



## Disassembly and reassembly: An introduction to the Special Issue on digital technology and creative industries<sup>☆</sup>



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### ABSTRACT

This Special Issue analyzes the dynamics of disassembly and reassembly unfolding in selected creative industries through the advent of digital technology. It argues that a full understanding of the much-observed organizational or sectoral lock-in effects on the one hand, and the possibilities for transformation and innovation on the other is only gained by analyzing jointly how institutional logics, business models and creative processes are affected by digital technology and how they interrelate in producing stability or change. These three dimensions provide a framework for reviewing the findings of the papers comprised in the Special Issue and for integrating their insights towards a research agenda. This introduction starts with a reflection on creative industries classification systems and related possibilities for generalization and discusses how digital technology acts as a driver for disassembly and reassembly. It concludes by highlighting three avenues for further research.

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### 1. Introduction

Digitization is everywhere in discussions on industrial and, more broadly, societal change. The way we get our news, the choice of work places and the design of work environments, how we connect with customers and stakeholders in developing products and how these products are consumed: our lives, both private and professional, are fundamentally affected by digital technology. No set of industries has felt this impact more than the creative industries: that set of sectors bound together through a reliance on the value of symbols and aesthetics [1]. Previously thought of as frivolous and an expensive luxury, the creative industries are now considered an industrial priority and a

'laboratory' for studying the transformations of modern economies and societies. Accordingly, the changes they are currently undergoing through digital technology are becoming increasingly urgent in broader debates on cultural production, entrepreneurial activity and the nature of creativity [2–4].

Creative industries research in the past has tried to understand the paradoxes or tensions inherent in creative work [5–7], the role of places or networks in supporting creative production [8,9] or innovation dynamics [10,11]. These studies stress specific forms of organization, managerial practices and policies and social ties as fundamental for spurring creative dynamics and enabling value creation from creativity. However, the role of digital technology as a mediator of these variables and in particular its disruptive effects on established forms of creative production and consumption is rarely explicitly addressed in these debates.

Although digital technology is commonly considered as a driver of growth and innovation [12], we also know that it has fundamentally shaken industries such as music, film

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production or publishing [13–15]. Old business models are often held onto, whereas new opportunities depend on firms' willingness and ability to apply new tools of production, recognize and address changed consumption patterns and mobilize institutional voids to change broader rules of the game [16–18]. The same holds for other sectors beyond the confines of the creative industries such as photography or telecommunications, where incumbent firms are often slow in adapting their business models to technological change because they are trapped in old cognitive representations and adhere to existing institutional logics [19,20].

The contribution of this Special Issue is to focus explicitly on both processes of *disassembly* – the shaking of existing business models of transaction and distribution, for instance – and *reassembly* – for example, new tools and architectures to interact with audiences and communities in selected creative industries. It hereby addresses three levels of analysis that are clearly interlinked in producing stability or change but rarely examined jointly: the macrolevel of institutional logics, the mesolevel of business models and the microlevel of creative processes.

This introductory article provides a synthesis of each paper's arguments and findings. It also derives theoretical implications for research on creativity and creative industries and highlights blind spots in our understanding as well as avenues for further research. First, it reviews briefly the rationales for classifying the creative industries and the boundaries around them, which is a contested and fluid field. These boundaries are important for understanding how the contributions of this Special Issue can be generalized to other settings. Second, it characterizes the process of disassembly and reassembly brought about by digital technology. Third, it summarizes the role of institutions in constraining and enabling creative processes and forms of value capture and appropriation in creative industries. Introducing the first set of papers in the Special Issue, this section highlights the role of discourse, actors and institutional work in maintaining or challenging dominant institutional logics and regulatory regimes. Fourth, it looks at the opportunities for and challenges in business model transformation arising through the shift from material to digital content. This section introduces the second set of papers seeking to understand how the traditional value chain of creation, production, distribution and sales has collapsed and how it is being reconfigured. Fifth, it turns attention to how technologies more generally and digital technologies in particular affect the thinking and activity of creative workers. By introducing the final set of papers which analyze the 'digital native' sectors of video games development and post-production of computer-generated animated film we find new methods of coordination that nevertheless perform some of the same creative functions as those enshrined in the early Italian Renaissance. The sixth and final section emphasizes the transformation of other sectors that may derive value from creativity regarding ways to create, produce and deliver goods and services and to interact with users and consumers. It also offers thoughts on the ongoing research agenda.

## 2. Classifying creative industries and moving beyond classification

The classification of what constitutes a 'creative' industry is highly contested. Building on the influential mapping and

measurement exercise undertaken by the UK New Labour government of Tony Blair in 1998, researchers, policy makers and practitioners often consider sectors such as advertising, architecture, art and antiques, computer games, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, music, performing arts, publishing, software, TV and radio as identified creative industries. These are defined as "those (...) which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through generation and exploitation of intellectual property." [21] (p. 4). The main policy motivation driving this classification was to account for and encourage economic growth, employment and social cohesion in advanced countries, recognizing unsung sources of value creation where cities, regions, and nations faced the decline of traditional manufacturing industries. This reasoning considers creativity not only as individual originality, imagination or inspiration, but as an economic factor contributing to entrepreneurship, innovation, growth and social peace.

Critics of these policy-driven developments have pointed out the highly eclectic and arbitrary compilation of traditional arts and cultural fields as well as digital new economy sectors under the creative industries label [22]. Some more fundamentally questioned the neoliberal stance behind applying the norms of industrial production to the production of cultural goods through the coining of the term 'creative industries' [23], a view that is said to be largely detached from artists' self-perceptions [24]. From this latter perspective, Horkheimer and Adorno's [25] original usage of the term 'cultural industry' as an overt critique of popular mass culture has been subtly and perversely converted into a normative agenda for 21st century economic policy.

Several alternative classificatory systems have been developed in the light of these criticisms. Throsby's [26] concentric circles model, for instance, proposed to differentiate between the 'core creative arts' such as literature, music or performing arts, other 'core cultural industries' such as film, museums or photography, 'wider cultural industries' such as publishing, television or video/computer games and, finally, 'related industries' such as advertising, architecture or design. This system gradually distinguishes sectors with high cultural value from sectors with high economic value. Hesmondhalgh [23] (p. 12–14), in contrast, suggested that only those industries that create texts or cultural artifacts and which engage in some form of industrial reproduction should be considered as 'core cultural industries', including advertising, broadcasting, film, internet, music, publishing and video/computer games. Yet an alternative approach, which is best represented by the classification system of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), is to focus on the role of copyright in mediating value creation and appropriation. According to this logic, sectors such as advertising, collecting societies, film and video, music or publishing constitute the 'core copyright industries', whereas sectors such as design, architecture and fashion are considered as 'partial copyright industries' because copyright plays a more peripheral role to their business models. The broadest perspective was developed by Howkins [27] who writes of a 'creative economy' embracing toys and games production as well as research and development in science and technology.

The role of digital technology has played an important part in these debates over creative industries classifications.

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