

# 'Art Works' – cultural labour markets: a literature review

**Kate Oakley**

## **Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) Literature Reviews**

These reports have been commissioned to introduce readers to the main principles, theories, research and debates in the field. They aim to introduce the major themes and writing pertaining to each area of study and to outline key trends and arguments.

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# Foreword

Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) is a national organisation which aims to transform the lives of children and families by harnessing the potential of creative learning and cultural opportunity to enhance their aspirations, achievements and skills.

Creativity, Culture and Education is about making a difference to the lives of children and families and their experiences are at the heart of what we do. We promote the value of creative learning and cultural opportunities by building a strong evidence base, stimulating debate amongst policy makers and opinion formers and through the delivery of high quality programmes which achieve this on the ground. We promote a systemic approach to creative and cultural initiatives and one which builds on the excellent practice which already exists to make opportunity consistent, to ensure that all children and young people are included and to place quality at the core of any creative or cultural experience.

We deliver two flagship programmes – Creative Partnerships and Find Your Talent.

- **Creative Partnerships** - the Government's creative learning programme fosters long-term partnerships between schools and creative professionals to inspire, open minds and harness the potential of creative learning.
- **Find Your Talent** - the Government's pilot cultural offer for all children and young people which aims to ensure they have access to the wide range of quality cultural experiences essential to unlocking their talent and realising their potential.

Fostering creativity is fundamentally important because creativity brings with it the ability to question, make connections, innovate, problem solve, communicate, collaborate and to reflect critically. These are all skills demanded by contemporary employers and will be vital for young people to play their part in a rapidly changing world.

Our programmes can have maximum impact if teachers, parents, children, young people and practitioners themselves learn from the experience and activities delivered through the programmes. For this reason, one of the most significant legacies will be the product of our research and evaluation and how that is effectively communicated to stakeholders.

However, because Creativity, Culture and Education works by creating partnerships drawn from the widest fields of endeavour, the different stakeholders recognise that there is often a 'knowledge gap' between reflection,

analysis and learning. In addition, the wide focus of approach – which is fundamental to the nature of creativity – means that people are often working at the limit of their disciplines.

For these reasons we have commissioned a series of literature reviews exploring the key issues in current literature and summarising the history and latest developments in each subject. Each review is written by an experienced and respected author in their field. They aim to be accessible, clearly referenced and to act as ‘stepping-stone’ resources to underpin the research conducted by and for Creativity, Culture and Education.

In this review, Kate Oakley offers an overview of the literature surrounding the nature of work in the cultural industries, as it has permeated policy-making, public debate, and practice across many sub-sectors within the arts, and the culture sector more generally; and in more academic writing by scholars and cultural commentators. Creativity, Culture and Education focuses its energies on developing forms of creative education based, in part, on a belief in the need to prepare young people for more creative forms of employment. Oakley has performed a salutary service by describing both the positive and more problematic aspects of this relatively new world of work and by showing how entry into employment and indeed employment itself in the cultural sector, can be uncertain and under-valued. She takes us clearly through a range of literature exploring precisely what this world of work might be like in practice in a more creative knowledge-led economy and this review has many lessons for those of us in education. Schools, and our partners in the creative and cultural sector will also find this review a thought-provoking and challenging piece of work as it describes many elements of their every-day practice.

We hope that the review will be useful for those interested in better understanding what changing aspirations for creative work might mean to different stakeholders, and what expectations and demands it might have for schools. It offers a serious and sophisticated review of key concepts and a comprehensive and original review of what changing patterns of work might mean for the workers of tomorrow. If Creativity, Culture and Education wants to leave a lasting impact on schools, curriculum and indeed the workforce of the future then we all need to engage with the implications of the ideas that Kate Oakley lays out so clearly for us.

**Dr David Parker, Creativity, Culture and Education**  
**Dr Julian Sefton-Green**

**...the major debates ...include the degree to which cultural work serves as a template for other forms of work; the pains and pleasures of cultural work; the geography of work and the importance of the network and of social contacts, and the growing importance of 'free work' of all sorts.**

# 1 Introduction

On the whole aspirations towards being creative are espoused as an unqualified good. Creative Partnerships has been working now for seven years to develop relationships with artists and other creative practitioners in schools in order to support the growth of a long term creative workforce. However this report was commissioned to explore the literature surrounding the spread, nature and meaning of such work, as it is experienced by real workers in the UK and around the world. As this report will show, there is a close relationship between the arts or cultural sectors and ideas about creative work in general, and all of us working in education need to think quite hard about what it means to 'make' creative workers in order that we might know more about what a 'creative life' means in practice. This report draws on studies about the nature of this work, as it is experienced by the real workers in the creative and cultural sectors.

The review seeks to give a flavour of the major debates in the academic literature on what is called, 'cultural labour'. These include: the degree to which cultural work serves as a template for other forms of work, the pains and pleasures of cultural work, the geography of work and the importance of the network and of social contacts, and the growing importance of 'free work' of all sorts.

This introduction sets the context for this study looking at current policy and defining the terms of the review. I then explore ideas of what it means to talk about art as work (section 2) and review studies of artists and cultural workers in general (section 3). The next section examines theory which argues that work in the cultural sector is a template for all kinds of work in the future. Section 5 explores the geography and organisation of cultural work. Following that is an outline of theories of 'precarious labour' (section 6) and studies that look at ways in which cultural labour is described in terms of love or passionate attachment to work. (section 7). The final section looks at the implications of these studies for cultural policy and education.

## 1.1 Context

The creative and cultural industries have been one of the fastest-growing parts of the UK economy in recent years. They account for just over 6.4 per cent of the UK economy and grew at around 4 per cent between 1997 and

2006, compared to a figure of three per cent for the rest of the economy (DCMS 2009). This in part explains the interest of policymakers in these areas. Overall figures for the 'creative and cultural industries,' as they are now generally called, mask a range of different performing sub-sectors. The majority of growth in this period is accounted for by software, computer games and electronic publishing which grew 8 per cent. Publicly-funded performing arts, for example, will have seen much slower growth rates (DCMS 2007).

In summer 2007, the last date for which we have figures, the creative industries employed around 1.1 million people in the UK, with a further 800,000 'creatives' employed outside the creative industries themselves – such as designers who work in retailing or musicians who work in education (DCMS 2009).

Much of this employment is concentrated in London and the South East of England – home to most of our media companies as well as national museums, galleries and publishing houses. Just under 165,000 people work in the creative and cultural industries in London, around 24 per cent of the UK's total cultural and creative workforce.

The current recession is clearly taking a toll on cultural employment. The reduction in businesses' marketing spends on Advertising and Design services; the downturn in construction, and cuts in Local Authority cultural funding and services will all have an effect as does the continuing structural crisis in some of the media sectors. Around 50 newspapers have closed in the UK since January 2008 (Greenslade, 2009), and advertising-supported broadcast media is also shedding jobs.

The classic picture of the cultural sector is of a few, very large, employers 'at the top,' and a mass of small firms and freelancers below, and this is a reasonably accurate picture. Just over half of cultural and creative sectors workers in London for example are self employed, compared with 12 per cent across all UK industries (Creative and Cultural Skills 2009).

This is particularly the case in the media sectors, as opposed to smaller and less *economically* significant sectors such as the fine or performing arts. The music industry on one hand has around five 'majors' such as Sony, a multitude of record labels, which are for the most part sub-divisions of a

larger holding company, and a huge number of bands and singers. Similar processes are at work in other media industries, particularly film and television and some argue that, the concentration of media ownership is growing (McChesney 1999), with five companies dominating the giant US media market (Disney, AOL-Time Warner, Viacom, General Electric and News Corporation).

The Internet was at one time posited as the saviour of diversified media and may play this role in some cases, but it is also dominated by the big three of Yahoo, Google and Microsoft.

However, as Hesmondhalgh points out (Hesmondhalgh 2002) even as cultural corporations have become bigger and more dominant, small firms have continued to grow in numbers. In addition, in a process familiar from other parts of the economy, outside of the cultural sectors, many larger firms now contract out elements of production to decentralised networks either of smaller firms or of individuals. In some cases, this means that, for example, media organisations outsource more of the creative work of cultural production to the 'independents' and concentrate on the core functions of financial operation, distribution and commissioning.

## 1.2 Policy Background

Assuming that, post-recession, expansion returns to the cultural sectors, they need a skilled workforce. A relatively high percentage of this workforce are graduates and rapidly changing technology and market conditions in some cultural sectors, means a need for continuing professional development of the workforce (DCMS 2006). Until recently, the need to ensure a skilled workforce was the only way that discussions about the labour market ever appeared in debates about cultural and creative industries policy. Entrepreneurship was the key word and support for small businesses and entrepreneurs was seen as the primary element of a cultural industries policy (Leadbeater and Oakley 1999). And not just in the UK. A 'quick scan' of over 1000 policies in 18 countries conducted by the European Institute for Comparative Urban Research detailed no creative labour policies, aside from support for entrepreneurship (Braun and Lavanga 2007).

But recent events have begun to challenge this perception. People in the cultural industries worldwide, the majority of whom are not entrepreneurs, but employees, have begun to flex their industrial muscle. The strike by the Writers' Guild of America lasted three months and estimates for the cost to the Los Angeles economy range between \$380 million and \$2 billion (Nickelsburg 2007). India's Bollywood film industry was recently threatened by a strike involving a coalition of more than 22 unions, and in the UK musicians have formed the Featured Artists Coalition<sup>1</sup> to protect musicians and performers' rights as digital distribution transforms the music industry. Cultural workers have also aligned themselves with the EuroMayday organisation<sup>2</sup>, which campaigns for the rights of migrants and marginalised workers, but also on issues of precarious labour in general.

The DCMS document, *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy*, devotes some of its time to a discussion of labour markets in the cultural and creative industries; including skills needs, vocational training and, for the first time in a DCMS policy document, employment conditions and labour market entry (DCMS 2008).

