

Reflections on Precarious Work in the Cultural Sector

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In my work I have been concerned with how culture and creativity have in effect in recent years been put to work not as leisure, or as consumption, as taste or as national identity, but rather as sources for work, employment and job creation. Of course people have for many years been employed in the arts and cultural sectors, but there has been a seismic shift since the mid 1990s. From being rather gentle backwaters of employment, these areas have come to the forefront of the 'new economy'. The paradoxes and the contradictions this gives rise to will be the subject of this article. One element of my argument concerns the illegibility of work in the creative and cultural sector. But this is functional illegibility. What have been in the past considered sites of relative freedom have become quite the opposite, fields for self-disciplining, but without losing that freedom, indeed the freedom is harnessed and put to work, the new 'free' labour depends on this being entirely different from 'wage labour'. Hence my own designation of this as 'passionate work'.

Creative work appears to operate, as it did in the past, if only for the select few, as an escape from, the dull monotony of normal work. But here is another irony, culture has been prised out of the hands of those for whom it once had a compensatory existence (culture as a way of life) outside the workplace, for example in leisure, in the working men's choir, in the amateur singalong in the pub, in knitting circles, and has become instead a favoured instrument of self-help in regard to self-employment, career choices, and small-scale entrepreneurship for those same people for whom it was external to work, for whom it was leisure (it has become culture as a way of making a living). Of course there

have been jobs in the cultural sector, especially in the arts and in publishing and journalism, this has been a field typically associated with graduates in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

And the art school has embodied the tradition of State-supported training and educating for the industrialisation of art, design and more generally for the proliferation of culture within the nation-state. But now this expanded occupational terrain has become a site for a different kind of work, for working class and lower middle class young men and women, with or without degree qualifications. I am concerned then with what we might call a culture-machine, and with the deployment of creativity as a way of transforming what we mean by work, what it is to work. The promotion of creative work has I claim become a depoliticising strategy, a way of removing politics from work and replacing it instead with notions of self-gratification, reward, and self-expression.

First I will review some of the research I have carried out from the mid 1990s on the indie fashion sector, and then with young people working across a range of creative small scale organisations. Then I will update this work, drawing on some more recent interviews, in the third section I will offer a series of grounded commentaries a result of these more contemporary observations, and then finally I will expand the argument so that it connects with some of our concerns in the universities and the arts schools.

Work as a mode of contemporary self-disciplining

I have argued that passionate attachment to work has emerged as a mode of contemporary self-disciplining. My focus has been on fashion, but the same sensibility applies across the world of the arts, culture and media. I have drawn on Donzelot's brief article 'Pleasure in Work' to present an account of the incitement to take self-actualising pleasure in one's working life in fashion, as an example of how biopower operates as labour discipline for young women now entering the world of work with very different expectations than those of previous generations of women (Donzelot 1991). In effect this is a Foucauldian technology of the self, the subject is expected if not required to find pleasure in the working life. For young women working in new culture industry jobs, the valency of emotion and the experience of intensity in the new post-Fordist creative workplace, along with the existence of hidden hierarchies in seemingly flat working environments, and the absence of access

to rights, and the further side-effect of flexibility as 'gender re-traditionalisation', produce a kind of multi-layered opacity, or 'illegible labour' that is also a defining feature in this sector. There are three key themes that have emerged in the small studies of creative micro-economies that I have carried out in recent years (McRobbie 1989/1994, 1998, 2002).

The first feature is that fashion design activity, when pursued as a specialism, is low capital return work, by which I mean that there is an inversion of Beck's description of 'capital without jobs', such that these young women are working in a context of jobs without capital (Beck 2000). They had little or no investment capital apart from small bank loans, or support from the Princes Trust. As micro-enterprises or freelance outfits, their capacity to manufacture clothes for example, was limited, and this was in effect an integral part of their working practices. They would typically produce a collection of fifteen pieces and then manufacture runs of perhaps just 20 of each item.

