

## 6. LABOR

### 6.1 Introduction

This third and final empirical chapter analyzes the role of labor dynamics in music networks in London and Berlin. Networks of aesthetic production are characterized by highly flexible and informal labor markets. Of particular interest here is how these networked labor arrangements are related to processes of accumulation and regulation. Following the main thesis, this chapter will argue that these processes indeed structure networked labor to an extent, but that one can only understand creative labor in depth by acknowledging the important role played by free labor. Once again, therefore, I want to emphasize the organizational specificity of networks of aesthetic production and the ways in which this contributes to the emergent dynamics of these networks that cannot be explained with recourse to accumulation regimes and modes of regulation.

The outline of the chapter is as follows. Section 6.2 complements the analysis of creative industries policy discourses as discussed in chapter five with a brief discussion of the representation of creative labor in these policies. It also offers a preliminary critique of this discourse on the basis of the argument developed so far. At the same time, it is clear that the realities of creative labor do partly match the imaginaries of creative industries policies. In order to address these similarities, section 6.3 highlights entrepreneurial logics — that can be interpreted as typical for the shift towards a KBE — among music workers. Section 6.4 analyzes the constitutive role of free labor in reproducing music networks and emphasizes the double-edged nature of this reservoir of non-remunerated labor: on the one hand, it directs creative industries labor towards precarization and exploitation; on the other hand, it is the inclusion of free labor that ensures the reproduction and emergence of non-capitalist relations. Section 6.5 further reflects on the implications of free labor for the theorization of the creative industries by drawing on debates within the tradition of (post-) operaism, since it is this tradition that has produced the most exciting analyses of free

labor. At the same time, this closing section points to a number of fundamental problems in these analyses through a critique of the real subsumption thesis.

## 6.2 Policy Discourses

In chapter five, I already analyzed in-depth the creative industries policies in Berlin and London with the conscious exception of the debates on creative labor — this is discussed in this section. The promotion of creative labor is central to the policy discourses and in line with the broader focus on the creative industries: it can be understood as a fifth meso-theme (next to ‘quantitative data and mapping’, ‘ambivalence of public funding’, ‘spatial selectivities’ and ‘the discourse of social inclusion’) within the broader meta-narrative on the emergence of the KBE. The promotion of creative industries labor needs to be understood as emanating from the centrality of entrepreneurs in the economic imaginary of the KBE and thus reproduces many of its core features. This can be exemplified by the following two quotes. In London, according to a 2002 Greater London Authority (GLA) report, “[c]reativity is synonymous with experimentation. To innovate constantly, the Creative Industries must take constant risks; they must try out new products, new styles, and new ideas” (GLA 2002a, 32). In a 2006 report on the Berlin music industry, Bastian Lange comes to similar conclusions. According to him, the practice of “culturepreneurs” is not oriented towards a certain schema, but “only unfolds within constantly changing conditions”: “[t]heir entrepreneurial, biographical as well as socio-cultural actions represent a new style not underlied by a predefined script” (Projekt Zukunft 2006, 19).<sup>1</sup> Both documents adopt a fundamentally Schumpeterian understanding of entrepreneurialism as oriented towards risk and innovation and, in doing so, reposition the creative worker as the role model for the envisioned knowledge society. These and other similar writings, as Ulrich Bröckling has shown, are governed by a “semantic of total mobilization” in which the entrepreneur always aims for one step beyond the status quo (2007, 117).

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1 Even though Lange also emphasizes the important role of networks, this does not undermine the centrality of the free-floating entrepreneur in his narrative. In his argument, networks are not coherently related to accumulation and regulation, which leads to a somewhat ‘flat’ discussion of networks and, in the end, a methodological individualism in line with Schumpeter’s celebration of the entrepreneur. This limitation of Lange’s argument is less visible in his more academic work (see Lange 2007).

There are many problems with such an argument — both theoretical as well as empirical — and its deficiencies can be highlighted by relating it back to my own argument as developed in the previous chapters. First of all, it is problematic to implicitly conflate descriptive and prescriptive dimensions of creative entrepreneurs. This happens most obviously in the GLA quote above: from arguing that creativity is synonymous with experimentation, the authors quickly move to the argument that entrepreneurs *must* risk everything, turning experimentation into a social or even natural necessity. Second, it is one-sided to argue that cultural actors do not follow a predefined script.<sup>2</sup> As Lange acknowledges himself in his academic work, the individualization of society and the increasing importance of ‘creativity’ in social processes is not simply the result of the retreat of social structures, but can also be understood as an effect of political-economic restructuring: with cultural entrepreneurs seen as central to the economic reproduction of capitalist societies, creativity has now become a societal leitmotif (2007, 66-73). This more critical perspective re-places the free-floating entrepreneur in broader social processes and, by doing so, questions superficial accounts of creative labor. I discussed these broader social transformations in chapter three. Even on a more grounded meso-level, however — and this is the third point — the argument of script-less action, constant change and experimental conditions is problematic. As I have shown in chapter four, the embeddedness of actors in networks and clusters limits the flexibility of creativity in the sense that creativity needs to be understood as socially mediated through a variety of horizontal and vertical linkages and knowledge communities. Although this can contribute to economic innovation, it can also obstruct innovation due to the relative closure of these interactive spaces: the constant interaction between the same actors can also lead to so-called lock-in (Visser and Boschma 2004), involving a (conscious or unconscious) exclusion of other, possibly more innovative, actors and as a result a foregoing of economically relevant knowledge. Fourth and finally, the notion of the creative entrepreneur is too generalizing, lumping together under one label many heterogeneous cultural practices. It abstracts economic action from the socio-cultural processes from which it emerges, thereby ignoring the institutional specificities of the various creative industries sectors (and actors’ positions within each sector). In chapter four, I discussed some of these institutional specificities by highlighting the different positionalities of nodes such as record labels, venues, distributors or record shops in relation to the broader urban political economy. It is only by acknowledging these institutional