While many of the challenges and responses described in *Creative Britain*, such as promoting a more ethnically diverse workforce or providing better information on career pathways for school children, have been attempted before, the document signals a departure from previous policy in this area by devoting discussion to entry-level jobs and particularly the role of unpaid work. Whether the announcement of 5,000 formal apprenticeships will address the issue of unpaid labour as an exclusionary device (excluding those who lack the financial means to work unpaid) is yet to be seen, but the significance of the announcement is that it suggests that DCMS is, for the first time, explicitly considering issues of *working within the cultural and creative sectors*, not just as part of skills policy, or small business support, but as part of a focus on the labour market itself.

Concerns about the lack of diversity have been raised before (Oakley 2006). Only 9 per cent of those working in these sectors in London are from an ethnic minority background, compared to 30 percent of the labour force in general in London. There have been policy attempts to promote a more ethnically diverse workforce, but also criticism that by not addressing the

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.featuredartistscoalition.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.euromayday.org/about.php>

issues of social class as an excluding factor; the ethnic diversity of the workforce is unlikely to improve dramatically.

The lack of interest that previous policy documents have shown in work in these sectors is in marked contrast to the growing volume of academic and other research into the cultural labour market. A rich stream of work has developed in sociology (Miege and Garnham 1979; Ryan 1991), cultural economics (Wassall and Alper 1992; Throsby 1994), economic geography (Jarvis and Pratt 2006) and cultural studies (McRobbie 1998; Ross 2003; Miller *et al* 2004), and it is the aim of this literature review to draw out the themes of this scholarship in order to explore how they might affect contemporary policy debates, both in education and in cultural policy.

### 1.3 The scope of the review

This short section sets out the scope of the literature we will be looking at in this review. The first question to ask is what do we mean by cultural labour? It is widely acknowledged that the publicly available statistics on the cultural and creative industries are poor, with international frameworks struggling to keep up with changing technology and labour markets (The Work Foundation 2007). Even the Department for Culture Media and Sport only provides estimates for the creative industries and their economic estimates are not counted as national statistics (DCMS 2009).

This is particularly difficult when it comes to ascertaining who counts as a cultural worker. Is it just cultural producers – writers, dancers, actors, musicians and so on – within the cultural sectors themselves (O'Brien and Feist 1995)? Or all workers, including those not doing cultural work, in the cultural sectors, such as accountants, catering workers or office cleaners? Do we include cultural workers working outside the cultural industries, such as art therapists working in the health sector (Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi 2008)? Or do we go even further and consider cultural workers, to be those that have a cultural training, such as a degree in fine arts, design or music?

While some of these questions are very vexing for statistical analysis, they are actually less problematic for a narrative literature review such as this one. The majority of the literature we look at, especially that which takes an

empirical look at particular groups of workers focuses on cultural workers within the cultural industries. We accept that more designers, for example, may work outside of the design sectors than within them, but we are concerned in this review with the production of cultural products, (see Hesmondhalgh, 2002, for a distinction between cultural and non-cultural goods) not with the production of all goods and services.

A more vexing question for us is to ascertain the geography of this labour. We recognise that cultural labour is a global phenomenon. Indeed, what has been called the New International Division of Cultural Labour (NIDCL) (Miller *et al* 2004) has seen a trend towards locating or re-locating the production of some cultural and especially media production in lower-wage countries in Asia and elsewhere (Christopherson 2006; Chakravarty and Zhao 2008; Mosco and Stevens 2007). Given the focus of this report, and the fact that we are only able to review material published in English, the literature reviewed will be primarily about the UK and other developed countries.

An equally difficult question is whether the term 'cultural worker,' includes both paid and unpaid work. This is not just an issue of including hobbyists or part timers, though as a recent study of fine arts graduates has argued understanding the cultural workforce does mean including part time and occasional cultural work (Oakley, Sperry and Pratt 2008); it is also a recognition that the growth of digital technology has led to an explosion of 'free labour' (Terranova 2000). This is an important policy issue (DCMS 2008), particularly given the growth of unpaid work as an entry criterion to the cultural labour market (Oakley 2007) and we certainly do not consider all cultural work to be paid work. However, while we are interested in the ways that the open source movement, as well as technology sectors such as videogames, make use of unpaid labour, the majority of literature we look at will focus on people who are, or at least would like to be, paid for their work.



**'Art came to stand for a special kind of truth, 'imaginative truth,' and *artist* for a special kind of person,'**

(Williams 1958: xv-xvi)

## 2 Is art work?

Our primary interest is in the literature on cultural work under industrial conditions, much of which has been written in the last 30 years, but there is of course a much longer tradition of writing about artists, whether it is Plato's treatment of poets in *The Republic* (Plato 1955), Vasari's sixteenth century artistic biographies (Vasari 1998), or Marx's sometime view of the artist as a future form of non-alienated labour (Marx and Engels 1959).

As Raymond Williams (Williams 1958) points out, while the word 'art' had originally simply meant a skill, over time it became associated with a special sort of skill, an imaginative or creative skill and the product of that skill – namely art – became associated with particular virtues: 'Art came to stand for a special kind of truth, 'imaginative truth,' and *artist* for a special kind of person', (Williams 1958: xv-xvi).

Thus while, until recently, very few writers dealt with the notion of artists as workers in the modern sense, the relevance of these texts for this study is more in the creation of the notion of art as something separate from everyday life, an idea strongly related to the idea of the autonomy of art and thus to its power (Eagleton 2000; O'Connor 2007). The tension between art as something with intrinsic, even sacred, value and art as a commodity, has long been present in debates about the arts, and it is fair to say that artists have often played it both ways, wanting, indeed needing, to be paid for their work, while simultaneously resisting the 'reduction' of their work to a commodity (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Banks 2007).

This ambivalence about art as work has been reflected, as Mark Banks argues in some accounts of the economy and the labour market (Banks 2007). Making art has not always been seen as 'real' work, but instead concerned with the production, of surplus, inessential goods; artistic work is portrayed as fun, pleasure or vocation, but not as labour (Abrams 1953). In other cases, particularly in celebrations of communal cultural production, art is seen as the antithesis of work; it is what we do when we are not at work (Ehrenreich 2006).

All of these issues, with their ambivalences and contradictions, continue to swirl around contemporary debates about culture and public policy. The point here is twofold. On one hand it accounts for the relative scarcity, until recently, of writing about cultural labour, and on the other, these issues mean that while we now talk about artistic work or cultural labour, the notion

persists that 'there is more to it than that.' Talking about artistic production as *work* still produces resistance or discomfort in some quarters.

It is therefore unsurprising that, as Gill and Pratt (2008) point out, when Raymond Williams spelt out his two great notions of culture (Williams 1976), one based on a hierarchy of aesthetic value and the other on the more anthropological understanding of culture as 'a way of life,' he left little room for consideration of cultural work, or culture as work. While he was resisting the notion of artists as special, and seeking to root culture with everyday life, the artist as a worker, did not engage him. As Andrew Ross has noted (Lovink and Rossiter 2007), he could hardly have anticipated that artists, writers, filmmakers, designers and others would, only a few decades later, have come to take centre stage as a supposed 'creative class,' their labour endowed with almost mythical qualities (Florida 2002).

The following sections are concerned primarily with work on cultural labour that has been produced in the last fifty years. I have divided the work thematically, rather than chronologically, while accepting that there is overlap between the themes.



**'I don't do this for the money.  
If I wanted money, I'd work in  
a bank.'**

(A TV cameraman quoted by Ursell 2000)

# 3 Studies of artists as cultural workers

The terms 'art' and 'artists,' are frequently found in much of the cultural economics literature, and while these writers recognise that the definition of an artist is often either a self-definition, or a value judgement, their focus is very clearly on the producers or creators of cultural products – writers, musicians, painters, sculptors, performers and so on, rather than say, managers of recording companies or admin staff in broadcasting.

Cultural economist David Throsby in a recent attempt to describe how he sees the creative economy, portrays the field as a concentric circle model with the arts at the centre (Throsby 2001). His 'centre circle' includes: music, dance, theatre, literature, the visual arts and crafts, as well as newer art forms such as video art, performance art, computer and multimedia art. Beyond them are further circles where the cultural content diminishes relative to commercial content and include industries such as fashion. This model, reproduced in the UK by the Work Foundation (2007), sees the creative arts as the source and generator of ideas that are later picked up by other cultural industries such as the media industries (film, TV and radio), and then dispersed by 'related' industries such as advertising, architecture and design.

It is worth noting that Throsby makes no distinctions between subsidised and unsubsidised cultural activities; the classification is not based around business models or funding, but around the idea of the 'creator' as a source of ideas and images that are 'taken into a wider production context,' (Throsby 2001:113).

A similar notion of the arts at the centre of the cultural and creative sectors is elaborated in *The Economy of Culture* (see table overleaf), a major report for the European Commission produced in 2006 (KEA, 2006). This puts the visual arts at the centre of what it describes as 'core arts fields' along with the performing arts and heritage and, as in the Throsby model, sees the cultural industries (essentially media, publishing and music) and the creative industries (design, advertising and architecture) as subsequent concentric circles. 'Related' industries in this categorisation are essentially concerned with the manufacture of hardware such as personal computers and MP3 players.

**Figure 1** EU Cultural and Creative Sector<sup>3</sup>

Circles	Sectors	Sub-sectors	Characteristics
Core arts fields	Visual arts Performing arts Heritage	Crafts Painting Sculpture Photography	Non-industrial activities  Copyright may apply but is not always exercised
Cultural industries	Film and video TV and radio Videogames Music  Books and press	Recorded and live music, collecting societies  Book and magazine publishing	Industrial sectors aimed at massive reproduction  Copyright important
Creative industries and activities	Design Architecture Advertising	Fashion design Graphic design Interior design Product design	Sectors described as 'non-cultural' although they employ creative skills and creative people i.e. people who have been trained in the arts
Related industries	Manufacture of PCs, MP3 players, mobile phone etc		

Source: KEA 2006

The study differentiates between what it describes as cultural activities - the arts and media industries - and creative activities - design, advertising and architecture. It argues that the 'creative' sectors are where culture acts essentially as an input into the production of non-cultural goods. In other words, creative activities incorporate elements from 'culture.' Not all design

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from The Economy of Culture in Europe, KEA (2006)

applications have a cultural output – car design is a good example - but the design is a creative activity whose input is undoubtedly cultural, based in this case on visual arts.

