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# **Creative Girls: Fashion design education and governmentality**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The University of Auckland,  
2008

## **Abstract**

This thesis is concerned with creativity as an object of educational governance and a category of subjective identification. It studies a ‘creativity explosion’ in higher education in New Zealand, focusing on how fashion design students are being mobilized as subjects of creativity through ‘joined up’ modes of governance and technologies of educational choice. Using a poststructural ethnographic ‘methodology’ I explain how, from the late 1990s, models of educational governance began to appear dysfunctional and unable to deliver the attributes and capacities expected of citizens in a knowledge economy. I argue that creativity gained significance as a result of new ways of ‘thinking culture and economy together’. Neoliberal rhetorics representing creativity as flexible human capital and a generic, transferable skill needed by workers in the new economy, were articulated with liberal humanist notions about creativity, which are commonly understood and performed through the social categories of art. All kinds of individual and institutional actors took advantage of these shifting opportunity structures to position themselves with ‘creative’ identities. Within various cultural organisations, including universities, moves to strengthen a liberal agenda and retain creativity as a form of ‘arts knowledge’ with high cultural capital, rubbed up against counter-hegemonic strategies to enlist and develop more universal concepts about creativity as a collaborative endeavour, vital to new forms of capitalist enterprise. By historicising the context in which a new ‘normative doctrine’ of creativity has emerged, and by treating its theorisation as culturally performative, I develop the position that fashion design graduates, as ‘creative girls’, are highly productive performers in the new categories of cultural economy. However I argue that the creative girl occupies a subject position fitted to after-neoliberalised social and economic arrangements, not because she is shaped by neoliberal ideologies, but because she is made up by techniques and tactics of an ‘after-neoliberal’ governmentality. This demonstrates the mutual constitution of ‘creative economy’ and ‘creative persons’ and underlines the fact that despite after-neoliberal ambitions for managing education, there can be no simple cause and effect relation between higher education and economic performance.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my grandson Jesse (b. 25.2.2007) and my mother Elizabeth (d. 25.8.2007).

Aroha mai - aroha atu.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Maureen Molloy and Professor Wendy Larner, for believing I could do this and giving me wise counsel. Also the members of the University of Auckland's Fashion Project who got me started, and my colleagues in the Fashion Design programme at the College of Creative Arts:

Arti Sandhu, Catherine Bagnall and Lilian Mutsaers; as well as my friend

Dr. Deborah Jones, for all their moral support.

Dear Steve, for never complaining.

Amber and Tony for Jesse.

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