

# Creative Labour: Content, Contract and Control

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## Introduction

The 'creative industries' have emerged as a key metaphor for mainstream management and organisation: project-based organisations deploying flexible technologies used by labour in high-trust, but ephemeral, teams. If the dissolution of the Hollywood 'system' into flexible specialisation (Christopherson and Storper, 1989) is portrayed as emblematic of meso-level changes, then the improvisation of jazz musicians has become iconic for the qualities of intuition and spontaneity deemed necessary for effective work teams or said to characterise work where conception and execution, composition and performance occur 'in concert' (Kamoche *et al*, 2002: 101). Despite the growing attention to film, music, advertising and television, however, the nature of creative *labour*, the creative labour process, and the management of creative labour, have remained little examined.

This overview paper is organised in three sections. First, we examine the content – the *labour* – of work in the creative industries. Although all labour necessarily involves some degree of creativity, the creative industries are distinctive in that competitive advantage and profitability are dependent not so much upon the routinisation of work but on harnessing individual and collective creativity. This implies a distinctive managerial imperative that is likely to be extremely wary of deskilling strategies. That is not to say that management in the creative industries is indifferent to controlling labour or cutting costs. Rather, we are more likely to see processes of marketisation that mesh with ideologies of 'releasing' worker creativity from bureaucracy. Second, we consider the range of employment contracts used in the creative industries. Above all, the sector has experienced a profound shift from internal and regulated labour markets to labour as atomised independent contractors. The networks of friendship and shared experience that are precondition

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of the 'fast trust' essential to the viability of sector's project-based organisation are also mechanisms that allow labour to cope with highly fragmented labour markets. Third, given the strong identification of creative labour with the production process and its output and the uncertain profitability of cultural products, the forms of labour control tend to rely on high degrees of self-motivation. While the management of self-motivated labour reduces fixed administrative costs, it does expose management to intense scrutiny in terms of its organisational, innovative and creative capabilities. In the creative industries, managerial authority turns on managers' ability to *demonstrate* their understanding and involvement in the creative process and to form administrative systems that impinge as lightly as possible on the labour process.

#### Between creative and mass industries

Analyses of creative industries have long drawn upon 'industrial' metaphors. Hollywood's 'studio system' is often portrayed as analogous to mass production: standardised 'safe' products, mass marketing and routinised production. The disintegration of the studio system has been depicted as a transition from mass production to 'flexible specialisation'. Similarly, Scott Lash has argued that the creative industries *practiced* the management and organisational techniques of 'post-Fordism' in *advance* of manufacturing and services. In both cases, however, the implicit assumption that the media and manufacturing industries have developed in parallel with little or no diffusion of personnel, practices, or ideologies. This seems an unrealistic assumption: it neglects, for instance, the inter-penetration of executive personnel; the increasing cross-ownership of media and consumer electronics; the power, reach and durability of mass production management practices; and the continuous interaction of mass production and flexible systems in all industries.

The importance of mass production as a regulative ideal for managers in the creative industries stretches beyond the 'studio system'. For over 40 years Disney's animation production was *explicitly* modelled on strictly hierarchical management and a tightly controlled, routinised labour process, closely modelled upon scientific management and Fordism (Bryman, 2000). Similarly, Berry Gordy, founder of Motown Records, claims he modelled the production of pop music on the assembly line principles learnt in Detroit. The backing tracks were laid down by the Funk Brothers and vocals were added by different artistes until one track was singled out by Motown's 'quality control department'.

...my own dream for a hit factory was quickly taking form, a concept that had been shaped by the principles I had learned on the Lincoln-Mercury

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assembly line. At the plant the cars started out just as a frame, pulled along on conveyor belts until they emerged at the end of the line – brand spanking new cars rolling off the line. I wanted the same concept for my company, only with artists and songs and records (Gordy, 1994: 140).

If contemporary manufacturing is defined by the pursuit of a durable balance between efficiency and flexibility, between standardisation and differentiation, then similar competitive pressures are experienced by even the most elite sectors of the cultural industries. According to some commentators contemporary international opera has become a high-brow form of just-in-time labour process in which a standardised cultural product is differentiated by the addition of a name singer in much the same way as the global car makers combine shared components with distinctive carcasses and brands to cover a market spectrum.