The cultural economics literature therefore tends to focus on these ‘core’ artistic workers, those in the top two rows in the table above. The past forty years have seen a number of studies published on artists’ working lives, both inside and outside the UK, many of which are concerned to try and establish a statistical basis for discussions’ of artists in the workforce. In doing so, they reveal findings about the core cultural workforce; its high levels of education and the frequency of portfolio or part-time working, and multiple job holding, that we will come to see as characteristic.

### 3.1 Counting Cultural Workers

O’Brien and Feist’s study in 1997, of the UK labour market for artists was one of the first such studies and, as such, it set a pattern in its use of multiple data sources (O’Brien and Feist 1997). Official statistics on employment, such as Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes and Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes were devised by statisticians in the immediate post war period. Despite a number of revisions, the basic structure of the SIC remains unchanged and thus fails to capture our current economy. Consequently, the service sector in general is poorly served and the cultural sector is particularly weakly served.

Other sources such as the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR) or Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) are also used, but the ABI does not include data on self-employment, an important category in many parts of the cultural sector. Similarly, in the census, respondents self-define their ‘main job’ in terms of income generated or time allocated; the self-employed are excluded; there are limited SOCs; and only the time and income outputs of the week before the census are included. Given this, O’Brien and Feist (1995, 1997), like most subsequent UK studies, combine data from official sources, independent studies and trade organisation data where available.

O’Brien and Feist (1995, 1997) examine five of the largest groups of cultural occupations including authors, actors, producers and directors, musicians and technical audio-visual operators. They looked at variations in weekly

hours, multiple job-holding and the nature of second jobs held and found that the overall incidence of multiple job-holding in cultural occupations was twice as high as in other parts of the economy.

Another study, Davies and Lindley (2003) reveals the relatively high levels of education in the cultural labour force, over half have further or higher education qualifications (as compared with 25 per cent of those working outside the cultural industries) and 39 per cent are self employed (as compared with 12 per cent outside the industries).

### 3.2 Making a living

Unlike these quantitative approaches, Honey, Heron and Jackson (1997) focus on a 'carefully selected, but small' sample of, in this case, visual artists. They interviewed this group of painters, sculptors, photographers, video and film artists, installation, mixed media and new media practitioners. Through this qualitative approach, the authors probe the artists' childhood practice and early education, their formal training and higher education, and their first year out of school and working lives.

Honey, Heron and Jackson find that most of these artists attended art college, and that many considered the years spent there as a 'special time' during which they could dedicate many hours to artistic practice (1997:vii). Many artists considered the first year after school the most difficult, a finding which concurred with that of earlier work (Blackwell and Harvey 1999), which found that cultural workers often experience a difficult time post-graduation, as they struggle to make contacts, organise a portfolio, and negotiate (often multiple) work contracts.

An important finding of the Honey, Heron and Jackson work was that its interviewees overall equated success with the quality of the work produced, rather than earning income from the work. This led the authors to conclude that artists' careers are different from others in that it is 'psychic income', rather than monetary rewards, which drives artists. As discussed below, this notion of the pleasure and even love to be derived from artistic work is a common finding of research into cultural labour. Ursell quotes one TV cameraman saying, 'I don't do this for the money. If I wanted money, I'd work in a bank' (Ursell 2000).

As Gill and Pratt (2008) argue, this account, while clearly the case, also misses rather a lot, such as the competitiveness, exhaustion and fear of failure, that are also a large component of much cultural work.

### ***Don't Give Up Your Day Job: An economic study of professional artists in Australia***

A reference to the relatively low incomes of cultural workers is contained in the title of Throsby and Hollister's large study, *Don't Give Up Your Day Job* (2003). This Australian study covers 120 cultural occupations spread over eleven groups, including visual artists, writers, actors, singers and composers, and community (cultural development) workers. *Don't Give up Your Day Job* is notable for its methods of selecting 'practising professional artists' that were self-defined and must have been artistically active in the past 3-5 years. They were not, however, required to have earned income from this practice. This allowed for the inclusion of a wide range of full-time, part-time and self-employed artists, indeed three quarters of all artists interviewed for the study were freelance or self-employed workers.

Throsby and Hollister divide the typical artists' career into four stages:

- an early stage of uncertainty;
- becoming established;
- the central stage of established practice and
- a later period of committed but less intensive work.

Established practice is not defined by income, but rather by the artist's 'commitment' and 'achievement' as defined by artists themselves. The moment of establishment or 'big break' is most often identified as the first solo show or publication (42 per cent); only 6 per cent see it as the completion of training. Around 43 per cent of artists had already earned some income from their practice before they finished training.

### 3.3 Crossover – working in different parts of the creative economy

Another study which looked at artists' working patterns, including their patterns of employment and self-employment, was *Crossover: How Artists Build Careers across Commercial, Nonprofits and Community Work* which was carried out in the US (Markusen *et al* 2006). Markusen *et al*, argue that long-standing, prevailing attitudes both inside and outside the world of the arts, have compartmentalised artists and their practices into three spheres:

- 1) The commercial sector, which is driven by for-profit organisations that employ artists; this sector includes self-employed artists.
- 2) The not-for-profit sector, commissioned and/or largely supported by the public sector or not-for-profit organisations (including museums and not-for-profit foundation grants). This is roughly equivalent to the European notion of a public sector.
- 3) The community sector, in which artistic practice is often unpaid 'but pursued for cultural, political and aesthetic reasons,' by 'informal' forums or organisations, outside the spheres of both the commercial art market(s) and not-for-profits.

Many of the artists surveyed by *Crossover* practise in all three sectors; less than 20 per cent of artists do no commercial work or work in the not-for profit sector.

This study again finds high levels of self-employment, with high levels of networking between practitioners, incorporating multiple venues and organisations. Markusen notes Becker's concept of 'art worlds' (Becker, 1982), which constructs a model of artistic creation as a series of relationships and negotiations rather than a single linear process (supply, production, distribution).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Crossover* found that artists cross-subsidise work in the not-for-profit and community sectors with money earned from more lucrative commercial work. In the words of Markusen *et al*, 'Many artist respondents thus move among sectors to cobble together arts income' (2006: 37).

Pierre-Michel Menger summed up much of what we know about the shape and structure of artistic labour markets when he wrote,

Artists as an occupational group are on average younger than the general workforce, are better educated, tend to be more concentrated in a few metropolitan areas, show higher rates of self-employment, higher rates of unemployment and of several forms of constrained underemployment (non-voluntary part-time work, intermittent work, fewer hours of work) and are more often multiple job holders. (1999: 545)

As mentioned above, much of this work focuses on the cultural producers or artists as a sort of model for other cultural workers, the section below considers how this view of the artist has migrated not only to other parts of the cultural sector, but to other forms of work.

**Whether it is talk of 'portfolio careers', the project lifecycle company or the importance of networks... writers have drawn attention to the ways in which 'cultural' ways of working are filtering out into the rest of the economy.**

# 4 Cultural labour as a template for new modes of working

'New economy,' writers such as Charles Handy (1994), Charles Leadbeater (1999) or Richard Florida (2002), as we might term them, have tended to portray cultural work as a harbinger of the way that work in general is changing. Whether it is talk of 'portfolio careers', the project lifecycle company or the importance of networks, these writers have drawn attention to the ways in which 'cultural' ways of working are filtering out into the rest of the economy. This vein of literature, derived from writing on the post-industrial or knowledge 'economy' (Bell 1973; Quah 1999), tends to present cultural work in a very positive light, stressing the relative autonomy that these workers have and the degree of enjoyment and even love that they bring to their work.

The portfolio worker is portrayed as focused on employability rather than employment, following a flexible, non-vertical career path designed to enhance his or her skills and networks. As Hall argues, this 'protean' career is partly measured by psychological success, 'the ability to be a continuous learner and to redirect one's life and career,' which in turn motivates the individual (Hall 1996). Driven by the individual's need rather than an organisation, he argues that the psychological contract at the core of the 'boundary-less career,' is made with the self, not with the organisation.

## 4.1 The artist as entrepreneur

Much of this literature celebrated or examined the notion of entrepreneurship, the ways in which people, increasingly groups of people rather than just individuals, combine different skills, identify opportunities to create new products or services, and then mobilise the resources, both financial and human, to realise the idea (Leadbeater and Oakley 1999; Flores and Gray 2000).

## New ways of working

As Richard Barbrook has argued, while there is nothing new in the notion of entrepreneurship (Barbrook 2007), recent 'takes' on it tend to combine two forces:

- the growth of the Internet with its digerati (Brockman 1996), digital citizens, swarm capitalists (Kelly 1998), bobos (Brooks 2000) and netocracy; and
- the older notion of the bohemian, often crystallised in the form of the artist. The hippies, prosumers<sup>4</sup> (Toffler and Toffler 1980) and digital nomads (Deleuze and Guattari 2004), who were the direct descendants of the nineteenth century bohemian, tended to portray themselves in opposition to bureaucracy – they were not 'organization man or woman' (Whyte 1956), the classic notion of the white collar, office worker of the 1940s and 50s.

Boltanski and Chiapello in their detailed analysis of management literature from the 1990s, find in the 'new spirit of capitalism' echoes of 1968, with its demands for autonomy, freedom and self-expression, what they call 'artistic critique'. This, they argue, has in fact been incorporated into much management literature, so creativity is now as much a feature of contemporary business rhetoric, as it is of discussions of the arts (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

However, what was in the 1950s and 1960s a relatively comfortable, even ideologically driven rejection of the career for life in the large, Fordist bureaucracy, from the late 1970s onwards became less about choice and more about necessity. The desire for an independent way of working may have remained strong in well-qualified and educated workers, in the cultural sectors and beyond, but the collapse of the career for life and mass unemployment of the 1970s and early 1980s definitely gave a spur to self-employment. If there was no security within large organisations; one might as well take one's chances outside.

<sup>4</sup> A hybrid of producer and consumer which supposedly reflects the dual role that many people now play with regards to cultural engagement

Of course, many cultural workers had always operated as self-employed, but these models were also spreading into parts of the cultural sector that had hitherto been unionised and offered permanent employment, at least to some, such as film and television (Blair 2001).