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2 Even though much depends on what one means by the notion of script and the extent to which a social phenomenon is predefined.

dimensions that one can come to grips with questions of power and in- and exclusion.

### 6.3 The Institutional Logic of Entrepreneurialism

It would be misleading, however, to argue that this is the only narrative on creative labor in the policy documents. Even though the strand on entrepreneurialism is clearly dominant, attention is also paid to the difficulties of making a living in the creative industries. Both the Berlin and London policy documents, for example, mention the volatile nature of the creative industries and its highly flexibilized labor conditions characterized by short-term contracts, high levels of self-employment and often low pay (despite high educational qualifications) (GLA 2007, 22, 28, 30; GLA 2004a, 167-168; Mundelius 2006, 42, 193). In many cases, payment is so low or infrequent that other sources of income constitute a necessary compensatory mechanism. According to a policy publication on the Berlin borough Pankow, only two third of all creative industries firms in the borough produce living wages for its employees. Many actors have second jobs (often in the service sector), but the continued existence of firms is also supported by family members, personal loans, patrons or bursaries. In the case of the music industries, bursaries are irrelevant, but supplementary income is derived from patrons (app. 4 %), personal loans (app. 32 %) and above all family support (app. 64 %) (Mundelius 2006, 52-53). Similar conclusions emerge from the London policy documents, in which it is not only mentioned that creative workers have seen a decline in relative earnings since the early 1990s (GLA 2004a, 167-168), but also that at any one time approximately two thirds of these unionized actors are unemployed (GLA 2004a, 167).

The problem with these policy doubts concerning the viability of creative labor is that they are not integrated into the broader narrative on the emergence of the creative industries and the KBE, but instead are identified as contingent phenomena that can be solved, either through individual effort and luck (e.g. Projekt Zukunft 2006, 15) or through the inclusion of unions and professional organizations in further developing the creative industries project (GLA 2004a, 171). More critical research, however, has argued that the precarity of labor in this project is not so much a contingent, but a structural effect of the shift towards the KBE and its associated mode of regulation. In the regulation theoretical literature, this has been identified as a shift from welfare to workfare (e.g. Peck 1996). Here, I want to focus on its more micro-political consequences and

analyze the shift towards workfare in relation to processes of subjectification. The following dimensions are important in this regard.

### 6.3.1 NATURALIZATION OF THE MARKET

First, on a general level, grounding the existence of and a priori to the activities of cultural entrepreneurs is a naturalization of the market. As Bröckling, arguing along Foucauldian lines, points out: “[o]nly when and insofar the market functions as the privileged space of societal integration i.e. insofar this is postulated, can the entrepreneurial self become the hegemonic figure of subjectification” (2007, 76). I have already shown this rationality to be central to the creative industries policy documents, but a similar naturalization of the market is visible among actors active in the many music networks. Naturally, this doesn’t mean that market interactions are the only mode of exchange used by these actors (as I have repeatedly shown), but there is a widespread belief in the relative neutrality of the market: it is seen as merely one mode among other modes of interaction. Even though journalistic writings and some of my interviewees divided markets into the well-established subcultural scheme of mainstream vs. underground (or well-trodden genres vs. more experimental genres) as a way of positioning themselves on the ‘good’ side of production, there is hardly an articulated adversarial attitude towards the market as such.

### 6.3.2 MARKET-MEDIATED INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

Second, it is on this (often implicit) basis<sup>3</sup> that actors develop strategies closely matching neoliberal forms of subjectification. Complementing the naturalization of the market, for example, is an understanding of the self that is oriented towards individual autonomy achieved through the market. Often, this is communicated in aesthetic terms, in the sense that actors want to express their creativity and present this to a particular audience. Nicolas Chevreux from Ad Noiseam in Berlin expresses this most explicitly: “[...] it’s definitely aestheticist. [...] it doesn’t market to a niche and it doesn’t market to a country or to a style and whatever and it’s really, it’s really the label for the music I enjoy. [...] (interview, 26.01.2007). This, of course, does not contradict the involvement in various networks — on the contrary, networks are used as a way of achieving

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3 A basis that remains relatively uncontested, but not completely. My analysis of copyright practices in the previous chapter makes this clear. The next section on free labor also questions the completed nature of this process.

individual autonomy in the realm of aesthetics. Networks, therefore, play a double role. On the one hand, they enable the construction of a niche identity based on aesthetic preferences. On the other hand, they can be used by actors to mediate these tastes as a way of branding themselves or their organization. This becomes clear in the following quote, taken from an interview with one of the organizers of Alt<Recordings/Delete Yourself in London: “[...] we have close association with and appreciation for other people running labels on a similar level. We can pass each other tips about bands, we might find something great that isn’t suitable for Alt< but would work on e.g. Angular Records, plus recommend producers, engineers, studios, PR companies, etc” (interview, 20.09.2006). This quote subtly shows the simultaneity of building social networks (through contacting and recommending people) as well as developing an aesthetic identity (through excluding music that doesn’t really fit the profile of Alt<) that can in principle be marketed.