...most European opera houses had dissolved their resident companies after World War II, and now these singers toured as international vocal consultants. Their training had become a matter of mastering a menu of ready-made parts to be marketed in auditions and assembled just-in-time. Artists flew in the morning, rehearsed during the afternoon, delivered their arias in the evening, and caught the last plane home the same night. An audience that did not know the story of the opera by heart and had not studied the score and libretto had no chance of understanding a complex plot like that of *The Marriage of Figaro* or *Così fan tutte* when it was produced in such an industrial way. Unschooled newcomers believed opera to be a competition to reach high C amid a demonstration of lovely arias interspersed with bits of incomprehensible knockabout. One might even wonder if all the singers themselves knew the details of the plot they so professionally delivered on stage. The strange logic of modern production technique had shortened rehearsal time and ignored recitatives; it had turned operatic art into show-biz entertainment (De Monthoux, 2004: 12–13).

Disentangling metaphor from substance, understanding the dynamics of management knowledge in and between sectors is essential if we are to go beyond broad allusions to a discredited Fordist ‘past’ and a bright flexible ‘present’.

### The labour of creative workers

In this section we are interested in comparing the *content* of work of the creative worker – artist, musician, actor or writer – with non-creative occupations

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in order to examine in what ways being innovative or original is divergent from other types of labour. In other words, how far do the *traits* of being a creative worker come together in a typology sufficiently distinctive to warrant different ways of understanding and classifying the economic and social qualities of the labour process of the creative worker? Or conversely, how this category of work shares general characteristics with other (or all) human labour.

There is a misconception connected with the idea of 'creative labour': that somehow the act of creativity, and occupations associated with creative work such as art, writing, music or film, are fundamentally different from the *labour* involved in other occupations, such as being a plumber, gardener or engineer. We will argue that *all* labour contains a creative element. That following Marx it is a characteristic of humans that their labour possesses a conceptual side, which involves the individual alone or in collective association, *envisioning* their work prior to its execution or enactment. However, the conceptual and imaginative side of labour in commodity production for mass or repeat market consumption is not under the direct control of the individual producer. Rather it is usually divorced, externalised or collectivised in a separate group (management and their allies) or embodied within the technology of production. Furthermore, in repeat work, especially volume production for mass markets, there is little room for imagination once the product and production process has been designed. What counts in these production areas is conformity to set protocols, following standard operating procedures and the ability to produce the same thing repeatedly on a continuous and extended scale. Of course, in every moment of production the commodities have to be created, but there is no originality, innovation or new thinking embodied in what will appear or the means by which it will appear, as both have already been defined.

Creative labour in the sense of work that is non-standard, non-repeatable, innovative or newly imagined is rare. Improvised jazz might be an exception, where conception and execution are united and sound is created spontaneously and instantaneously. While each product of the creative labour process is a one-off, the degree of variation and individuality of the product can be inhibited by it fitting within a style structure, genre or particular musical or artistic school, which has the effect of *institutionalising the unique*. Most labour, even that of an artist has a routine or familiar component. Routine comes from following training as an artist or musician, one that is acquired through the practice of being a musician or artist within a community of fellow artists or musicians. Routine comes from working within a particular *genre* or style that the individual does not create, but which is there as a template or recipe for the individual to 'follow' or work within. Style can be cultural, linked to a particular group, or situational – the vogue of the

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time which the artist absorbs and expresses in particular but recognisably 'stylised/structured' terms. In this sense, creative labour is *craft like*, it requires working within a tradition or established form, which acts as an externalised and institutionalised set of normative rules that the individual is required to learn and follow. But once the technique or style is mastered by the individual, there is then room for 'innovation' and interpretation that may be different from the received standard, and reflect the individual's unique talent, or a new 'school' of practice and technique that the individual shares with other originators or revolutionaries within the field.

Moreover in what could be called creative industries (Caves, 2000), the producer is more immediately involved in conceptual *and* operative elements of work. There is more *totality* in the productive process and therefore more control for the individual. And the product and possibly the way it is produced are not necessarily repeatable, but rather one of a kind. Further as Caves (2000) notes, for the capitalist in this sector, demand for creative products is not guaranteed. Therefore profit cannot be known in advance of the costs of production being committed and there is extreme uncertainty around how many people will buy the piece of music or view the film once it has been produced. Such uncertainty does not apply in mass or repeat market situations, where orders have already been taken and sales are highly predictable. But it may be increasing as a phenomenon in saturated consumer markets, as differentiation grows as a selling strategy.