For some writers, particularly those of a libertarian bent, this change and the severing of ties to employers and fellow-workers was something to celebrate. 'Today, anyone who holds a job, and isn't looking for a side gig – or creating a business plan, writing a screenplay, or setting up shop on eBay – is out of touch,' proclaimed Dan Pink in his turn-of-the-century tome, *Free Agent Nation* (2001).

## 4.2 The Creative Class

The celebration of the possibilities of self-directed creative work reached its apotheosis in Richard Florida's *Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), which as the title suggests, argued that there was a whole new class of worker, whose common element was 'creativity' and whose, 'economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content,' (2002:8). Florida's creative class is not to be confused with those who work in the creative or cultural industries; it is much wider and includes fields like business, finance, health care and education. Indeed, critics have dryly noted, it is the consumption, rather than the production of culture that seems to distinguish Florida's creative class from other workers (Pratt 2008).

The essence of Florida's argument is that the ways of working associated with cultural work have moved from the margins to the economic mainstream. By 'ways of working,' however, Florida does not mean low pay, insecurity or casualisation, he means setting your own hours, dressing in relaxed or casual clothing and working in a stimulating environment. These 'no collar' workplaces replaced, 'traditional, hierarchical systems of control with new forms of self-management, peer recognition and intrinsic forms of motivation,' (Florida 2002:12). His, somewhat idealised workers, are 'fairly compensated' for what they do and willingly trade job security for autonomy.

However, unlike Pink, Florida recognises that self-employment, far from being a way of life that all workers would soon adopt, remains a minority pursuit and argues that 'a free-agent world would be unthinkable without big

companies', (Florida 2002:107). Just as in the creative and cultural industries, even with high levels of self-employment, large firms still account for the majority of labour. Florida's optimism however is based on the notion that the large firms need creative class workers to the extent that there has actually been a shift of power between workers and employers, such that firms will locate where creative class workers are clustered, not the other way around, an argument disputed by other economic geographers (Nathan 2005; Peck 2005).

What Lloyd calls Florida's 'relentlessly cheerful account of a creative economy in which alienation is a thing of the past,' (2006:68) was received as a ringing endorsement, both by some urban policymakers, and by arts and culture advocates (Lloyd 2006). As Ann Markusen has commented, these people welcomed Florida, 'because they feel it makes them visible,' while others argued that in so doing, it glossed over both the realities of the cultural labour market, and the motivations and stresses of the cultural worker (Markusen 2005).

### 4.3 Free workers or corroded characters?

A more problematic look at the realities of 'new' forms of work, including cultural work is to be found in the writing of sociologists such as Ulrich Beck (2000), Richard Sennett (1998) and Pierre-Michel Menger (1999). Menger considers both the realities of self-employment for cultural workers and the subjective rationale. While he argues that self-employed artists display many of the attributes of the entrepreneur, such as deep commitment and a strong sense of personal achievement from work, as well as the ability to set their own working pace, he also recognises that this may be only 'illusory independence and autonomy' (1999:552) particularly for those outside the 'inner circles', who are locked in a precarious situation (Gollmitzer and Murray 2008).

A variety of theories have been advanced on why, given this, people are willing to take these risks. These include the ideology of 'arts for arts sake,' which makes artistic work more important than other types of work (Oakley *et al* 2008); the idea that artists overestimate their chances of success in the lottery of the cultural labour market (Benhamou 2003), or

that 'psychic income' genuinely does compensate for lack of monetary success. As Menger (1999) notes, however, the benefits of non-monetary income get harder to sustain as cultural workers age, and the strain of searching for work, preparing for projects and trying to remain visible in a highly competitive labour market, starts to show (Gill 2007).

However, Menger is keener on the benefits of risk and uncertainty, which he sees as more double-edged, than some other sociologists of work. He argues that the non-routine aspects of cultural work are what give it such great social value, and that responding to the uncertainties of the cultural market is what drives artistic innovation. Because artists never know whether the next film, book or piece of music will be a success, they are freed in a sense to express their individual creativity – they are not working to a brief. However, Menger recognises that this 'freedom' comes at a cost, both for the individuals and to some degree for society, as the uncertainty surrounding any new artistic creation provides, he argues, a rationale for continuing public support for the arts.

Richard Sennett, while not looking specifically at cultural labour markets, considers the psychic consequences of flexible work in the new economy, where workers are denied the 'linear narrative' of a long term career, a process which he argues can corrode trust, loyalty and mutual commitment (Sennett 1998). This runs alongside a wider pattern of individualisation in society, where both success and failure are personal and if things go wrong, the answer lies not in society, but with our own personal failings (Beck 1992; Banks 2007).

#### 4.4 Network Sociality

One of the ways in which cultural workers manage both the risk and uncertainties of work and the psychic cost of that uncertainty is through network formation. We will look at the importance of networks for work organisation below, but several writers have also examined the process of network formation as a social one, with social benefits and losses.

Leadbeater and Oakley (1999) argued that the idea of the entrepreneur as a lone inventor was utterly misleading. Entrepreneurs work in

partnerships, networks and clusters, both to acquire ideas, information, contacts, resources, but also for mutual support. Such is the value attached to these networks that the idea has become a core part of government support for the creative and cultural industries (Oakley 2006). Mark Granovetter's observations in the 1970s about the 'strength of weak ties' (Granovetter 1973) has been taken up by policymakers to argue that such loose social links – to a range of people well beyond kinships and family – can be more effective in securing access to the labour market (and to other social goods) than the formal structure of job centres or employment agencies (Mingione 1997). In other words, you are often more likely to find a job through a friend of a friend, than through formal recruitment channels.

At the same time, the self-image of the creative industries labour force (encouraged by writers such as Florida who praise their tolerance and diversity), is often one of openness to talent and lack of overt discrimination. But as Mark Banks argues, this image ignores the protectionism, nepotism and exclusion that are also key parts of networks (Oakley 2006; Banks 2007). And, as we have seen, despite their seeming tolerance, the cultural and creative sectors are not, in fact, very representative of the population as a whole.

Wittel (2001) argues that in contrast to traditional 'narrative sociality' based on stability, shared concerns and mutuality, and which one might share with friends or even colleagues in a conventional workplace, 'network sociality' is more instrumental, friendships become resources for finding work and workers become emotionally detached from others.

Others argue, more optimistically, that despite the pressures, particularly on the precariously-employed to use relationships instrumentally, in fact people often use networks to re-invent and re-establish bonds of sociality (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), or as Berking puts it 'our everyday knowledge continues to distinguish strictly between market-governed relationships and social relations, between the principles of equivalence and reciprocity' (Berking 1996).

The policy issue therefore is not so much the effect on individual's bonds with others, but the exclusionary nature of social networks. In a sector heavily dependent on social networks for entry and advancement and

where 'experience' is often gained in unpaid first jobs such as film industry 'runners,' the disadvantage to those who lack friends or relatives in these sectors, or cannot afford to work for 'free' is very clear (Blair 2001). The Skillset 2003 labour force survey, which covers the media industries, reported only 28 per cent of those surveyed had gained a first job in these sectors via an advertisement in a newspaper, with the majority using less 'formal' channels such as friends and relatives (Skillset 2003).

The argument therefore is not so much that networks are simply masks for self-aggrandisement and individual advance, nor that the individuals who take part in them are 'despatialised' or 'desocialised' (McRobbie, 2002); but that networks are themselves the product of structural social inequalities, often based on education. If traditional means of opening up employment to excluded groups, such as via 'equal opportunities' legislation has been less than successful, the problems facing those seeking to integrate the workforce of these looser forms of employment are if anything, more complex and difficult. In addition, there is often a tension between the trust needed in the risky, experimental stages of creation and the need to be sufficiently porous to allow new talent into the system (Bilton 2007).

**...as work becomes more uncertain ...trust becomes important not only creatively in terms of developing ideas, but also psychologically, in terms of support**

(Paterson 2001)

# 5 Geography and work organisation in the cultural industries

There is a large literature on the geography of the cultural industries, much of which seeks to understand how networks function within these sectors (Scott 2000; Pratt 2002; Mommaas 2004; Mosco and Stevens 2007; Pratt 2008).

Recent economic geography (Knudsen, Florida, and Stolarick 2005) has focused on the inter-related concepts of proximity, face-to-face interaction and knowledge spillovers; in this respect the cultural sectors exemplify many of the factors that, some economists argue, promote growth in a knowledge-based economy (Gertler 2003).

Generally, networks are viewed in two dimensions (Bilton 2007): horizontal peer to peer relationships, and vertical supply and distribution chains. This is sometimes overlaid with the notion of strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973), with strong ties being particularly important at the early stages of work, where trust is crucial and reputation important (Grabher 2002), and weaker ties exposing people to different perspectives becoming more important later on in the project or development (Fiore 2007).

Close or strong networks seem particularly important in the early stage of an idea or project, such as a film for example, as intense experimentation and collaboration require close contact and constant communications. Ideas at this stage are often not properly formulated, much less written down; risk is high and rewards uncertain. The supportive environment and local, tacit knowledge are vital in helping with everything from finance to premises or staff.

As Paterson (2001) argues, these relationships of trust also exist within firms, *beneath the bureaucratic surface*, (2001: 516) as he puts it, but as work becomes more uncertain, for the freelancer for example, trust becomes important not only creatively in terms of developing ideas, but also psychologically, in terms of support.

Once ideas are more developed and can be 'coded,' loose international networks and peer review become important. Supply chain networks, often more 'visible' than peer to peer relationships, take ideas or concepts through a series of phases, drawing on different resources at each stage.

## Project work – the UK film industry

Like TV, film production is labour intensive, with up to 85 per cent of the cost of production attributable to labour costs, albeit starkly distinguished between above the line 'talent' and below the line crew and postproduction (Randle and Culkin 2007). Reducing labour costs is thus always of interest to the industry, particularly as above-the-line 'stars' now cost so much.

In terms of the labour market of course, there is less of a distinction between film and TV than there is to the consumer; both actors and crew will often work across both, as well as, in the case of actors, working in theatre and advertising (Knell and Oakley 2007). Indeed, as Randle and Culkin argue, declines in film coproduction in Hollywood between 1997 and 2003 are disguised in labour market statistics, as television production over that period almost tripled, absorbing unemployed feature film workers and largely driving the industry (2007: 3).