In that respect, the discussed music networks do not seem to be different from other cultural industries sectors, nor does the geographic location seem to play any decisive role in this regard. In the case of new media labor in Berlin, for example, Alexandra Manske (2006) has argued that workers hope to achieve a higher level of self-determination as well as compensation for societal instabilities through their market-mediated social position. Similarly, Gina Neff *et al.* (2005) have shown that a primary attraction of new media as well as fashion modeling work in New York City is the promise of “artistic creativity and self-expression — albeit in a commercial way” (315). And Angela McRobbie (2002) even goes so far as to argue that cultural workers have submitted to an ideal of individual achievement, in line with the meritocratic discourse of New Labour on the talent-led economy. It is important, however, to keep in mind that this process of market-mediated individualization is by no means complete or uncontested. As I have shown in the previous chapters, actors are embedded in social networks for more than economic reasons and many of their practices counteract or at least inhibit a dominance of entrepreneurial forms of subjectification.

### 6.3.3 INDIVIDUALIZATION OF RISK

The third point can be understood as the other side of the coin of the market-mediated promise of individual autonomy. As some authors have pointed out, the ideal of individual autonomy as propagated by governmental institutions is intimately related to high levels of labor flexibility. Pierre-Michel Menger has given the most concise summary of this intertwinement. As he argues:

The required flexibility of a project-oriented organizational form leads [...] to high frictional unemployment. At any point in time, the amount of available artists, managers, technicians and workers has to lie considerably above the amount of those actually employed in ongoing projects, so that the employees can unproblematically switch back and forth between projects that are highly diverse in content. In the light of this structural flexibility component, periods of employment and unemployment with or without social benefits entitlements alternate with phases in which those involved look for a new job, activate their networks and perform multiple activities in- and/or outside the cultural sector parallel to each other. (2006, 64-65)<sup>4</sup>

In the case of creative labor, there is evidence that this combination of individual autonomy and flexible labor arrangements has caused an individualization of risk among cultural workers. With this I mean that workers accept these conditions in which they operate and use individualistic explanations for their own performance within such a flexible environment. It is this interdependence that Foucault tried to grasp in his research on the genealogy of the modern subject in which “techniques of the self” interact with “techniques of domination”. The governance of people, in his view, is not simply based on domination, but instead is always composed of techniques that “assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself” (1993, 203-04, qtd. in Lemke 2001, 204). Actors, in other words, participate in their own subjection and subjectification. To illustrate this with an example from another study: in her research on new media workers in Austria, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK, Rosalind Gill (2002, 85) was struck by the dominance of individualistic and meritocratic discourses — even though workers knew they operated in an unequal reality, there was a profound reluctance to relate their own individual experiences (and their failures and successes) to this broader social environment.

Similar discourses are visible within the music networks I analyzed. For example, during an interview with Heiko Laux, the owner of the Kanzleramt label, he acknowledged that making a living with selling records had become increasingly difficult due to free downloading and the enormous increase in record labels, but the solution he offered to overcome this problem was highly individualistic:

I have quasi redefined the function of the label. This resulted in new rules. The brand is, in principle, indestructible, even when the hard copies would cease to

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4 Menger’s book originally appeared in French in 2002. My English translation is based on the German translation of the original, which was published in 2006.

exist, the name is still there, and I would still try to bundle the music and get to the point. Thus, the transition to this digital business can in principle be mastered. [...] One simply has to accept the permanently changing rules of the game and adapt. One has to be capable of adapting. (interview, 08.05.2007)

Although such a strong statement was rare, many actors adopted a comparable position, with statements such as “[w]hen you love what you do, you find a way!” (Possible Music, interview, 23.03.2007) not being out of the ordinary.

### 6.3.4 ACTIVITY AS THE ENTREPRENEURIAL IDEAL

And fourth, the shift towards workfare and more entrepreneurial forms of labor is accompanied by a normative shift in which activity as such becomes the new ideal: in the more extreme calls for more entrepreneurial engagement, the content of labor no longer matters; what matters is the dynamic moment of constant activity as the central route to economic development (Bröckling 2007, 125). In the case of the discussed music networks, this translates into long working hours, the blurring of the work-life boundaries and constant networking.