We need to reiterate the problem of establishing a clear-cut distinction between occupations based on the content of work, and that routine and creative elements combine in all human labour. However, we also recognise that for certain sectors, where the market is volatile and unpredictable, the product is highly perishable, and where the act of creativity in production is difficult to standardise or routinise, the originality in creative labour is accentuated and may define a whole sector of work. When such labour encounters commercial or industrial capitalist forces, the creative purpose emphasised by the musician or artist – the 'art for arts sake principle', or the intrinsic/critical value – meets the economic purpose of making profit. Moreover, the possibility of earning money (and dreams of stardom and economic power) will animate the motivations of individuals as creative industries commercialise and production takes place along principles of profit maximisation, greater shareholder value and economic returns to owners. This may create what Caves (2000: 7) calls 'vertically differentiated skills', but it will also shape individual preferences and motivations, segment sectors and sub-sectors between more or less commercially oriented production – art house films and Hollywood, the *avant-garde* and mainstream. But in a world dominated by commoditisation, it is difficult to

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remain unaffected by the forces of monetised and mass capitalist production values. Moreover as O'Connor (2007: 20) has noted:

There is thus an underlying tension between exchange and use value at the heart of the cultural commodity. Cultural commodities are expensive to produce but cheap to reproduce – the more copies sold the greater the return on the original investment. But there are limits on this reproduction; people are not content to consume the same, they want new and different products. For this reason cultural commodities are prone to a short shelf life, and income has to be maximised before it hits the sell-by date.

What the capitalist industrialisation of creative arts represents is an attempt to get more value from the creative labourer by applying industrial principles and practices to the production of creative artefacts. This usually means widening the *distribution* of creative products, by means of technological solutions by mass (repeat) producing or storing products in new ways (reprographic photography, film, video, vinyl, digital etc) that make them marketable to a global audience. Capitalist principles of production can be applied to production, distribution or circulation, but with the same purpose, to make more profit. This can mean bringing the creative labourer into a collective, industrial complex, where rules from factory production can be applied. Or it can mean simply bringing the product into a marketing machine that can then turn the artist and their artefacts into 'merchandise'. Often it is not possible to de-compose the artistic/creative labour process and bring the producer into industrial production. However, as the example of Motown Records illustrates, artistic creativity can be institutionalised if not industrialised. Popular music, for example, remains largely individualistic and tied to handicraft production. The same is true for art. However once created, *copies* of the 'product' can subsequently be industrially mass-produced, distributed and marketed. But new creative sectors, such as film and television, are industries, with an extensive division of labour, a more and less creative occupational hierarchy, formal employment relationship and many other rules taken from capitalist production which are applied to ensure continuous supply of usable products from a 'collective' creative labourer.

An essential part of the globalisation of the music industry over the last two decades has been the increasing interpenetration of music, media, and consumer electronics conglomerates (Scott, 2004: 184–6). The experience of the format wars during the introduction of consumer video technology had a double impact on corporate strategy. First, it underscored the vital importance of establishing global rather than rival standards both to establish the

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possibility of a mass market and to amortise the enormous costs of product development. The VCR format wars were echoed by the complex pattern of competition and cooperation between the global electronics companies in establishing standard formats for audio compact discs and DVDs. Irrespective of their technical capabilities, other multimedia technologies were squeezed out by increasingly formalised strategic alliances establishing global technical standards, underscored by the availability of high-end music and film content, and has emerged as a critical to competitiveness and to the nature of technological innovation (Dai, 2000: 221–40; Tassej, 2000). Second, global ‘hardware’ companies Sony, Matsushita and Philips, in turn, acquired major music and media businesses in order to ensure a reliable supply and back catalogue of ‘software’ (Sadler, 1997; Wasko, 1994).

### Content: the labour of creative labourers

Borrowing from Marx we can say it is not the content or material aspect of a persons job that defines their social position in society, but rather their social relations to the means of production – whether or not they are owners of their labour power, their tools or means of production and their product, or rather simply sellers of labour time for producing a product which is appropriated by another. In other words, it is the social relations towards production that define a worker not job characteristics. Weberian writing is different, looking at the value of the skills a worker possesses, and implying that skills are *assets* with different marginal value, and therefore skill assets act as a kind of property that can differentiate workers into different occupational ‘property classes’. Applied to creative labour we could say that these workers have particular skill assets, which give them more or less market value, more or less autonomy and perhaps more or less social status. Moreover, they may own their product, and be petty commodity producers, but they will not own the means of distributing the product, and capital in this sphere can be concentrated and control access to market for the distribution and sale of the product of creative labour. Alternatively, they can be ‘jobbing workers’ (actors for example) and move from project to project selling their labour time.