Over time this style of independent working almost inevitably became unsustainable and instead had to become a stepping stone into more diverse activities. In the search for security the young women fashion designers gravitated to a public sector niche of a part-time or fractional appointment, ideally teaching, the advantage of this being that payment would be guaranteed and there might even be some statutory obligations on the part of the employers such as sick pay. This then became the most reliable of the roles tucked into the portfolio. Jobs like these were considered gold dust, and there was also a hierarchy in this kind of work, the best jobs being in prestigious art schools or universities, and the less attractive being in low level further education courses in fashion retail or perhaps in fashion buying.

This shift towards the public sector coincided however with the semi-privatisation of many of its activities in the world of the arts and culture. By the time the young women had decided to become mentors or arts administrators, these kinds of posts had already been stripped of the welfare benefits accruing to employment status and so were subject to not dissimilar insecurity as was experienced in the commercial world of project-working. There was something of an irony here. Thirty years ago, graduating from art school with a specialism in fashion and textiles for many young women would have been followed by a Post Graduate Certificate in Education course which in turn would have resulted in a teaching post in a secondary school, with all the benefits associated with the teaching profession, holidays, salary scales, and opportunities for promotion, including also the chance to keep professional skills alive with shows and exhibitions.

Overall this would have meant being a teacher, which has never carried quite the status and glamour of actually being a fashion designer. Nowadays we might find that similarly qualified young women would pursue this independent, freelance pathway for many years, scraping a living, never thinking about undertaking a teacher training course since school-teaching carries no aura of success, only to find themselves eventually in their late 30s or early 40s in effect working as teachers on ‘projects’ with unemployed youngsters or with young people, suspended from school or who have been forced onto job creation schemes. The women retain the title of fashion designer rather than that of fashion and textiles teacher, even though the bulk of their livelihood will actually come from this kind of teaching-mentoring activity.¹ Opacity or illegibility creeps into these working lives, they have a semi-detached relation to the institutions where they have a seasonal teaching contract, and to keep themselves buoyant on the market they constantly need to be promoting their own work no matter how little time they have to concentrate on this creative activity, it is nevertheless still their trademark, giving them access to possible contracts and so it has to be safeguarded and updated even though in reality its existence might be almost virtual or imaginary

The second theme is then the unviability over time of a pure fashion or design specialism and the need, as a result, for a broad portfolio, hence the rise of the fashion multi-taskers who can show themselves capable of working in a number of different roles across this field. This might mean helping out as a shop assistant, developing new projects which emerge from perceived needs on the part of the sector and which connect directly with the knowledge economy², picking up the skills of being a stylist, doing agency work booking photographers, compiling and then editing fashion directories, or working as a freelance design assistant or consultant for various less well-known or less adventurous companies such as *Esprit* or *Marco Polo*.

The interviews I conducted showed that the ingenuity and emphasis on contacts and networks needed to keep these jobs coming in, meant that unfairness, gender or race related discrimination, or overtly bad

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- 1 The same applies to the category of “film-maker” who in reality might be teaching media production several days a week to young people who have been excluded from school, or who are on welfare to work programmes.
 - 2 Harriet Posner for example began as an independent designer but some years later helped to set up a fashion directory, for use by designers and wholesalers as well as retailers who needed up to date information about suppliers and manufacturing units and costings across the world, see www.harrietposner.com.

practice in the sector was often ignored and put down to experience. Most often the strategy was to walk away from it, having already spent energy and anger in situations where the payment had not arrived months after the job was completed, or the organisation had changed the terms mid-way through the work. The fashion world has long been known to operate in these ways, so there was some level of tolerance of bad practice. Gender inequalities were often inflected in a post-feminist way, for example women bosses treating young men more respectfully than their female counterparts, giving them more work as freelancers, or more complicated and hence better paid work, and so within this landscape of daily stress these gender issues were often difficult to pin down, they would be buried deep inside this whole underbelly of freelance experience. Work-place grievances would not be opened up for discussion, never mind arbitration, they simply meant it was time to leave, usually under a bad cloud of claims and counter-claims. Sociologists of small businesses that rely on freelance or casual workers would surely say there is nothing at all new here, and they are probably right. The novelty applies more to the sector itself, as art and design, culture and creativity take on the cruel characteristics (or bad intensity) of the world of small enterprises.