Long working hours are the norm within the music networks and interviewees regularly referred to their activities taking up more than forty hours per week. Thus, 93 Feet East, a venue in east London, is coordinated by two promoters and one online press officer, all of whom work “45+ hours a week” (interview, 22.11.2006). In another interview, the owner of Possible Music distribution in Berlin mentions he spends “most of the time here in the office from 9.30 a.m. to 9 p.m., not all days but most days” (interview, 23.03.2007). Not surprisingly, these long working hours tend to blur the distinction between work and life, with the demands of work colonizing the private sphere. At the same time, actors try to reshape their work to such an extent that it becomes more like recreation. This is closely related to the fact that most of these jobs emerge from previously established networks of friends and acquaintances and the job in that respect becomes a continuation of social interactions, but under the sign of capital. The following quote exemplifies this ambivalence:

[...] the reality that I spend most my life talking, consuming and reading about music; my girlfriend reminds me of this fact. The thing is you work in it but it's also your hobby and your escape, but in reality you are always kind of working, where the boundaries lie completely blur, you are always working, or never working depending which way you see it, and no doubt the reason why so many people want to work in the industry — it beats stacking shelves or factory work. But it can feel quite sad because the substance can be very little, in the

scheme of things, but exciting because we all love it so much. (interview with Sean Brosnan, Azuli record label, 22.11.2006)

## 6.4 Free Labor

Despite this high amount of working hours and the compulsive networking, many actors do not manage to make a living with work in music networks and need to search for other sources of income. This problematic points to the constitutive role of free, unremunerated labor in networks of aesthetic production. The following dimensions of free labor are central in this regard:

First of all, many actors simply combine their free labor within music networks with paid labor in other fields. One of the main biographical solutions to the structural problem of underpayment in the creative industries is — besides family support, loans and unemployment benefits, as discussed above — working in sectors that are more secure and stable. Thus, Sam Shackleton of the Skull Disco label works as a primary school teacher for twenty-five hours per week (interview, 12.12.2006). The two owners of the Seed Records label work for a satellite broadcaster (twenty-five hours per week) and an architectural firm (full-time), respectively (interview, 19.12.2006). Typically, these quotes are from people based in London and not in Berlin, which might confirm the suspicion that it is easier to make a living in Berlin as a music worker than it is in London due to the low living costs. With music production being such a precarious existence, however, many interviewees point out that earning enough income necessarily involves the combination of multiple jobs or projects with one job or project subsidizing another. This will not necessarily show in the statistics, but it is central to the organization of creative labor. Examples are numerous. Thus, next to working on Alt<Recordings/Delete Yourself, one of the owners also has two positions as an A&R consultant (interview, 20.09.2006). Thorsten Sideboard, the owner of the Highpoint Low-life record label, spends a few hours each day on label work, but works full-time at the music-oriented social networking website Last.fm as IT specialist (interview, 19.09.2006). Eric Namour from the experimental music event organizer [no.signal] mentions this project probably earned around 1500 pounds in 2006, but simultaneously emphasized that all income — if any — is re-invested in the production costs for forthcoming events. His main income is derived from a position within online music distribution (interview, 21.09.2006). According to the owner of the distributor Possible Music in Berlin, “I think the only way to survive is to have your fingers in a few different pies and don’t really focus on just one



## 6.5 Questioning the Real Subsumption Thesis

Other authors have also noticed this structural inclusion of free labor in creative labor markets. As Gillian Ursell (2000) has shown in the case of television production in the UK, the financial pressures as a result of the lowering of production costs and increased competition have largely been offloaded onto workers at the “entry points to the industry”: students working for free as part of their learning experience; young people working for low or no pay after graduation. Although some workers achieve a more stable and profitable situation, many do not and as a result there is a high churn rate as well as high levels of frustration among workers over-45 (2000, 814-816). The fact that music networks are, by and large, populated by actors in their twenties and thirties offers support to the speculation that a similar process of exclusion is at work in these networks as well. In the case of new media and fashion, Neff *et al.* come to a comparable conclusion and highlight the fact that “[a]spirating new entrants to the workforce spend ‘free’ time learning new skills for no pay in new media [...] and spend time getting their bodies ready for work in fashion modeling [...]” (2005, 318). And, in an earlier classic analysis of the cultural industries, Bernard Miège already argued that a “reservoir of workers” that are “ready to work without the need to pay them wages” (1989, 30) are central to the cultural industries and related to highly uncertain market conditions. Menger, in principle, continues, but radicalizes this line of argument, when he argues that these precarious conditions of employment are the precondition for a “complete competitive market” (2006, 64).

This explanation, however, cannot explain everything. It tends to ignore, above all, that the high amount of free labor investment constitutes not only a mechanism through which workers can be and are exploited, but also labor that is — as Tiziana Terranova has argued most persuasively — “willingly given” (2004, 94), since it offers actors the opportunity to participate in networks of pleasure, affect and collaboration. Not being paid (enough), in other words, also reflects a fundamental refusal on the part of actors to approach creative labor as a ‘normal’ job characterized by the sale of labor power. The regulation theoretical analyses of workfare are of enormous importance, but to understand the dynamics of creative labor in its full depth and complexity, one needs to integrate this account with an analysis of these normative practices of free labor. This, however, raises the following question: what is the status of free labor in relation to accumulation and regulation and how should one understand its normative claims?