It is not possible to make definitive categorisation of creative labour by examining the content of people’s work. This is because all human labour has both creative and non-creative elements, and no worker is wholly creative, as artists, musicians and writers etc. have routine elements to their work – in the form of styles, genres etc. If we explore other aspects of occupational sociology in which one group is defined against others, then the case of professions within Anglo-Saxon cultures is telling. Here, an early and influential approach is what is known as ‘trait’ theory. This involved listing

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the characteristics of professions that made them different from other occupations. The problem with such boundary or classificatory exercises is that traits are not stable, and other groups acquire what were considered 'exclusive' qualities, and we witness what one writer called the 'professionalization of everyone' (Wilensky, 1964). Critique of the limitations of trait theory looked at issues of power relations (Johnson, 1972; Freidson, 1994), the role of the state (Johnson, 1972); the type of contracts and labour market position has in defining professionals (Abbott, 1988).

For Abbott, professional occupations establish spheres of influence over their task activities/work ('jurisdiction' in Abbott's terminology) through first addressing human problems through particular types of expert solutions; through legitimating their claim to jurisdiction in the social and public sphere, and then closing their labour market through a variety of legal and other mechanisms. (This chronology of professional formation, from work/labour market → public support → legal sanction for jurisdiction, is questioned by Johnson (a 'power theorist'). For Johnson, the state often initiates the process of professionalisation and deprofessionalisation. However, Abbott is ambiguous about the direction of causation, and does not always suggest that the process moves from work through public legitimisation to legal control. Unlike the power perspective which emphasises the importance of knowledge monopoly, or statutory/legal monopoly of the professional over the client, problem or public, and hence a superior/subordinate relationship, Abbott stresses the '*negotiated* nature of the status of professions'. Jurisdictional settlements are *historical* and are therefore constant competition, and not once-and-for-all monopoly closure, best characterises the system of professional jurisdictional struggle over particular problems, tasks, knowledge or activities.

In creative industries there are groups that have professionalised along these lines, such as classically trained musicians, painters, actors and broadcast technicians, who have professional associations or trade unions representing their interests and attempting to build boundaries around their labour market niche.<sup>1</sup> However even for these groups, there might be competition from amateurs, there are multiple entry routes, and formalised training may not be a necessity in order to practise. Television and film are vehicles for actors without formal credentials, especially with the explosion of docudrama, reality TV and various programmes that dispense with skilled labour and use increased participation of (cheaper) 'audience' labour as means of lowering production costs. Although most actors in TV and film will have some 'drama school' credentials, such qualifications are not essential to practice – unlike say being a doctor. The boundary between qualified and non-qualified labour is policed by unions, and possession of an Equity card is a necessity in motion pictures, and British stage and TV acting. But as Davenport

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(2005) suggest unions in the UK have reduced bargaining power with the fragmentation of the sector through contracting out of work from TV companies. For other groups – writers, cinematographers, sound engineers, and lighting engineers – routes into the industry are more circumspect and less dependent on formalised training (see Blair, 2000). The ability of trade associations and trade unions to regulate the labour market or to sustain demarcation lines in the workplace has declined markedly in the last two decades. We shall return to this point later.

The blurred distinction between technical and aesthetic dimensions is a key characteristic of creative labour processes. Hollywood's 'studio system' relied upon the clear separation of aesthetic and technical dimensions of production. American technicians had clearly defined *technical* roles, strictly subordinated to the director's aesthetic decision-making powers. In Britain, by contrast, film crews expect to be involved in *aesthetic* decision-making, encroaching on the director's space, and in return would improvise to overcome technical or budgetary limits (Lassally, 1987: 36–7, 69; Petrie, 1996a: 56). However, others have argued that the British film industry is characterised by narrow specialist skill, low levels of flexibility and a reluctance to embrace change (Davenport, 2005). Yet certain groups within the industry are more adaptable. The British cinematographer observed Freddy Young 'is an artist and a technician. ...The cameraman stands at the natural confluence of the two main streams of activity in the production of a film – where the imaginative meets the reality of the film process' (Young and Petzold, 1972: 23). British film directors accepted that their relationship with the crew was necessarily negotiated, irrespective of formal distinctions between technical, commercial or aesthetic areas of responsibility:

The relationship between director and other staff is so much a question of teamwork that it would be a very unhappy unit if the 'boss and employee' techniques were applied. No director with any sense at all would try to enforce that feeling. A director needs the friendship of the unit and although at times he might be rather bossy he finds in the long run that he gets much more out of the unit if he keeps them all happy (Young and Petzold, 1972: 34–6; Petrie, 1996b: 110–11).