The *third* feature can be described as a bypassing mechanism, which impacts on the career trajectories and self-identities in this sector. By this I mean the way in which the structural characteristics of this whole field of new culture industry working are increasingly predicated on mechanisms which allow the usual safeguards against poor practice or discrimination in the workplace to be by-passed and ignored without re-crimination. Whether this gives rise to low level criminality or corruption or not, this possibility is normalised in the everyday working lives of the young people. The very idea of challenging a long hours culture is replaced again by emotional intensity, by profound attachments, by virtually living the work, by eating if not sleeping with the project director. There are also incentives to young cultural entrepreneurs to create flexible and informal working environments for themselves so that employment law is irrelevant. Even if in the course of time new legislation is indeed introduced to protect part-time or casual workers, in the meantime informal working and network sociality comprises a *de facto* understanding that there can be no recourse to the law or to an industrial tribunal when things go wrong.

By-passing the world of what Ulrich Beck calls 'normal work' means that the new cultural capitalism can get away with murder, since the kind of dangers which appear in old factory-style environments are replaced here by health hazards of a different kind, mental illness, burn

out, exhaustion, alcoholism, drug-related problems, heart attacks, premature strokes and so on. It also results in what Scott Lash and then Lisa Adkins call gender re-traditionalisation in the form of a renewed dependency on family or kin as this becomes once again a unit of production (Beck/Giddens/Lash 1994; Adkins 2002). Lash commented that women were, in the world of reflexive modernisation 'reflexivity losers'. I think what this means is not just that old patterns of gender hierarchy re-appear in the form of the husband in what is in effect a family business both being more active in network sociality at night or in the evenings that must be spent in the pub, but that relations of financial dependence take on a new significance, that some work simply cannot be sustained without the support of a partner.

If new culture industry work coincides with the state attempting to unburden itself of responsibility through promoting self-employment in this sector, almost inevitably responsibility falls back on family and kin. It has long been the case that a struggling artist or writer has been dependent on his wife's steady employment to cover the basic bills and the mortgage, but when young women are embarking on these precarious careers and when it is quite uncertain as to whether or not they will actually secure a viable income, the fact that the state has cut back on benefits and on many other forms of social security, so that unemployment payments barely exist, and when so many creative-related jobs no longer provide security of employment, this introduces a retrograde factor for young women who not only want to 'be creative' but who also hope to be financially independent.

The chances are that they actually, over time, become less creative because the desire or the need for a steady income prevails. Bearing in mind that for this generational cohort of young women this is a priority, then it is likely that artistic independence and creative freedom are jettisoned in favour, eventually, of some form of regular employment, all the more so if the same women embark on motherhood³. Multi-tasking, project work, and job mobility as well as different forms of self-employment all contribute to this work becoming illegible labour. Statistics are unreliable, despite all the recent attempts by government to 'map' the new culture industries for the reason that the culture of creative work defies the logic of systematicity. Working life is thoroughly individualised and occupational identity has been subjected to the logic of branding, in direct contrast to the old world of bureaucracy and replaceability,

3 Destination studies have not so far investigated gender-specific pathways see Royal College of Art 2004.

and instead uniqueness is a dominating characteristic, and the life-biography the most reliable tool for charting pathways and forms of work and experience across this sector.