## 6.5.1 REAL SUBSUMPTION AND THE GENERAL INTELLECT

Terranova positions her argument within the broader autonomist Marxist tradition (in particular the Italian strand of *operaismo* ('workerism')) and it is this tradition that has given the most interesting answer to this question. At the same time, it is characterized by a number of central conceptual flaws that limit the extent to which it can offer a coherent analysis of labor dynamics. In this last section, therefore, I want to critically discuss this tradition, relate it back to the empirical data on music and engage in an immanent critique of this theoretical framework in order to better understand the actual role of free labor in contemporary networks of aesthetic production. It is certainly useful and important to collect further empirical data in order to gain a better understanding of networked labor dynamics, but so is theoretical development. Also, this strand of autonomist Marxism has become quite popular as an analytical perspective from which to analyze the creative industries in general (Lazzarato 1996; Neilson and Rossiter 2005; Hardt 2005) as well as more specific sectors such as gaming (de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2005), advertising (Arvidsson 2007), the arts and curatorial work (Krysa 2006) or fashion (Wissinger 2007). Although I am sympathetic to these kinds of analyses of creative labor, they are hampered by conceptual difficulties. The focus will be on the strengths and weaknesses of this strand of autonomist Marxism when applied to empirical research and less on the evaluation of their exegesis of the writings of Marx, even though this is clearly central to this body of work.

For (post-)operaists<sup>5</sup>, labor is 'free' to the extent that it is through labor that workers can escape the dependence on the wage, their subjugation to commodity production and to capitalism as such. This argument is developed through an idiosyncratic re-reading of the writings of Marx. Interestingly, this re-reading is based on some of the more 'totalizing' as well as speculative dimensions of Marx's thought, namely the shift from formal to real subsumption and the emergence of the general intellect. Thus, in his writings, one can observe an historical narrative that posits a tendential shift away from formal to real subsumption. This shift is directly related to the expansionary and colonizing nature of capitalism, involving the increasing submission of social and cultural processes under the logic of capital. Formal subsumption, however,

5 In using the term '(post-)operaists' or '(post-)operaismo', I follow Nunes (2007) and highlight the continuity as well as transformation between the original hypotheses of the Italian Operaismo movement in the 1960s and the later work (from the 1970s onwards), which both reflects on this earlier work and continues the theorization of labor in a politicized context.

is still characterized by a central ambivalence that is the result of the continuing structuring role of earlier traditions of labor process. This leads Marx to argue that the formal subsumption of labor under capital “is the *general* form of any capitalist production process; but at the same time it is a *particular* form alongside the developed *mode of production which is specifically capitalist* because the second involves the first, but the first by no means necessarily involves the second” (Marx and Engels 1993, 469).<sup>6</sup> By arguing along these lines, Marx wants to show that, on the one hand, the laborer becomes a mere “factor in the production process”, dependent on “the capitalist as a money owner” (470). On the other hand, however, capital can only appropriate and subsume under itself an already “existing labour process, which was there before its subsumption under capital, and was formed on the basis of various earlier processes of production and other conditions of production” (470). At this stage of development, in other words, the capitalist mode of production still needs to articulate itself with other non-capitalist labor processes, even though it is increasingly dominant. All this changes, however, with the emergence of real subsumption. The increased employment of machinery, the division of labor within the workshop, and the application of science to the production process lead to a “transformation of the direct production process itself, and the development of the social productive powers of labour” (472). The first part of this quote is clear: labor processes are no longer relatively autonomous from the capitalist mode of production, but instead completely subsumed under capital. In contrast to formal subsumption, labor has lost its particularity and is now merely a general form of the capitalist production process. The second part of the quote is more complex and pitched — as so many arguments in this debate — on a highly abstract level, but it broadly refers to the application of “*general* products of human development, such as mathematics, etc., to the *direct* production process” (472). Capital, in other words, integrates these general products — besides mathematics, also knowledge, the bodies and social skills of workers, technologies as well as other means of labor — into the capitalist production process, thereby reifying human cooperation as an achievement of capitalism.

The notion of general intellect is derived from this historical-theoretical analysis and is central to the (post-)operaist analysis of labor. Marx briefly discusses this notion in a section of the *Grundrisse* (1973), often referred to as the ‘Fragment on Machines’. In reality, however, this is not a delineated section in the manuscript,

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6 I did not have direct access to volume 34 of the *Collected Works*. Instead, I relied on the Marx & Engels Internet Archive. See: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/economic/ch02a.htm#469> (12.02.2008).

but refers to the last pages of a section called 'Surplus value. Production time. Circulation time. Turnover time' and the first pages of the following section called 'Fixed capital & continuity of the production process. Machinery & living labour'. To complicate matters, exact page references in the secondary literatures tend to differ, increasing or decreasing the total length of this imagined section.<sup>7</sup> However, irrespective of these philological issues, in this speculative section Marx tries to describe a generalization of production that further dramatizes his real subsumption thesis. Discussing the position of the means of labor — as one of the three basic factors of production (the other two being 'living labor' and the 'material of labor') — within the shift from formal to real subsumption, Marx argues as follows:

[...] once adopted into the production process of capital, the means of labour passes through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the machine, or rather, an automatic system of machinery [...], set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself; this automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages. (692)