Conversely, an inexperienced director who flouted the crew's expectation of involvement in all aspects of decision-making – operational and aesthetic – risked passive resistance and expensive over-runs (Young, 1999: 85–7). A consistent theme of European and British film-making has been that film crews are enduring groups of collaborators rather than complete strangers (Petrie, 1991: 184–94). Indeed, one Californian study suggests that moderate familiarity – neither friends nor strangers – inside crews, is positively correlated

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with higher levels of film success (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998: 127). This familiarity with generic industry working practices and the specific skills of fellow crew mates is an essential part of the film and television labour processes. However, as we shall see in the following section, these 'thick' connections have been seriously eroded over the last two decades.

The temporary nature of the film labour process, the interaction of technicians with directors and chronic under-funding of film all combined to reduce formal collective bargaining and demarcation disputes to a minimum. By contrast, the rapid rise of television and the profitability of commercial companies meshed to produce a highly institutionalised and combustible form of industrial relations. Until the last decade, television studios were crowded, with heavy, often fragile equipment, snaking around the set. Camera and lighting crew had to work quickly, making fine adjustments to their cumbersome, temperamental equipment to compensate for manifold contingencies involved in shooting a scene (Jones, 1972). The depth of television technicians' job controls was matched only by the sheer vulnerability of management. Tight demarcation rules, a ferociously policed pre-entry closed shop, and an expensive, time-sensitive product combined to heighten union and informal bargaining power. As electro-mechanical equipment rapidly gave way to computer-assisted and then digital equipment, so the craft skills of television technicians were replaced by those of speed and selecting alternative shots to increase the variety available to the director and editor (McKinlay and Quinn, 1998). Paradoxically, then, the erosion of formal and informal collective bargaining has been paralleled by the emergence of a more cooperative set of relationships between the director and crew in television, much closer to the historic norm in film than before digitisation.

#### **Contract: reproducing, recruiting and retaining creative labourers**

We now turn to the types of employment *contract* that characterise work in the creative industries, and in what ways the short-term, one-off or temporary quality of the output from creative industries necessitates particular contract relations that do not depend on a continuous employment relationship with a single employer typical of most service and manufacturing employment situations. All labour contracts are open-ended, in the sense that the buyer of labour services offers up a wage in exchange for a definite amount of labour time from the seller, time in which the seller offers up their labour capacity. This capacity has to be realised or extracted by the buyer through the apparatus of work supervision in which notions of fair exchange, effort bargain and a 'going rate' for the job are implicit rules that

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guide seller and buyer in reaching agreement on the amount of effort required. Caves emphasises the open-ended nature of contracts within creative industries:

Most contracts that we find in the creative industries have strong incomplete incentive provisions. The contracts are commonly simple, and they evade complete contracts needed to describe each input or action *ex ante* and monitor it *ex post* (Caves, 2000: 13).

A labour process and institutional perspective would suggest that this is typical of the capitalist employment relationship, not simply creative industries. For Williamson, like Marx, the employment contract is not a conventional legal contract, in that there is no effort to specify all obligations in advance, but rather employees concede to manage the authority to make them do particular tasks, within certain customary constraints. This is therefore more flexible; people can be moved, retrained, and made more adaptable within the terms of a direct employment contract. The *incomplete nature* of the employment contract gives employment relations a potential advantage over fixed types of contract – ‘contingency claims’; or ‘sequential spot contracts’ and many other contract types Williamson outlines.

These types of contract do not fully overcome the problem of being unable to specify in advance all obligations between parties or the costs that arise due to unforeseen contingencies.

In the context of the employment relation, the existence of uncertainty over the precise work task required to be performed during any particular period, when combined with bounded rationality, makes the negotiation of a complex contract covering all potential contingencies extremely costly, if not impossible. Hence, Williamson argues the contract between employers and workers will necessarily be incomplete (Marginson, 1993: 148–9).