Researching self-reflexive subjects

Indeed we also come up against difficulties when we turn to the realm of experience and the research methods relied upon to document that experience. There is no (nor should there be) transparency of meaning in the narrative accounts given by these subjects, for the reason that, as Lange points out, they are generally highly self-reflexive subjects for whom the chance to express themselves in an interview situation or in the form of a research-related blog or email diary becomes indistinguishable from the self-promotional strategies required to position themselves on the freelance labour market (Lange 2005). University research has a place in the cognitive map of the small scale cultural entrepreneur. This aspect of creative labour, the endless need to self-promote, and to flag up the work itself, makes it difficult for the researcher to disentangle the layers of talk which are required features of network sociality and which frequently overtake the flow of the well-planned semi-structured interview. Nobody can afford to come across as less than exceptional, hard working, and talented. Bauman described the way in which failure is personalised and how self-blame and a must try harder attitude takes the place of more traditional workplace grievances (Bauman 1990). We can really only surmise that this kind of work takes its toll on mental health and well-being, and the question arises as to how people retain visibility and how and when and why they slip into the invisibility of quiet mode.

I offer a selection of quotes from three respondents. One is from the early work on fashion designers and is a simple expression of creative identity. It is by Pam Hogg, who in many ways epitomised the first wave of visible, successful, subcultural, small-scale art-related designers. I am interested in her career because, a forerunner of Galliano and younger by a decade than Westwood, she has refused the lure of the big commercial marketplace, while nevertheless finding it impossible to remain small scale and independent. For this reason over the last few years she has had a low profile, known only to insiders. (This reflects the point above about 'failure' and what it means, fading into invisibility, making a living by different means?) In fact Hogg has continued to make one off dresses and costumes for musicians and celebrities, she herself plays in a band, and is well known around the club scene in London. And for the

first time in many years she is showing a new collection at London Fashion Week 2009 20th–27th Feb). I should also add that I know Pam personally from her time at the Glasgow School of Art. Her career is totally idiosyncratic, haphazard and irregular, archetypal artist-bohemian.

Sometimes I dream my next collection. I have millions of clothes in my head, that I have not got time to produce. It's like painting with the body as a canvas. I cut straight into the fabric, the ideas pour right out of me onto the table, I get completely carried away by the process. I like being able to sell clothes that are within the range of girls and young women, I get such a buzz seeing them wear my pieces out and about on the streets and in the clubs.

In total contrast and following up the idea of self-reflexivity and creative identity, one more recent couple of designers, recently graduated in graphic design, and working together in as partners, approached me, in the university, in the same way as they did potential clients. Their distinctive business strategy was to send out unusual and beautifully designed postcards to people who they thought they would like to work for or with.

When I responded to their postcard, and told them about my culture industry research, they were happy to take part in what turned out to be a lengthy interview. They had read my fashion book while at college and had found it interesting, they were also familiar with the *Subcultures Reader*, so in effect my research respondents came to me in this case, and three years after the interview they continue to send me postcards and emails. I in turn monitor their activity, which reveals them to be continuing to work at a frenetic level and keeping to the same kind of business plan they described to me in our conversations. The two hours I spent with them were illuminating.

They worked from home to keep down costs. They arranged to meet potential clients and to show them their portfolio and ideas in different London locations, in my own case one of the large and empty cafés in the South Bank. However what I hoped would be a research interview was in effect them presenting their portfolio to me and talking their way through it, every single client and job was described in detail, myself and my research assistant barely got a word in, such that asking questions got pushed off the agenda. This was of course immensely interesting and research wise we just went with the flow.

They were also pleased to describe their daily activities and their working life since leaving college. Working from home, getting on the dole until contract began to flow in. Never borrowing or taking out loans, keeping overhead low. Never more than three projects at a time,

so they could guarantee quality. Talking between themselves for days at a time on how to develop an idea. In effect they were offering a full design service to possible clients but on an out-sourced and one-off freelance basis. Researching in advance, they also provided clients with socially informed creative ideas about their products. Referring to their pitch with a key company, the young man, Mike commented:

After we had presented it, it was the accountants who said ‘I can really see the benefit of this creativity’, which was really nice.