Blair (2001) argues that the break up of larger firms and the contracting out of project-based work is also occurring in the film industry, albeit from a baseline that, in the UK at least, always included more 'independents.' While the UK never had the Hollywood 'studio system,' 'film production was for a long period of time co-ordinated by companies that directly oversaw the financing, development, production and distribution of film products' (2001: 151).

She looks at how the role of managers affects the work of freelancers arranged around project work, where the resources required to make a film, instead of being available on a permanent basis as in the studio era, are assembled and disassembled for every project. Freelance employment has thus been the norm in the UK film industry for getting on for thirty years.

Unlike in the US, where media unions continue to play a relatively strong role (Randle and Culkin 2007), acting as brokers between freelance labour and those hiring, Blair *et al* argue that more informal hiring

processes dominate the UK film labour market. Advertising as a recruitment method is uncommon and the vast majority of those who find work therefore do so through informal contacts (Blair *et al* 2001).

The degree to which this process leads to a core/periphery model, with workers at the core enjoying more stable employment and higher wages, is debated as is the nature of the core and periphery itself (Christopherson and Storper 1989; Blair 2001). Is it based on skills, with higher skills putting you at the more stable 'core,' or based on contacts, experience and numbers of hours worked – those with access to longer hours being at the core? And what is the particular mix between these factors, as working longer hours arguably enables you to develop higher skills and greater experience? As Blair (2001) argues, all these factors come into play when workers are looking for projects, as does the role of reputation.

She argues that while 'family type' contacts are crucial to getting into the industry, the effects of these diminish as people develop contacts based on working experiences. The degree and type of these contacts create very complicated patterns in the labour market. The role of reputation is crucial, both individually and for groups, which workers form and which in some senses, combats the effects of an individualised labour market. Producers often hire groups who have worked together before and will in some sense validate each others' reputations (Blair 2001).

## 5.1 Hanging out: work in the city

The ability of expensive, inner-city neighbourhoods to retain their productive employment in the cultural industries puzzles many, who are perplexed by why creative and cultural workers remain bound to place, as distance work becomes technically easier. But, as much recent research has demonstrated, even new digital technology firms, which one might think could be located anywhere, have a surprising tendency to co-locate, generally in major cities, and often within the same neighbourhood or building (Grabher 2002; Storper and Venables 2004; Neff 2005).

The explanations are often mutually reinforcing. Pratt has examined the importance of personal communication, particularly at the early developmental stage of projects, when uncertainty is high and negotiations are complex, in his discussion of the London film industry (Gornostaeva and Pratt 2005). This constant exchange of information, together with informal information exchange, such as rumour or industry gossip, are what is known as 'untraded interdependencies' (Storper 1995) seen as crucial to individuals' and firms' ability to innovate in fast-changing markets. Thus gossip about actors' personal lives, (who is regarded as the best cameraman, what particular locations are like to shoot a film in and so on), are actually really useful in a business where much information is not written down and working with people you trust is essential.

What Knudsen, Florida, and Stolarick (2005:4) call 'learning and returns to one's skills and creativity' are facilitated by the density of urban environments and city neighbourhoods. As Athey *et al* point out in their discussion of London's fashion industry, the city's fashion designers are aided not only by the critical mass of people and businesses working in their own area, but by access to specialist media and the related sub-cultures of design, music and the visual arts nearby (2007). In some cultural sectors, such as the media, the structure of the sector – a few large players, surrounded by much smaller companies and a large pool of freelance labour – means that information exchange often happens beyond the boundaries of the firm. This increases the importance of close, often social settings.

Gina Neff's work on digital media in New York's Silicon Alley (Neff 2005) demonstrates the importance not only of social ties, but of places where these social ties could be formed. Thus the 'night time economy' of Lower Manhattan - its parties, bars, clubs and informal gatherings - plays a crucial part in enabling exchange between the large number of small new media firms in the city. The leisure infrastructure is not just about consumption, but enabling firms and freelancers to be more productive by giving them somewhere to tune into industry 'noise' – rumours, impressions, recommendations, trade folklore and strategic information (Grabher 2002).

## 5.2 Waiting tables – culture and the leisure infrastructure

A less recognised but important aspect of the city's leisure infrastructure is the opportunity it offers for multiple job-holding to artists who are unable to make a liveable income from artistic work alone. In his study of the changing nature of the Wicker Park area of Chicago, Richard Lloyd (2006) shows how many young creatives subsidise their unpaid artistic work through a variety of service sector jobs particularly in bars and restaurants. He argues that the 'performative' nature of cultural work often serves workers well in service industries which require, 'the mastery of hip social codes' (2006:181).

The existence of a large service sector and a buoyant consumer economy to sustain it, characteristic of urban environments, is therefore part of the mix that enables the cultural sectors to function. These factors are often mutually dependent, reliant on the combination of access to labour pools, tacit information, 'the right address' and the cultural consumption preferences of workers.

This need for proximity and the importance of personal contact in cultural work helps explain the continuing importance of dense urban environments in the cultural sectors. It also helps to explain the importance of the network, both as an organisational form for creative and cultural firms, and for groups of individuals such as artists.

**Precariousness in relation to work is generally taken to include all forms of insecure, contingent, or flexible work, from illegal, casual and temporary employment, to home working, piecework and freelancing.**

## 6 Precarious labour

As we discussed in Section 4, the degree to which cultural work stands as a model for other sorts of contemporary work, has been widely discussed, both by those who take a broadly positive stance (Leadbeater 1999; Pink 2001) and those who take a more critical one (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Ross 2003; Sennett 1998; 2006).

Much of the more boosterish 'new economy' literature has been criticised in particular for neglecting the aspects of insecurity, casualisation and often very low pay that also characterise the cultural industries (Ross 2003; Miller *et al* 2004). De-regulation of labour markets, combined with the diminishing of unions in areas such as television, has, these writers argue, led to increasingly precarious working conditions for cultural workers. The way that precarity relates to gender, ethnicity and class, particularly around issues of access and employment practices, has also been the subject of recent research, and it is this work on so-called precarious labour that is the subject of this section (Dyer-Witthford 1999; McRobbie 2002; Gill 2007; Oakley 2007).

As Gill and Pratt point out (2008), the term 'precariat' combines the notion of precariousness or insecurity with the term proletariat, to suggest the formation of a new social class; the dark side, one might say, to Florida's creative class (Florida 2002). Precariousness in relation to work is generally taken to include all forms of insecure, contingent, or flexible work, from illegal, casual and temporary employment, to home working, piecework and freelancing.

This of course ranges across the relatively highly-paid freelance work that characterises some parts of the cultural industries, to much lower paid, temporary or part-time employment. As such, the term is used to combine both freelance copywriters in the advertising industry, office temps and those working in the lower end of the fashion industry, for example clothes manufacturing (Ross 2004). It can also apply to workers within the same profession – actors for instance who can be described as precarious in their self-employed status, even though (a small minority) may make a large amount of money (Lazzarato 2007).

There are those that query whether in fact any terms can cover such a wide range of working experiences and economic positions and whether precariousness in and beyond the creative industries can become a source

of solidarity and 'common cause' among such very different groups (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). As Mitropoulos asks starkly, 'Would it actually be in the best interests of the maquiladora<sup>5</sup> worker to ally herself with the fashion designer?' (Mitropoulos 2006).

Others criticise it for being a rather ahistorical notion. After all, insecure work for low pay has been most people's experience of work throughout much of history, the fact that it now affects middle-class workers with university degrees, does not make it a novelty for most workers (Fantone, 2007) Similarly, she argues that women's work has always been precarious, and that precariousness is only discussed at the moment when the Western male worker begins feeling the negative effects of the new flexible job market.

But as well as referring to actual working conditions, the term precarity also refers to the *experience* of this type of work, both positive and negative. It is seen therefore as not only offering insecurity or exploitation, but also as offering the potential for new understandings, new forms of socialisation and new kinds of politics.

### Creating precariousness – the case of television

In 1987, then UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had criticised the British television industry (Ursell 1998) as one of the last bastions of restrictive practices and sought to break up the vertically integrated producer-broadcasters (particularly the ITV companies) and create a series of competing, small independent companies from programme producers to facilities houses. ITV companies and Channel 4 were required to contract out some 25 per cent of programme content origination to this new tier of independents. According to Ursell (1998) this decentralisation went along with the de-recognition of unions and collective wage bargaining in some of these firms, a process which made television companies more like other firms in the cultural sectors and indeed in the then-emergent 'new media' (Gill 2007).

<sup>5</sup> A maquiladora is a factory that imports material on a duty-free basis and then exports the finished goods to the country of origin. Many such factories are found in Mexico, close to the US border and they are often associated with avoidance of environmental or workplace regulations.

Considering the impact of decentralisation on television specifically in the UK, Ursell argues that

the size of permanent staffs with terrestrial producer-broadcasters has diminished, casualisation of the labour force has increased, entry to the industry is more difficult and less well rewarded or supported, average earnings have dropped, and working terms and conditions have deteriorated (2000: 805).

Paterson also argues that freelance employment on short-term contracts became much more the norm in the UK television industry during the 1980s and 90s (Paterson 2001). He argues that those recruited into the industry before the early 1980s, had usually entered a relatively stable sector in the industry and were trained and employed either by the BBC or one of the ITV companies.

Georgina Born in her work on the BBC (2004) echoes this, arguing that,

One of the most striking developments in the broadcasting industry in the eighties and nineties was the casualisation of employment, evident in the drift away from permanent staff jobs and towards a reliance on short term contracts and freelancing (2004:180).

The casualisation and increase in short-term contracting, also meant that faster promotion became possible (Paterson 2001), with the long apprenticeship, particularly in technical skills, less relevant in a fast changing technical environment. This also has implications for training, much of which had been done by the BBC. With the reduction in the BBC's training role, this has largely been externalised to the world of independent training providers. The implication of this, together with the decline of long apprenticeships continues to be controversial. The 2008 furore over Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand on Radio 2, made much mention of the fact that their on-air producer was a relatively inexperienced 25 year old, employed, not by the BBC, but Ross' own production company (Gibson *et al* 2008).