This horrific image of technological control presents the activities of workers as fully determined by the machinery of capital, a complete appropriation of living labor by objectified labor: “[w]hat was the living worker’s activity becomes the activity of the machine” (704). This machine, however, might no longer be dependent on direct labor input and time in the production process, but it is dependent on socialized labor on a more general level, since the reproduction of this complex machine depends on “the general state of science and on the process of technology” with the human being now cast in the role of a “watchman and regulator to the production process” (705). It is this level to which Marx refers when he mentions — only once — the notion of the general intellect (706). It is also at this point of the argument that Marx minimally ‘re-opens’ his totalizing framework to human intervention by emphasizing the economic consequences of this shift: the decreased need for labor time involved in direct production will subvert the capital-labor relation and “set free” (706) the superfluous workers (also see Dyer-Witheford 1999, 4). At the same time, the socialized labor needed to reproduce the machine subverts the machine from within, since this labor can now no longer be controlled by the exchange relation-

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7 The weblog ‘What in the hell...’ mentions references to pages 692-706, 693-706, 690-706, 690-712, based on the pagination of the 1973 English-language Penguin edition. See: <http://whatinthehell.blogspot.com/2006/05/23/is-the-fragment-on-machines> (26.11.2007).

ship. Instead, according to Marx, the reduction in labor time will lead to an increase in free time — understood as “both idle time and time for higher activity” — which in turn will lead to the transformation of “its possessor into a different subject”, who can then enter “into the direct production process as this different subject” (712). This way of describing social change is, of course, highly speculative and a sign of Marx’s idealism. Most problematically, it is symptomatic of an idealism that is profoundly non-sociological (and maybe even ‘non-Marxist’), since it no longer enables the analyst to identify the specificity of the capital relation and its structuration of socio-cultural and political processes. It is, however, precisely this moment within the work of Marx that is amplified through the writings of the (post-)operaists, with problematic consequences for their analysis of labor. The following dimensions are important in this regard.

### 6.5.2 INVERSION OF THE LABOR/CAPITAL RELATION

First of all, the (post-)operaismo literature builds on Marx’s ‘positive’ narrative by prioritizing labor over capital, thus inverting the classical Marxist labor/capital relation in which the latter is seen to impact on the former. Instead of analyzing labor as an object of capital, the worker i.e. the working class is now understood in a more active sense, namely as a subject struggling against capital. The reason for this shift of emphasis is political and activist. By shifting attention from capital to labor, (post-)operaist theorists hope to link up with workers’ struggles by offering a more ‘grounded’ perspective that starts from the contestation of capital and not its reproduction. Arguing from a (post-)operaist perspective, Nick Dyer-Witheford, in following Julie Graham (1991), criticizes regulation theory for downplaying conflict within capitalist society by taking as “its focus and ‘point of entry’ the requirements for capital’s successful organization of society, not the contestation of its rule” (1999, 59).<sup>8</sup> To an extent, I think this criticism is justified and it seems clear that the claims of the (post-)operaismo literature

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8 Please note that Dyer-Witheford regularly confuses regulation theory (or what he calls the ‘Regulation School’) with the much broader field of literature that analyses post-Fordism. Although at certain points of his argument, he does make this distinction (e.g. on p. 56), at other points of his argument these distinct strands are collapsed into each other by offering a rather generalizing and unfair critique. For example, Dyer-Witheford argues that post-Fordist analyses hardly pay attention to casualization and flexibilization of the labor force (p. 57-58). However, directing attention to this dimension of labor restructuring has been one of the main goals of regulation theoretical analyses of workfare (e.g. Peck 1996).

resonate more strongly with the normative practices of cultural labor, including music, than does regulation theory. Regulation theoretical analyses do start from the notion of capital and there is indeed a tendency within this literature to highlight the successful regulation of the capitalist economy within a variety of socio-spatial environments. At the same time, this is not inherent in the theory as such and much recent work (including this book) emphasizes the contingency of successful reproduction. Indeed, the central conceptual starting point of the regulation approach is that the reproduction of the capital relation cannot be secured solely through market-mediated exchange, but needs to be stabilized through institutional interventions. These interventions are not structurally determined by some logic of capital, but mediated through social conflicts.

The inversion of the labor/capital dynamic as undertaken by (post-)operaist theory, however, does create a number of problems of its own with negative side-effects for their analyses of free labor. One problem is that this inversion in many (post-)operaist approaches tends to lead to an 'externalization' of capital from the realm of labor (and this despite the simultaneous insistence on the reality of real subsumption, which is something I will discuss below). (Post-)operaismo identifies "two dominant modes of organization" within capitalism: capital itself, which tries to structure the working class according to its own image; and the working class, which tries to struggle against capital and develop its own forms of organization (Mandarini 2005, 195). Although an important drawback of such a line of argumentation is that it does not grasp the state as a third dominant mode of organization, it does at least acknowledge the mutual imbrication of capital and labor. The central notion of class composition further emphasizes this imbrication by including two aspects: technical class composition, which is related to what Marx called the organic composition of capital and which is best described here as the objective conditions set by capital; and political class composition, which refers to the ways in which workers turn the technical composition against capital by establishing cooperative relations among themselves (Mandarini 2005, 195). In actual analysis, however, this type of argument often leads to an 'externalization' of capital from labor — something that reaches its culmination in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004) with their promotion of immaterial labor and the multitude. As Nicholas Thoburn, referring to and quoting Negri, has argued: [...] insofar as the multitude tends towards autonomy, exploitation becomes increasingly 'external' and 'empty' [...]: 'capitalist power dramatically controls the new configurations of living labour, but it can only control them from the outside because it is not al-

lowed to invade them in a disciplinary way' [...]. It thus becomes increasingly unclear what exactly exploitation is (2001, 88).<sup>9</sup>