These two young people, Rebecca and Mike, talked in detail about the technicalities of their work, the style, the colours, the ‘linear sequences’ and so on. My role in this research interview was more reminiscent of being a tutor walking about a graphic design studio and commenting on the work. But outcome tells us more about the work process than might be imagined. Enthusiasm, drive, and network sociality were the defining features of this kind of creative entrepreneurship.

The interview was an opportunity. Myself and the research assistant heard about every client they had worked for in the last 3 years, what they had done, what the outcome was, how they got the work, and what it led to next. We were also able to see the links between the client range, from Levi’s to Diesel, from MTV to Cadbury’s chocolate, from Dunhill to Channel 4.

My impression was that these companies were not looking to bring the couple in as part of a big advertising team but instead were willing to pay them for ideas, input and more specifically for a ‘pure art’ signature brought to the world of commercial design. The pair were working with clients not unlike the way in which as students they would be doing work or coming up with ideas for similar clients, but within the framework of ‘work experience’.

This way of pitching gave them a foothold in a competitive market, and this time, unlike as students, they were being paid. Their strategy also showed the way in which art and design school pedagogy (internships, working unpaid for clients as part of the training) relayed into the world of freelance work. ‘rebeccaandmike’ (their trade name) came across as exemplary professionals whose creative identity was forged through bringing art and design, subculture and cultural studies, mediated through their training at Central St Martins, into the commercial domain of mainstream clients (they suggested Cadbury’s did a special edition chocolate bar).

Last I offer just one quote from Paul Hedges director of the now very successful Hales Gallery in London (Bethnal Green). A Goldsmiths

graduate and one of the Hirst generation, but with a sharper concern for social issues including local community politics, Hedges realised the combination of punk DIY ethos with the enterprise culture ideal espoused by the Thatcher generation. Hedges's career demonstrates the power of network sociality underpinned by the long hours, no pay culture. His first shows were for Jake and Dinos Chapman and then for Mike Nelson, and this would repay him on the longer term. To start up he raised £85,000 as a business training for artists initiative in the run-down area of Deptford where he had grown up, he used his connections with the local church to get cheap premises and he opened a café with space for a makeshift gallery. Talking to him about his career he said:

I was getting up at 5 am and making a load of sandwiches, and then by 3 in the afternoon I would get out of the kitchen and do the paperwork for the gallery.

What these extracts illustrate is the utterly singular and non-comparable nature of careers in this sector, and the uniqueness of life-biographies (although all trained in the UK art school system, and all identified themselves with aspects of youth culture as a kind of unofficial training ground for later careers).

I would suggest that conventional methodologies for carrying out social research on or with the creative workforce are less effective than research strategies which foreground life-biography. Cultural producers are comfortable talking about 'the work itself'. But as a cohort they are typically de-territorialised, nomadic, and rhizomatic in their schedules. Fleeting from project to project, the quality of social encounters is both intense and often short lived, by necessity. The economic geographer of cultural labour markets Allen Scott gets round the difficulties I describe above in relation to representativeness by using professional organisations as the source for respondents across the areas of film, media, TV and associated fields (Scott 2000).

While this gives methodological rigour and statistical accuracy, nevertheless there is little correspondence between these definable skills and competences and the working practices of the four people quoted above. A professional organisation which would represent their distinct interests was not something that had any place in the working lives of these people. Their own personal networks replaced this more traditional form of work organisation. Of course one might add that artists and creative people have in the past worked by and large without trade unions or professional associations, but the question arises that as this kind of work becomes increasingly pervasive with larger numbers of people amassing

together in albeit fragmented or even virtual ways, the consolidation of networks into support systems might seem like an obvious thing to do.