## 6.1 The new multitude

At the same time as what some argue is the proletarianisation of some forms of cultural and artistic work, so many lower status jobs increasingly resemble aspects of cultural work – most notably in the communicative and emotional dimensions (Lazzarato 1996; Hardt and Negri 2000; Virno 2004).

The notion of *affective labour* (Clough and Halley 2007) is sometimes used to capture the emotional aspects of this kind of work, where interpersonal skills are seen as a core part of entrepreneurialism and the creation of relationships, particularly with clients, a core part of work (Ditmore 2007). As Andrew Ross (2003) comments, the ‘mentality of artists,’ with its tradition of sacrifice and commitment to work, has simply become too valuable to be left to artists alone, and instead is increasingly in demand, at both the higher and lower reaches of the contemporary knowledge and service sectors. The dual elements of cultural work, the combination of insecurity and exploitation alongside new freedoms and potential for new forms of communication (including via digital technology) is the focus of work by many of those deriving from an autonomous Marxist tradition, most notably in recent years, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Hardt and Negri 2000; 2004).

Unlike ‘classic’ Marxists, autonomists are generally seen as granting a good deal of agency to workers – seeing them as capable of resisting the power of capitalism – in what is an ongoing battle between capital and labour. While others on the political left may have spoken of a ‘right to work’, as something that people should demand, autonomists speak of a right to refuse work. Techniques such as wildcat strikes, absenteeism or go-slows are often seen as part of the workers’ arsenal of resistance. There is an echo here, of some of the notions of the bohemian artist, popular in the nineteenth century, such as the flaneur, or in contemporary parlance, the slacker (O’Connor 2007) and also of the ‘situationists’ (Debord 1994).

The stable ‘job for life’ in the large corporation or public agency, seen to be characteristic of the post-war period is gone and the growth of digital technology and a more highly-educated workforce, makes possible the new, more socialised worker. The downside of this is that instead of work being confined to certain hours of the day and a certain place – the office or factory – work now spills over into all of life, so that ‘the whole society is placed at the disposal of profit’ (Negri 1989:72).

The upside is the potential for these de-centralised workers, constituted in loose networks often across the globe, to act politically – arguably in the way that the environmental, or ‘global justice’ movements of recent years have acted – in other words, making great use of media technologies, protests and spectacular demonstrations (Kingsnorth 2003; Gilbert 2008).

## 6.2 Immaterial Labour

As we can see, there are elements of the autonomist arguments that seem to mirror (albeit from a different place politically), some of the ‘new economy’ writing on the changing nature of work, with its stress on the potential autonomy of workers outside of traditional work environments (Handy 1994; Leadbeater 1999). Perhaps the term that best captures this notion is ‘immaterial labour’ (Lazzarato 1996; Hardt and Negri 2000), where work is increasingly concerned with the production of ideas or images, rather than physical goods. But this reflects not just a change in the nature of work – after all some people, notably artists, have always been in the ‘ideas-production’ business – but also a change in the role of these ideas and images in society as a whole.

As more and more of us are concerned with the production of ‘immaterial’ products, the role that ideas, images and communications plays within society and the economy as a whole becomes more important, or as Virno argues, the culture industry, *plays the role of the industry of the means of production* (2004: 61). In other words, cultural producers no longer just produce cultural products (books, music, films) but they in a sense, produce the means by which other things are made and consumed, notably through advertising, marketing and the ‘production’ of tastes, consumer norms and public opinion (Lazzarato 1996).

In this way, cultural labour provides content that requires ‘artistic creativity’ as a knowledge-based and labour-intensive input into a whole variety of goods. Or as Lash and Lury have it, cultural products are no longer primarily symbolic, but have become ‘things,’

for example when movies become computer games; when brands become brand environments, talking over airport terminal space and restructuring department stores, road billboards and city centres; when cartoon characters become collectibles and costumes; when music is played in lifts, part of a mobile soundscape, (Lash and Lury 2007: 8).

While acknowledging that immaterial labour may have grown as a percentage of all labour, many writers have criticised the autonomist traditions for falling into the same trap as the new economy boosterists, namely ignoring the fact that even 'post-industrial' or immaterial economies have material underpinnings. As in the quotation above, billboards, airport terminals and department stores are all material things, as are computers, mobile phones and consoles – the material infrastructure of the digital age. As Gill and Pratt argue, 'even the ones and zeros that make up the Internet's code, have to be written, by someone, somewhere' (2008:24).

The 'somewhere' is significant and a frequent criticism of the autonomist tradition, as well as other writing about the new economy, in that it is premised on a developed world, global north, point of view. Much of the infrastructure of the digital age is manufactured and broken down in developing countries, where the hazards associated with electronic or 'e-waste' are only just starting to come to the attention of policymakers (GAO 2008). And media companies, far from making immaterial goods, are in fact among the world's largest polluters (Maxwell and Miller 2008).

Others have criticised this writing for glossing over the differences between different sorts of immaterial workers – both workers in call centres and investment bankers make use of digital technology all day – but there is little in common in their pay or working conditions (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008).

### 6.3 Suffering for your art

One of the difficulties is the *relatively* small amount of empirical work that looks in any detail at the working conditions of most cultural workers which means that generalisations about the cultural workforce are more likely to be made (Hesmondhalgh 2008). In the context of precarious labour in particular, a few studies look at not only the difficulties inherent in this kind of work, but also the degree to which workers are beginning to resent these difficulties.

The case of 'ea\_spouse' has been highlighted by Toby Miller (2009), who examines an anonymous posting on *Live Journal*<sup>6</sup>, by the partner of an employee of Electronic Arts (EA), one of the largest videogames companies, which makes *The Sims* and *John Madden* games, among others. The

<sup>6</sup> EA – The Human Story <http://ea-spouse.livejournal.com/274.html>

anonymous 'spouse' details the exploitation of the videogames industry, where forty-eight hour weeks are normal, and 72-hour work weeks not uncommon. Stress and over work means that turnover amongst engineers runs at 50 per cent. Resembling in many ways, Florida's no-collar workplace (2002), with its free espresso and volleyball court, Fortune magazine ranked EA as among the *100 Best Companies to Work For* (Levering and Moskowitz 2003).

Elsewhere, de Peuter and Dyer-Witthford examine the 'forced workaholism' of videogame development (2006) and the divisions of labour based on age, gender and parenthood. The young, male image of the games industry workforce being reinforced in this case, by the difficulty anyone with any caring responsibilities would have in maintaining the level of commitment and working hours required.

Similarly, Ross Gill in her study of new media workers found that freelancers in particular worked an average of 65 hours per week and that the lack of pension, insurance and paid holidays meant that many feared becoming older or regarded having children as something that they would not be able to combine with their working lives (2007). Other writers similarly found that it was not uncommon to find freelancers in fashion, web design or TV working excessive hours, taking no holidays and pushing themselves to physical and psychological limits, not only because of looming externally imposed deadlines, but in some cases because of their own passion for their work (Ursell 2000; Paterson 2001; Banks 2007).

As Andrew Ross, in his study of artists-turned-new-media-workers, *No Collar* (2003), argues, these traditions of self-exploitation have a long history in artistic labour: 'Artists (in the broad sense of the term) come with training in what could be called sacrificial labor [sic]' (2003: 142).'

This, he argues, makes them 'predisposed' to accept non monetary rewards such as the gratification of practising their art (or writing code), and thus makes them a boon, for example, to dot com firms, seeking long hours, as well as ideas and emotional commitment from a workforce. For Ross' 'net slaves', 'it was cool to be addicted to overwork' (2003:143), but as Ross himself notes, this may have as much to do with artistic 'traditions' of self-exploitation, as with the requirements of their bosses.

**A distinctive, if not unique feature of cultural labour markets is the degree of enthusiasm, even love, that workers show for their fields, which helps ensure that even casualised, insecure and often exploitative as these labour markets are, they are continually over-supplied with labour.**

# 7 Learning to love work

A distinctive, if not unique feature of cultural labour markets is the degree of enthusiasm, even love, that workers show for their fields, which helps ensure that even casualised, insecure and often exploitative as these labour markets are, they are continually over-supplied with labour. Angela McRobbie describes the 'passionate' attachment that such people have to their work, 'a space of romantic idealisation perhaps more rewarding than personal relationships' (2006).

The cultural economics literature has looked at the ways this affects how cultural workers spend their time. David Throsby's 'work-preference' model of artist behaviour (1994) takes as its starting point the idea that the majority of 'workers are assumed to have a positive preference for leisure time and a negative preference or disutility for time spent working' (1994:69). In simple terms, they value leisure time more than work time.

But the model suggests artists are part of a select group of people - including academics, researchers and scientists - for whom the standard economic model does not work, and for whom satisfaction or a desire to work in their chosen field generally motivates them more than financial reward. Indeed Throsby argues that the driven artist's principal objective is to maximise the time he or she spends on art work, and to therefore take advantage of any earnings from non-art work to spend more time on art work.

In her study of new media workers in the UK and the Netherlands Ros Gill (2007) speaks of the 'extraordinary passion and enthusiasm' that people have for their work and the many different elements of this passion: the sense of autonomy and opportunity, the playful and pleasurable nature of the work, and the opportunity for community and political activism. Indeed, as she argues,

sociologists of work would be hard-pressed to find another group of workers who expressed similar levels of passion both for the work itself and for the field more generally (2007:14).

Similarly, Oakley in her study of festivals and events workers found that many of the elements traditionally seen as disadvantages – short-term contracts for example – were viewed by some as part of pleasure, albeit largely by younger workers with no caring responsibilities. Others, as in Gill's study, felt that they were getting paid for what, for themselves and others, was sometimes seen as a hobby (Oakley 2007).

McRobbie connects what she calls the 'refusal of mundane work,' among these cultural workers with the autonomist notion of refusal of work and the feminist dynamic, by which this independent work becomes a potential source of self-realisation (McRobbie 2007). However she argues that this 'first wave' of cultural independents have subsequently been overtaken by more neo-liberal models, where the enthusiasm that cultural workers showed for their own businesses, is now all the resource that they have in an economy which has stripped away workers rights, benefits, student grants and so on, to be replaced by a focus on individual talents, which she argues is unsustainable (Gollmitzer and Murray 2008).