This creates many difficulties in actual analysis. On the one hand, it is surely correct to argue that labor — in the broad sense adopted by (post-)operaismo — is social to such an extent that it 'overflows' the exchange-oriented production process. On the other hand, however, one cannot ignore the simultaneous structuration of labor dynamics by capital accumulation as well as state regulation. Although Hardt and Negri might argue that the cooperative and communicative qualities of immaterial labor are "internal to labor and thus external to capital" (2004, 147; qtd. in Camfield 2007, 27), this completely ignores the extent to which accumulation and regulation inform the ways in which cooperation and communication takes place. Thus, the clustering of network nodes in certain areas of Berlin and London (as discussed in chapter four) is shaped by economic rationales as well as policy interventions (however contested). The organizational structure of these networks is characterized by vertical and horizontal linkages (also discussed in chapter four), the existence of which needs to be part of any coherent analysis, since they regulate the distribution of capital within the music networks. And as I have shown in this chapter, the music networks are shot through with entrepreneurial logics, exemplified by a naturalization of the market, a market-mediated ideal of individual autonomy, the individualization of risk and the blurring of work-life boundaries. The importance of free labor in these networks needs to be taken seriously, but it also needs to be put in relation to the market economy and its regulation, since these partly constitute the institutional context in which free labor operates and which regularly obstructs the actualization of its normative claims.<sup>10</sup>

Another problem produced by the inversion of the labor/capital relation is the dramatic enlargement of the class category. Within the (post-)operaist literature, class and class struggle, in effect, become a signifier for any moment in production that cannot be fully controlled by capital. This indeed overcomes the problem of distinguishing between a relatively coherent group of actors (i.e. "the working class") and other actors (as Dyer-Witheford (1999, 65) casually remarks) and has the important advantage that it enables an acknowledgement of the multitude of struggles existent across

9 The references are to Negri (1994), 238 and 235.

10 This is also acknowledged by Terranova, when she argues: "[...] the existence of immaterial labour as a diffuse, collective quality of postindustrial labour in its entirety does not deny the existence of hierarchies of knowledge (both technical and cultural) which prestructure (but do not determine) the nature of such activities. These hierarchies shape the degree to which such virtualities become actualities [...]" (2004, 84).

the globe.<sup>11</sup> It raises the question, however, why one would one to call all these conflicts 'working class struggles' at all. There seems to be no particular reason for this, other than a celebration of one's Marxist credentials. In the end, the reality behind this notion is simply too heterogeneous and its use therefore almost inevitably leads to a denial of context specificity.<sup>12</sup>

### 6.5.3 IMMANENT TO CAPITAL, OR THE LIMITS TO CAPITAL?<sup>13</sup>

Second, the (post-)operaismo literature radicalizes Marx's notion of real subsumption by emphasizing the extension of the factory over society as a whole. As has been discussed above, Marx identified an increasing subsumption of labor processes under capital, leading to a situation in which society would be subsumed under an 'automatic system of machinery'. At the same time, direct labor time would now be displaced by labor on a more general level with the reproduction of the automaton being dependent on science and technology and social interaction — the emergence of the general intellect. Continuing this line of thought, Mario Tronti has argued that "[t]he social character of production has been extended to such a point that the entire society now functions as a *moment* of production. The sociality of capitalist production can now lead to a *particular form of socialization of capital* — the social organization of capitalist production" (1973, 105). By emphasizing the total infusion of social relations by capital<sup>14</sup>, Tronti and other (post-)operaists were able to criticize a neo-Gramscian perspective that emphasized the relative autonomy of the political (Thoburn 2001, 78). Capital, it is argued, has expanded to such an extent that all social action needs to be understood as immanent to capital. From a regulation theoretical perspective, this is clearly false (since the capital relation always needs extra-economic stabilizing mechanisms) and it can be criticized by focusing on the following points.

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- 11 As such, (post-)operaist theory needs to be seen as part of the broader shift in theory that has led to a greater sensibility to micro-political conflicts that cannot be subsumed under one singular logic or meta-narrative. This becomes most clear in Hardt and Negri's reliance on the work of Foucault and Deleuze.
  - 12 More could be said about this issue of class. Since, however, this book builds on a regulation theoretical account that focuses on capital accumulation – and not on class dynamics – this will not be further discussed here.
  - 13 The use of the phrase 'Limits to Capital' is, of course, a reference to Harvey (1982).
  - 14 But simultaneously emphasizing the social organization of capitalist production. This is the double-edged nature of (post-)operaist thought which continues Marx's original concern with real subsumption.