Expanding our understanding of creative labour

In previous articles I have introduced a range of conceptual devices for expanding our understanding of this field of creative labour e.g. ‘happiness at work’, ‘passionate work’, ‘club to company’ ‘culture as a way of life (Williams) to culture as a way of making a living’, I have also discussed the visibility of 1st, 2nd and 3rd waves of creative economies in the UK and in the light of the extensive neo-liberalisation effect in global cities like London I have suggested the emergence of the ‘one big hit’ model or aspiration (McRobbie 2005). In the following pages I briefly want to address issues, which connect with the changing prevailing socio-economic structures which impact on this creative activity. This also takes us away from expressions of passionate attachment to work to the other side, and to the power relations, which produce intensity, and a highly emotional relation to work. For the sake of brevity and clarity I will itemise these as follows;

- The expansion of this kind of work as a feature of government policy which traverses all levels of schooling and education (e.g. media, performing arts, art and design etc.) marks a decisive feature for the labour market of the future in the UK and also Europe, in regard to unburdening companies, firms and conventional employers of the responsibility they have hard to workforce. It is one thing to talk about unburdening, but something quite different to examine how this actually happens on the ground.
- The training and education for self-organised work, results in a field of semi-employment which is relatively cheap to introduce as a kind of informal thin-spread labour strategy. And it provides labour, which comes cheap to employers as a result of its unofficial or irregular status. In effect irregular work with the shimmer of creativity becomes normalised and institutionalised according to the emerging codes of the de-regulated labour market.
- This has repercussions beyond the limits of creative labour for the reason that as we have seen this kind of work is profoundly intersectional, it overlaps with and becomes inextricably linked with parts of the knowledge economy, with the social projects for creating employment in Europe, as well as for implementing grounded social policies, in fact we could say there is a multi-chain model in place. To give one example, one layer of young people (i.e. under 35s) in Italy, with qualifications in areas as diverse as architecture, media

and communications, social science, and law, are employed on a freelance basis, by an independent research organisation (whose directors are social scientists funded through an array of EU projects), to administer and oversee further down the chain, a scheme to provide skills and training to unemployed graduates in Palermo who might benefit from business studies, media education, tourism and heritage studies, and knowledge of enterprise culture to develop a more autonomous self-reliant outlook, so as to be able eventually to create their own jobs⁴. The conclusion of the funded project entailed the Palermo students getting work experience as interns in the creative sector in Berlin for up to four weeks (events management, youth employment, club management, fashion sector etc.). In this context regular employment is replaced by irregular, abnormal and illegible labour where they question of who and within what terms and conditions is paying who, who is on work experience or internships, and at what level of authority or 'status', disappears in a fog of activity, events, invoices and claims. This is 'social enterprise' drawing on cultural and creative skills and expertise, it offers a fascinating glimpse of how complex and inter-generational such EU funded projects are⁵.

- In small-scale or tiny organisations intimacy or emotional labour is unavoidable. To cut overheads people work in close proximity with each other, if hierarchies are flattened and bureaucracy marginalised, pseudo-kinship or familial ties replace workplace formality, and in such a context anger and even violent emotion replaces the grievance procedures in formal employment. Small companies have always been characterised by such volatile and intimate environments (the small restaurant, the small fashion company) however there are consequences when these kinds of features come to dominate organisations which technically are state- funded eg arts administration or semi-privatised training agencies.
- This leads us to reflect on the nature and status of workplace legislation, employment law, sex discrimination law, health and safety, sickness entitlement and maternity rights. In effect the field of employment rights comes into question. Are these evaded or simply ir-

4 My own contribution to this Palermo Step programme took the form of one lecture to the students followed by a seminar, and another lecture to a range of trainers.

5 Palermo Step Programme (2009) Sculoa Territoriale per Artisti Emergenti www.bbjsare.it. The Final Report will be published in May 2009.

relevant, or are there new ways in which they are got round, or implemented in an unsystematic way?