## 7.1 Work and life

The pleasure, psychic income or self-realisation that cultural workers are said to find in their work often results in the blurring of boundaries between 'work' and 'life'; another feature of the cultural labour market which can be seen becoming widespread outside of the cultural industries (Jarvis and Pratt 2006; Henninger and Gottschall 2007).

The offices, particularly of media companies both old and new, make room for 'play,' whether with chill-out areas, pool tables, gyms or even in-house masseurs (Florida 2002; Ross 2003). This self-image of the cultural industries as fun or glamorous is consciously embraced by cultural workers themselves. In their interviews in the advertising industry Nixon and Crewe found that many employees were drawn to advertising in part because of this fun image, which not only means fun at work but also a culture of post-work drinking and partying (Nixon and Crewe 2004).

The 'compulsory' elements of this post-work drinking are, if anything, even stronger for those without regular employment. As Gina Neff points out, it is in these social settings after work that freelancers find out about upcoming contacts, new projects and so on. Some of this activity is undoubtedly about pleasure and socialisation, particularly for those for whom the working day might be quite solitary, but there is also a compulsory element, where one can never switch off, relax or get away from work. Nixon and others (Nixon and Crewe 2004; Gill 2007) stress the 'gendered' aspects of this compulsory socialising and the difficulty that parents for example have in fully

participating, but as Mark Banks points out, a paradox of this life/work blurring is that while, the image of cultural work itself is non-routine, unregulated and 'creative,' the need to be successfully 'social' is in fact rather strongly enforced (Banks 2007). It seems you can be anything you like in the creative workplace as long as that includes being sociable, available for long hours, and 'clubbable'.

## 7.2 Free work

One aspect of this love of cultural work that is gaining importance is what we might call 'free work' (Terranova 2000), in other words unpaid work, in the cultural sectors. This is a huge terrain which includes volunteers, hobbyists and 'prosumers', as well as those who would like to get paid but need to work unpaid in order to get the necessary experience to get a paid job, or in order to change jobs or move from one project to another (Oakley 2007; Randle and Culkin 2007).

Again, this is not an entirely new phenomenon – unpaid amateurs have always been a big part of the performing arts scene and writers like Bourdieu have argued that the existence of a large, amateur labour pool has helped keep wages in these sectors low (Bourdieu 1993). The number of freelancers and casual workers also mitigates against traditional forms of worker organisation, such as trade unions (Gollmitzer and Murray 2008).

One of the difficulties of writing about this subject is the absence of much empirical work in the area and the difficulty of separating these categories – such as volunteers, from hobbyists from unpaid workers. Indeed, some writers do not attempt to distinguish, arguing instead that the phenomenon of 'pro-ams', enthusiastic amateurs working to professional standards, covers a variety of people from political campaigners to open-source programmers or mountaineers (Leadbeater and Miller 2004).

Not all of these 'pro-ams,' are in the cultural sectors by any means, but clearly such behaviours are widespread in the cultural sectors, saturated as they are by hobbyists and enthusiasts. For Leadbeater and Miller, the distinguishing characteristic of pro-ams is one of quality and enthusiasm, people work to what is often a high or semi-professional standard, not for

money but for love of the activity. Indeed, some of their interviewees are quoted as saying that turning their particular passion into paid 'work' might rob it of the meaning and passion that it has for them.

Leadbeater and Miller present a highly positive picture of pro-ams, their only concern appears to be that some people – carers for example - will not get enough time to pursue their pro-am enthusiasms. In particular, they see them as 'disruptive innovators' creating new ways of doing business by their use of and response to the products that they consume and use. And it is in this blurring of the distinction between producers and consumers, that much of the interest in 'free labour' is currently situated (Hartley 2009).

### 7.2.1 Consumers as producers

The role of consumers is important in any industrial sector – but the high risk and uncertain nature of much creative production enhances the role of consumers. When young people 'customise' their clothes in a way that the fashion industry later copies, or when digital copying leads to wholesale changes on the part of recording companies, we can see these processes at work very clearly.

The development of digital technology and particular collaborative technologies such as the open source movement, videogames like the Sims, websites like Wikipedia and citizen journalism, where news organizations call upon their audiences to reconstitute themselves as journalists - such as Yo Periodista at Spanish newspaper El Pais, or iReport at American broadcaster CNN - has led some commentators to suggest that 'self-made media' has distorted the 'expert paradigm' that characterised traditional media (Hartley 2009) and democratised, at least in part, the media world.

Other writers are dismayed by what they call 'the cult of the amateur'. Keen sees it as,

decimating the ranks of our cultural gatekeepers, as professional critics, journalists, editors, musicians, moviemakers and other purveyors of expert information are being reprieved ...by amateur bloggers, hack reviewers, homespun moviemakers and attic recording artists. (Keen 2007:16)

Keen's concern here however is more about what this means for our cultural life in general – the erosion of expertise – than it is about the work of paid-for cultural producers.

In the absence of concrete data on user-generated content it is difficult to tell how much of this is additional to (paid for) content and how much is a replacement. In a blog post, Mark Deuze makes the point that the growth of 'citizen-journalists' and 'free media' is leading to job losses in traditional media industries, while media employers are cutting back on healthcare benefits, pensions and training for those still in employment (Deuze 2008). Alongside the implications for media workers, is of course a concern, shared by Keen and others, about the erosion of expertise – genuine, investigative reporting is labour intensive and time-consuming, not necessarily something that can be undertaken by people in their spare time.

In her study of new media workers, Tiziana Terranova looked not only at those trying to enter the paid labour market but also at those, building websites, modifying software packages, reading and participating in mailing lists and building virtual spaces, not because they were required to, but because 'they were acting out a desire for affective cultural production' (Terranova 2000:40).

Videogames in particular have become prime site for free labour, with 'authoring tools' being increasingly included with computer games, helping to foster a participatory culture of game 'modding', or modification (Sotamaa 2005). Some of this modification is relatively superficial, such as changing the appearance of characters, but it also includes more dramatic interventions and whole new games. In contributing in this way, the boundaries between 'play' and 'content provision' subtly dissolve (de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2006).

Indeed, Sotamaa argues that modding represents the ultimate commodification of leisure time in that modders labour to produce content for other gamers and fans to consume. Although modifications themselves are often downloaded free from the Internet, this is not some sort of idealised gift economy (Hyde 1979). Modders join the legion of 'free labour' that Terranova argues is a major source of value creation, as commercial firms learn how to exploit or 'monetise' this freely produced content (Terranova 2000).

## 7.2.2 Willing hands – the voluntary cultural sector

While the image of the modder or blogger may be young, the archetypal image of the cultural sector volunteer is more likely to be old – the community panto, the local street festival, amateur dramatics – there is a vast and vital community and voluntary cultural sector, most of whom work unpaid.

Much of this cultural production is done for free and consumed for free – community festivals being one such example – and where money does change hands, it is likely to be for a charitable cause.

However, given the low pay and insecure financing of much of the cultural sector, the issue of volunteering as a replacement for paid labour does, occasionally, raise its head. The Canadian Human Resource Council's study of human resource issues in Canada's cultural sector (CHRC 2002), argued that volunteers do often replace paid workers, which it argues not only decreases job opportunities in the sector overall, but leads to an undervaluing of these jobs and a dilution of professionalism.

Some evidence for the tensions that this can produce is provided by a study of the labour force in festivals and events, a sector which is moving from one that was formerly firmly based in the community arts arena, and largely sustained by volunteer labour, to one where there are now dedicated vocational training courses, and we are seeing the growth of paid positions in some large festivals (Oakley 2007).

The appearance of a group of younger workers, in some cases formally trained, and explicitly seeking a career in festivals, is presenting something of a challenge, at least in terms of their expectations. Some of the younger workers interviewed for Oakley's (2007) study spoke dismissively of the lack of business or management skills in the older labour force. A clash of values – the counter-culture versus the cultural industry – may be behind this, as much as a set of explicit skills, as volunteers were themselves often dismissive of the formal training and 'commodified' attitudes of paid staff.

Regulation, as well as commercialisation is driving professionalization. As festivals become larger and, in some cases, more 'business-like,' the ability of a largely untrained workforce to deliver them, is put into question. From a

local authority standpoint, there are increasing requirements for organisers not just to know, but to demonstrate their knowledge, providing site plans, transport plans, information on child safety and various forms of certification. In many cases the tacit or embedded knowledge that has been developed over time by people is now being deemed 'bad practice' in need of credentialisation to meet explicit standards.

We thus have contradictory forces at work around free labour. Traditional volunteering, particularly in the performing arts, is in some cases being professionalised as younger workers seek to make a living in what were once, hobbies; while hobbyists in highly commercial sectors, such as videogames, seem willing to give their labour for free.

One difficulty as is often the case in the cultural sectors is the lack of quantitative research. Cultural statistics in general do not account for the contributions of non-profit work and volunteer work or charity activities, and while the role of 'free labour' in videogames and on the web is much written about, it is rarely quantified. Similarly, although some studies have looked at the role of 'non profits' in the cultural sector, particularly in the US, (DeMaggio 2006), this does not equate to unpaid work, as non-profits can and do employ paid staff, particularly in Europe where the term can include many public sector cultural organisations.

### 7.2.3 Getting in - the growth of internships

Another area, which appears to be growing, and is perhaps of more concern to policymakers is the growth of internships and other forms of informal, unpaid work which increasingly acts as the 'first job' for many of those who want to work in the cultural sectors. As Blair comments, the huge over supply of labour in the cultural sectors gives particular importance to first jobs as a route in, as many of those who want to work in these sectors may never even get that far (Blair 2001). Given this, 'family-type' contacts play an important role in 'getting in,' which obviously has undesirable consequences for the social and ethnic mix of the labour market.

Work experience and work placements have long been a feature of the labour market; approved of by employers and educators alike for the skills of

'employability' (self-management, communications skills and work readiness) that they are seen to bestow on younger workers. More recently they have been joined by the growth of the 'internships,' unpaid, entry level jobs in a variety of fields from the highly desirable and glamorous – the film industry, politics, parts of the law – to sectors, which until recently were not considered glamorous, such as restaurants, where the star celebrity chef can now serve to attract unpaid entry level workers into the kitchen.

