A Scene in Sequence: Australian Comics Production as a Creative Industry 1975-2017

Amy Louise Maynard

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Abstract

From 1975 until the present Australian comics production has existed as a creative industry which is comprised of various clusters and social networks. These social networks consist of creative practitioners (stakeholders), cultural intermediaries, and public institutions, and are sustained through reciprocal social capital, knowledge, and innovation. Within this thesis I will be presenting the argument that the Australian comics industry is a case study into how a creative industry which relies on collective labour within scenes can contribute to creative economies on a global scale.

This thesis is modelled after a chain narrative, with chapters focused on funding, production, distribution, retail, and marketing. I adapted the chain narrative framework from Cunningham and Higgs’ (2008) ‘Creative Chain’, this framework providing a comprehensive analysis of all agents involved in production and circulation. Throughout this narrative there is primary data in the form of ethnographic field notes and interviews, and my methodologies include Bourdieu’s theory of the cultural field and critical discourse analysis.

My research has found that stakeholders and cultural intermediaries in the Australian comics industry are strategic in how they form clusters and networks to continue their practices and strengthen their markets. These strategies include knowledge brokering, as individuals and collectives, with state institutions and the corporate sector. Stakeholders and cultural intermediaries are also connected to other creative and comics industries through contractual labour, cultural tourism, and media convergence. This individual and collective agency is the key to the Australian comics industry’s resilience and growth, as stakeholders and cultural intermediaries increasingly occupy different physical, cultural and virtual spaces.

Through entrepreneurialism and adaptation, stakeholders and cultural intermediaries convert social capital into cultural and economic capital. These practices are at once unique to the Australian comics industry, but are also reflected in various creative industry models. This thesis is the first case study which presents the theory that comics production could be considered a creative industry through shared economic structures.
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