The double-edged dimension of capital — in which capitalist production is both seen as encompassing society as well as social in the first place — enables (post-) operaist writers to argue that the working class is both the “*internal component* of development and, at the same time, its *internal contradiction*” (Tronti 1971, 57, qtd. in Mandarinini 2005, 194; Italics in original). To an important extent, this makes sense and other writers have put forward similar claims. Karl Polanyi (1944), for example, has made very clear that labor needs to be understood as a fictitious commodity: it can be exchanged (which makes it a commodity), but it is simultaneously and a priori to this process of exchange a general capability of human beings. According to Polanyi, the tendency to treat labor *as if* it is merely a commodity is an important source of conflict and crisis within capitalist societies. (Post-)operaist writers would agree with this analysis of labor as a central point of conflict, but their totalization of the apparent immanence and ‘internality’ of these conflicts to capital falls into the trap of a reductionism that can understand labor only in relation to capital — and nothing else. This makes it nearly impossible to develop an empirically grounded analysis that can understand the actually existing differences between cultural practices, the ways in which these practices are part of — what I called in this book — alternative forms of regulation and how these alternative forms interact with more dominant modes of regulation and accumulation regimes.

Acknowledging these alternative forms of regulation would also allow the (post-)operaist tradition to escape the quagmire in which it now finds itself by emphasizing, on the one hand, the total immanence of all social relations within capitalism (i.e. real subsumption), but, on the other hand, the potential (and possibly even increasing) autonomy of workers. This has been central to the theoretical apparatus of (post-)operaismo from the very beginning — most obviously with their propagation of a refusal of work — but it has been emphasized more strongly by Negri (1991) in positing the ‘self-valorization’ of workers against the valorization of capital.<sup>15</sup> According to Negri, self-valorization is based on “the strength to withdraw from exchange value and the capacity to base itself on use values” (2005, 241). Although Negri is (mostly) careful enough to posit this as a tendency and not an achieved historical fact, it re-

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15 In contrast to Thoburn (2001), therefore, I am not so sure if Negri continues as well as “radically departs from operaismo’s project” (87). It seems to me that the tension between an analysis founded on the premise of real subsumption and an analysis founded on the potential autonomy of the working class is central to (post-)operaist thought, creating a whole host of analytical problems that cannot simply be attributed to the deviant development of Negri.

mains unclear, as David Camfield (2007, 35) has also pointed out, how this can be achieved within an era of complete real subsumption. Dyer-Witheford (1999) even goes so far as to argue that “labor does not need capital” and that it “can dispense with the wage” (68), but this is clearly wrong. Labor has become dependent on capital for its own reproduction — this is precisely the point of the argument that we live in a period of real subsumption: social relations have been restructured to such an extent that they are unthinkable without capitalism.

I would be very careful, however, to simply posit this existence of real subsumption as a general condition for contemporary societies. Clearly, the dependence of workers on capital does exist and this situation is unlikely to disappear any time soon. As my research on music networks has shown, many actors are dependent for their income on the sale of their labor power and/or the production and exchange of commodities. Also, the commodification and naturalization of the market within these networks is hard to overlook. At the same time, sources of income outside of market-mediated exchange are of enormous importance. Without the structural support of parents, the cross-subsidy of cultural production by work outside the creative industries and the inclusion of free labor within cultural organizations, these music networks would not exist as such. The dynamic this generates, however, can only be understood by analyzing the relative importance of these different sources of income — capitalist as well as non-capitalist — on the actual practices of the various networked actors. In order to do so, however, one needs to acknowledge the often limited role of real subsumption in processes of production.<sup>16</sup>

## 6.6 Conclusion

This final substantive chapter has analyzed networked labor dynamics in relation to accumulation and regulation. Complementing the analysis of creative industries policies in chapter five, section 6.2 briefly discussed policy representations of creative labor. Section 6.3 analyzed the extent to which these representations matched the realities of labor in networks of aesthetic production, focusing on four dimensions of its entrepreneurial logic: the naturalization of the market; the belief in market-mediated individual autonomy; the

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16 In that respect, Vercellone’s (2007) recent argument that we are currently observing a shift away from real subsumption to a new form of formal subsumption is more convincing. Even this argument, however, runs the risk of totalizing the apparent reality of real subsumption under Fordism, whereas I would argue that real subsumption can never be complete.

individualization of risk; and activity as the entrepreneurial ideal. After this analysis of the relations between the three core concepts of this book, I then concentrated on the irreducibility of networks of aesthetic production to accumulation and regulation through a focus on the role of free and unremunerated labor. Section 6.4 highlighted the importance of free labor for the very existence of music networks. Not only do many actors combine their free labor investments in music networks with paid labor in other sectors, free labor is also central to the organizational structure of these networks due to the inclusion of unpaid overtime as well as non- or underpaid workers and volunteers. The regulation approach and other political economic theories have usually understood this in the broader context of a shift from welfare to workfare, involving the individualization of risk and the increased exploitation of the worker. This, however, ignores the extent to which this labor is often willingly given for a whole host of non-economic reasons. Section 6.5 tried to think through these more normative questions by relating the regulationist framework to (post-)operaist debates on labor.