Creative industries avoid the costs of having elaborate enforcement machinery – usually considered unnecessary in such simple contract forms, because to a large extent the *reputation* of the provider of creative services helps ensure that the work contracted for is actually delivered. Reputation functions in the industry as a substitute for hierarchy, there to ensure contract delivery chiefly due of the short-term nature of contract work, the competition to get into the market from competing groups, and the need to ensure that access to work flows through the networks of job distribution which are dependent on the performance of the individual in their last contract. A poor reputation for delivering work weakens access to future work, which

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with short-term contracts, means the individual can easily become all but unemployable.

The individual worker as well as being problematical or bothersome to the hirer, is also costly, and this increases the incentive to minimise, replace and cheapen this input, either through capital substitution, making workers work more productively or swapping expensive skilled labour for cheaper less skilled labour. In the creative industries these conventional strategies may not work, primarily because the skill or creativity of the individual is such an essential part of the creative product or commodity that can neither be replaced nor displaced. This only leaves finding ways of maximising the productivity of existing workers as the major method of increasing surpluses in these industries. Hence we have in these industries the following features:

- A surplus of skilled over unskilled labour
- A productivity dilemma that means raising output requires engaging with labour not replacing or displacing it
- A surplus of individuals wishing to join the creative industries relative to available places providing wages at levels that would support the living costs of the individual. This surplus army helps depress average wages, and create vertical segmentation in wages and not just skills

These features give rise to contracts between agents and principals that do not follow the typical employment contract. They also give rise to unique forms of recruitment and retention, as the surplus of workers to living-wage places, added to the uniqueness, rarity and premium wages of certain individuals means the labour market does not function normally to equalise wages and access to jobs. Rather the sector is segmented and networks are used to distribute work (Blair, 2000 – Chapter 6 this volume). Furthermore particular forms of management control, which also involves more personal, value dependent or attitudinal forms of engagement between buyer and seller, exist within the sector.

Capitalism converts independent producers into dependent workers whose only means of livelihood is selling their labour power for a wage through the labour market. Braverman (1974) devotes a large part of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* to exploring the spread of waged labour, and especially the change in the United States workforce from independent small farmers into waged workers, and then from working as an autonomous skilled craftsmen to working as a more dependent unskilled worker. Applied to creative industries, we can see two processes in operation: firstly, the retention of the independent producer 'class' within this sector, and the absence of the waged labour form as applied in mass production or mass service industries. Producers remain as independent contractors, who through managing

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agents and other networks have market forms of short-term exchanges with production companies, or purchasers of their services. In other words the waged labour form is weakly developed. Secondly, the 'de-bureaucratisation' and contractualisation of creative industry hierarchies that were previously centres of waged labour forms of contracting and have now undergone retrenchment, delaying and downsizing. This has the effect of transforming former employees – who had salaries, access to internal training rights, job ladders, pensions etc – into independent producers or small production companies. The *marketisation* of the BBC or ITV companies has involved this process. In the film industry it happened several decades before, as the studio system disintegrated (Caves, 2000: 87–102). In the music industry it began to collapse in the 1950s before re-establishing in the late 1960s (Perrow, 1986: 183–9). The change here is one of moving away from salaried or waged forms and exchange within an internal market, towards a network or external market of competing and numerous small companies or contractors.

One of the reasons for studying the creative industries is that they exemplify forms of labour contracting, management control and firm organisation that have broken free of sector constraints and entered more mainstream organisations as a viable way of putting the firm together. Hence in a simple sense there are lessons to be learnt from this sector for organisations in general and the management of the labour process in particular.

One striking example of the marketisation of a creative industry is British television broadcasting. The BBC signalled the shift to marketisation with the introduction of Producer Choice. Market rhetoric was paralleled by the introduction of more fine-grained management accounting systems in the mid-1990s that reached from Corporation's apex to the individual project. Historically, slack budgeting using broad categories was deployed at the level of the programme division rather than the individual production. More than this, despite a McKinsey inspired divisionalisation in the mid-1970s, producers had been able to exercise considerable autonomy in moving resources between different budget headings or even between projects (Burns, 1977; Lury, 1993). The tighter financial controls imported by the new accounting system clashed with the established 'redistributive, compensatory logics' of programme makers. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the depth of this marketisation of the BBC's cultural bureaucracy (Born, 2004: 115).