While there is some anecdotal evidence that the phenomenon is growing, it has remained below the radar for most policymakers. Only in the cultural industries has any attempt to curb this practice been even mooted. The DCMS report, *Creative Britain* talks about 'opening up' unpaid internships to people of all socio-economic backgrounds (2008:24); 'unpaid entry-level jobs' are deemed to give the sectors a negative image, and the announcement of 5,000 formal apprenticeships in the cultural sectors is in part designed to address the issue of unpaid labour as an exclusionary device, with only those with parental help or other sources of income able to undertake often long periods of unpaid work.



**If public policy is to continue to push an expansion of these sectors, we need to understand more about who works in them, why and under what conditions.**

## 8 Last thoughts

The cultural labour market is growing, highly diversified and global. It ranges from some of the most highly-paid ‘celebrities’ in the world, to pre-teen girls in the global South, ‘picking away without protection of any kind at discarded First World electronics in order to find precious metals’ (Maxwell and Miller 2008:10).

Most sub-sectors have a strongly bifurcated structure, with a small handful of large employers and a plethora of small firms and individuals. Some sub-sectors, such as videogames, advertising, or design, are almost all in the private sector; most, including the media industries (in the UK and Europe at least), have a mixed economy, where public funding plays a significant role.

But beyond these broad brushstrokes, we know relatively little about a workforce that is said to be vital to our future economic prosperity and cultural well being (Athey *et al*, 2008; DCMS 2008). Official statistics can help us hardly at all. We cannot even count the number of DJs, videogames designers or citizen journalists in the world, let alone know much about their working lives. Public policy has concerned itself with skills and training issues, and asserted the importance of entrepreneurship and business skills within the arts education tradition, but beyond that it has paid little attention to the issues of cultural work.

Fortunately academic work has filled some of this gap in recent decades, with a variety of perspectives, from management studies to sociology to cultural economics. This review has sought to give a flavour of the major debates in the academic literature on cultural labour. These include: the degree to which cultural work serves as a template for other forms of work; the pains and pleasures of cultural work; the geography of work and the importance of the network and of social contacts, and the growing importance of ‘free work’ of all sorts.

Researchers always say that we need more research, and this report offers no challenge to that convention. This is a highly under-researched area, compared to cultural policy, and with other parts of the labour market. If public policy is to continue to push an expansion of these sectors, we need to understand more about who works in them, why and under what conditions.

## 8.1 Cultural work – any role for policy?

This complicated pattern of ‘getting in and getting on’ in these labour markets reveals the difficulties for public policy interventions. Creative Britain (DCMS 2008) tries to tackle some aspects of labour market entry, but the patterns of work within these sectors, together with some of the more undesirable aspects of casualisation, are not confined to first jobs.

‘Free work,’ does not end when one has secured a first commission or contract; training or skills development is often undertaken at the trainees’ expense, and moving from one activity to another often requires another period of unpaid work (Blair *et al* 2001; Oakley 2007; Randle and Culkin 2007).

But the most difficult challenge for public policy is perhaps the fact that, despite the difficulties in getting a job in these industries, the low pay and relative insecurity in many parts of them, the nature of the work – its intrinsic interest and perhaps an air of glamour – means that they are hugely over-supplied with labour.

The expansion of higher education in recent decades in part accounts for this. According to the most recent figures from Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the United Kingdom (HESA 2009) over two million students in higher education in the UK are studying at over 170 universities and colleges. Their number has increased from just over 1.6 million students in 1996. In 1960, there were 270,000 students at just twenty universities.

There are more than 156,000 students in creative arts and design, an increase of over 60 per cent in the past decade. The annual Pattern of Higher Education Institutions in the UK report published by Universities UK (Ramsden 2006) notes a 5.8 per cent increase in the number of creative arts and design students from the previous year.

Similarly, the nature of work in these sectors – the large number of small firms and freelancers in particular, makes it hard to intervene. Even in the UK, which has relatively lax employment law, employers with larger number of employees generally have greater requirements placed on them, than smaller ones, and equal opportunities and other legislation applies. Where

recruitment and promotion criteria are as informal as they are in the cultural sectors, it's sometimes hard to see how public policy can make a difference.

However, some recent work on new media, suggests that labour market regulation and particular policy settlements can affect working conditions in even the most 'cutting edge' of cultural sectors.

### **Different policy regimes in the new media industry**

The 'new media' sectors replicated many of the features of 'old' media (Christopherson and van Jaarsveld 2005), with the added complication that many of their working patterns derive from the IT industry, rather than from the cultural sectors as such.

As we discussed in Section 4 above, the media workforce has been one of the most mythologised in terms of new work (Handy 1994; Kelly 1998; Pink 2001; Leadbeater and Miller 2004), represented in Ros Gill's words as 'cool, creative and egalitarian' (Gill 2007), but also revealed to have many of the same patterns as cultural labour in general, high levels of insecurity and casualisation, combined with often self-exploiting levels of enthusiasm (Ross 2003; Gill 2007).

Despite their 'footloose' image however, Christopherson and van Jaarsveld argue that, the location of new media work and the policy regime in particular countries still makes material difference to working conditions.

In Sweden for example some 85 per cent of new media workers in 2002, were permanent employees, a picture very different from that in the USA and hence, in their interviews with new media workers, the constant process of networking and self-promotion acquires greater importance in the US relative to Sweden (Christopherson and van Jaarsveld 2005). While job descriptions and job titles in these sectors are notoriously fluid (McRobbie 2002; Gill 2007), Christopherson and van Jaarsveld argues that job descriptions in Germany are stronger and work responsibilities better defined in a country where occupations and strong

professions are still common (Abbott 1988). Self learning 'on the job' was common across all of the countries they looked at, but again, even more common in the US, than Sweden or Germany, where employers were generally more willing to invest in workers' training.

The significance of these findings is not just to suggest that public policy regimes can have an impact on working conditions, even in the highly decentralised cultural sectors; but also to point out that despite their idiosyncrasies, the cultural sectors also resemble other parts of the labour market, as well as diverge from it. Swedish and German workers have traditionally had a greater voice and control over working conditions, than in a more de-regulated labour market like the US or UK. And it is the same for the cultural sectors. Despite the over-supply of labour and the seeming willingness of cultural workers to join what is in some respects a difficult, even exploitative labour market, cultural work does not have to be a 'no go area' for public policy.

## 8.2 Producing the creative workforce - implications for education policy

### 8.2.1 Higher Education (HE)

Given the large numbers of people currently studying for careers in the cultural sectors, higher education policy has focussed not so much on increasing the quantity, but the quality of Further and Higher education qualifications and accrediting courses that are considered industry-ready.

Partnerships between industry and Higher Education are increasingly geared towards ensuring a supply of suitably skilled labour and giving employers more of a say in the content and emphasis of that education. The sector skills councils, government-funded bodies which try to ensure that the UK workforce has the appropriate skills, are increasingly involved in accrediting, particular higher education courses. In the cultural sectors, with high levels of self-employment and very few large employers with which to consult, this can be problematic, so the arrangement of proxy intermediaries, such as

the Arts Council, increasingly focus on HE. In 2006, the Arts Council of England (ACE) published its first HE strategy on the common interests shared by itself and the HE sector, such as widening participation and fair access both in HE and in the cultural workforce. The Arts Council's HE strategy proposes a partnership approach with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in relation to supporting arts organisations which are part of HEIs and greater collaboration in the development of the creative economy through knowledge transfer, creative entrepreneurship and continuing professional development.

At the same time, concerns have been raised that in tying higher education too closely to the (perceived) needs of industry; the critical tradition of arts and humanities teaching is in danger of being compromised, without necessarily producing any better qualified graduates (Smith and Taylor 2008).

## 8.2.2 Schools

While HE deals with issues of partnership and the over-supply of graduates for the cultural industries, in the UK context at least, greater concerns have been raised about the appropriateness of our *school education* to encourage creativity and produce creative learners. In particular, there are concerns about what, at least in England and Wales, is seen as the destructive narrowness of the curriculum and early specialization.

The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education report (NACCCE 1999), was influential in alerting commentators to the discrepancy between the economic challenges as laid down in successive White Papers and the educational response. In other words, while the economy requires highly skilled, flexible, self-learners, the need to raise standards in education has led to greater emphasis on outputs and targets, perhaps at the risk of experimentation. In addition, the number of tests has increased, though we know that much testing emphasises simple recall at the expense of higher critical thinking. And while economic commentators stress that the ability to fail is part of the vital training for entrepreneurship and creativity – schools can no longer afford to fail (or have pupils that do) for fear of falling down the 'league tables' of performance.

One concern raised by the NACCCE report was the National Curriculum, with its emphasis on traditional academic subjects, in particular verbal and mathematical reasoning. Creativity, it argues, drawing on the ideas of Howard Gardner and others is a multi-faceted capacity building on what we know in one area and applying it to another (1999).

The NACCCE report authors were concerned that the National Curriculum sets out a hierarchy of subjects, with core subjects such as English, Maths and Science being seen as more important than the arts, humanities or technology. It argues that there is no basis for this distinction and the consequence has been a steady decline in provision for the arts – music is often cited – and humanities.

The issue of art education in schools is much broader than simply preparing people to work in the cultural sectors. The argument is that some of the skills that are highly developed in the arts – the ability to deal with ambiguity, resilience and communications skills – are increasingly needed across the economy as a whole.

However, what is less clear is what other skills are needed to negotiate and sustain a career in the cultural sectors and what roles schools have in the production of those skills. These might include a better understanding of ownership and intellectual property rights, greater media literacy, more knowledge of the structure of creative careers and how they may be navigated, or the ability to negotiate different value judgements. All of these are important, but they take place against a broader ethical and political question about the degree to which policymakers should push work in the cultural sectors, without admitting the difficulties attendant on them and without developing a fuller idea of 'good work' across the economy.

**The argument is that some of the skills that are highly developed in the arts – the ability to deal with ambiguity, resilience and communications skills – are increasingly needed across the economy as a whole.**



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