- Finally however we need to consider business failure, this too is a site of illegibility. Especially when jobs are constantly being invented and re-invented, and where freelance work and project to project work dominates. To make sense of business failure or closure, we would also need to take into account not-for-profit dimensions, and the role of the third sector in so many cultural and creative sectors, e.g. film, media training for unemployed youth, or drama and music workshops for disadvantaged people, or community activities with a cultural and creative aspect, all of which are reliant on people inside the organisations re-applying for funding. What does it mean then when instead of talking about business failure the usual terms are that the organisation 'lost its funding'. Failure is then taken out of the working vocabularies and instead there are words like change, transformation or re-structuring. This makes it hard to see who are the winner and the losers. Or who eventually gets some compensation or pay out, who leaves amicable and who seeks recourse in law. I would suggest this area of illegibility is the source of acute anxiety, where roles are ill defined, where job descriptions evolve, where everyone is always waiting for the outcome of funding proposals. It is this dimension which accentuates the difference between regular and irregular work. It is this which leaves the individual unprotected, where the singularity, distinctiveness and uniqueness of the talented creative is a poor substitute for bureaucracy, and for that fact that if ill, one gets paid and someone can step in as a replacement.

Conclusion

We are confronted with a series of paradoxes, clusters of young creatives who pass on work opportunities to each other, yet also highly atomised and even isolated workers, for whom there are only a patchwork of possibilities to fall back on if things go wrong. As Allen J. Scott would put it they are both agglomerated and individualised, and also in cut throat competition for work, undercutting their peers when it comes to getting a project contract. Scott also quotes Ursell's description of an 'economy of favours' in the informal job market, but this too is hard to quantify, who is actually doing what for whom? There are other paradoxes, the state steps back, yet it re-appears in certain instances and in particular forms, employment law is swept aside in micro-organisations yet budgets are often underwritten by institutions of the state. The free-

dom of creative labour is offset by traditional forms of dependency, family or kinship, husbands and wives. The visibility index of success overshadows the existence of failure or hardship, this is made invisible, people simply fade from the scene. To sum up, I have argued that creativity has been instrumentalised as a regime of freedom, bringing with it the possibility of happiness at work and the idea of culturally improved or enriched cities and environments, and this becomes the means by which older bureaucratic safeguards and entitlements are swept away. The theorists of immaterial labour correctly see this process as a manifestation of capitalist power and domination, as work subsumes life and as post-fordist production appears to respond to the desires of the people who fought for freedom from wage labour and from monotonous and mundane work. Cultural capitalism shows itself re-invigorated through its ability to absorb and respond to critique. Some theorists claim that post-fordism is capitalism's communism. My own conclusions are more banal:

- There are more creative producers than before and the numbers are rising as government invests in training more young people for this field of work (for example in Further Education colleges with media and performing arts, in projects for young offenders with film and media making projects), but this provision is predicated on uncertainty and unknown outcomes, since the capacity of the labour market to absorb this kind of work force is unsure, as is the sustainability of a DIY labour market concocted out of these self-realising strategies.
- We as educators and as people who both contribute to policy-making and implement it, find ourselves in an unexpectedly 'hot seat' position as universities and art schools are pinpointed as lead institutions for growth in the creative and the knowledge economy, the role of education and research in this area assumes a new importance. How do we ourselves in our pedagogy confront the uncritical celebratory discourse of the new cultural economy?
- If as the Italian Opera theorists claim work now overwhelms life itself we need to address the question of what new or novel modes of radical political organisation can be envisaged in such a context? When cultural and creative work in the community supplants social-work we need to address the question of the immanent democratic politics of that illegible activity, which as Virno reminds us, rubs us so close to its opposite as to be frequently hard to discern.

To conclude I want to suggest we need to pay more analytical attention to not just the subsumption of life by work but to life itself, how does

life intersect with these working practices, can everyday life be used as a possible instrument for critique against the overwhelming authority of work, can life be a source of creative opposition, and what might such a new form of everyday life look like in this context? I think we need to inspect more closely the fine line between paid and unpaid work, and focus in much more detail on what it might mean to re-invent a 'welfare state' in the light of the proliferation of precarious work.

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