence	Economic Productivity	Reducing the state	Exiting EU	Recovery Levelling Up
Structural	CEMA (Origin of Arts Council 1940); Festival of Britain (1951)	Arts Education in schools and as part of the national curriculum	Creative Industry Task Force, DCMS, NESTA, UK Film Council, DfES, Devolvement of ACE to regions, ARHB to AHRC	DCMS; Bonfire of the Quangos; Cuts t public services and arts funding	DCMS shift to digital	Debates about new economic/ social models
Discourses	Art for "everyone", "everywhere", "welfare", Festival of Britain seen as Socialist agenda; Arts as Welfare; Art as an International Pride	80s and 90s debate of "cultural democracy" versus the "democratisation of culture" (e.g. criticism of mass culture vs a defence of intellectual culture), Arts Education in Schools	Definition of "Creative Industries"; Mapping Document, NESTA Founding Docs, Creative Britain Speeches, Dearing Report, etc. "Culture and Creativity: The next 10 years" (2007), Creative Britain (2008)	Big Society, "Philanthropy is good" narrative, DCMS; austerity, cuts to public services including arts and culture	Wealth divides; economic dead ends; environmental unsustainability; Brexit / Levelling Up	Breaking up of the UK; Pandemic Recovery; Green Recovery; Diversity; Levelling Up; World of work; renewed belief (?) in more state
Agency	Clement Attlee (Labour); Winston Churchill (Cons); Civil society	Margaret Thatcher and Major (Cons); Civil society	Blair (Lab); Chris Smith (DCMS); Lord Puttnam (Nesta); Tessa Jowell; Civil society	Cameron (Cons (LibDem); Civil society	May; Johnson; Civil society	Johnson; Sunak; Devolved govts; Regions

Tab. 1. High individualism and Culture 3.0 in the UK (more details, see Boehm 2022)

There are many signs that co-creation is on the rise in the cultural sectors, the business sectors, in government thinking, industrial strategies and also in policies addressing various crises from environmental to the pandemic. Terms and words are signs of this evolution, from "co-curation", "place-shaping", "co-production", "participatory", "co-operative" to "cultural democracy", "everyday creativity", or "collaborative".

Despite various governments in different nations having had a tendency to centrally regulate society's cultural and economic progression, concepts of partnership work and collaboration abound and cannot be swept under the individualised carpets any longer.

But we do need to support this growing awareness with rigorous, critical frameworks and concepts able to be used in creative practice, allowing creatives to understand this new opportunity to shape the world in which we all live as a place where we co-create the future together.

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