For more than a year, parallel processes of financial management coexisted. The accountants championed the new framing and planning procedures; the department managers and their teams continued to employ their redistributive, compensatory logics. The drama department heads, their executive producers and producers continued to work with the original

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teams, and successful efforts were made to isolate and freeze out the new accountants; while on their part, the management accountants and cost controllers tried determinedly to exert their authority and controls. The bizarre stand-off was manifest at lunchtimes in the cafeteria. One or two tables would be occupied by a group of unfashionably dressed people, among them a number of young British Asians. These were the outcasts from Drama Finance, invariably hunched together laughing, orderly but defiant. They were ignored by the rest of the lunchtime crowd, whose behaviour made it clear that the accountants lacked the cultural élan to become truly part of Drama Group.

Within a year, however, the new accounting system was sufficiently embedded in the BBC to withstand such local resistance. The budgetary – and ideological – revolution heralded by Producer Choice resulted in and partly legitimised departmental closures (Born, 2004: 107–9, 126). It is not that the language of competition and markets wholly displaced the Corporation's Reithian mission or staff allegiance to the ethos of public sector broadcasting. Rather, it is that public sector broadcasting was no longer sufficient justification on its own but had also to secure legitimacy in terms of efficiency and competitiveness.

The profound casualisation of British broadcasting has triggered – suggests Starkey *et al* (2000) – the emergence of 'the latent organization', a form of organisation that both transcends and incorporates 'hierarchy' and 'network' forms. While 'the latent organization' is a term that captures the rapid diffusion of technical and 'business' knowledge across the sector, it singularly fails to register that first generation production companies and contractors were drawing upon the shared repertoires they had developed while employed by the BBC and commercial broadcasters (McKinlay and Quinn, 1998; Dex *et al* 1998; Ursell, 1998; Paterson, 2001; Wittel *et al*, 2002). While it is unclear how durable these repertoires have proven, some commercial broadcasters – faced with severe and chronic skill shortages and severe wage inflation – have cautiously reversed the powerful trend towards outsourcing by increasing their 'core' technical workforces precisely because of their need for (Tempest *et al* 2004; Saundry, 1998). As in British film, the social networks that traverse the broadcasting labour markets are not just vital coping mechanisms but also important mechanisms for ensuring the continued viability of labour processes of the main broadcasters. Similar patterns of acute labour shortages and insecure employment are unfolding across Europe as broadcasters move for professional bureaucracies to 'lean' models (Sydow and Starber, 2002). But as McRobbie (2002: 519) cautions, in the speeded up world of the cultural sector, the demands of sustaining a constant performance of self-promotion, with few mechanisms for solidaristic organisation

and no fixed workplace, informal networking is unlikely to generate any durable collective responses to profound employment insecurity.

### Control: managing creative labourers

What forms of labour *control* characterise the creative industries? Superficially there is a strong identification between the worker (musician, writer or artist) and both their 'means of production' and the product of their labour, such that levels of self-motivation are extremely high, and the need for external supervision and work pacing may not exist or be marginal to the process of adding value in the industry. Interior or normative discipline seems most evident in the sector, but market forces, peer-pressure and performance targets are also apparent, and these kinds of control would seem common to other forms of employment, and therefore fashion bridges between creative and other industries.

Labour within a capitalist economy, regardless of the degree of intensity between creative and routine elements, exists to serve the purpose of producing a surplus for the hirer or capitalist. The purpose of labour power or services is to provide both utility *and* value, in order for money to be made. Within commodity production, and the employment relationship, labour is the creative component, but also the problematical element. While wages may be known (or are determinate), the performance of the particular individual for those wages cannot be known in advance, as labour is indeterminate, and exists as a mere capability that requires motivation (control, cajoling and commitment) to be productive. The individual cannot be manipulated in the same way as other non-human 'elements' of production, such as machinery, which can be bought and sold at the will of the owner. Human labour (time and capability) is hired, not bought outright, hence the purchaser is required to establish a *social relationship* with the hired worker in order for purposeful and productive work to be realised. In creative industries, labour may need to be 'controlled' or managed in different ways from mass production or repeat production settings. This is because the value of the individual worker may be higher as they are hard or impossible to replace (due to the function of individual asset specificity or unique individual skills), and therefore ownership relations are more complex.

Control is a central concept in labour process analysis. It is derived from the nature of labour as a productive resource, and what is referred to as the indeterminacy of labour power, that is as discussed above, the uncertainty of the return to the hirer of labour services of predictable revenue or product, and the requirement for management to ensure that hired labour is productively utilised. The control function is *one* part of management for classical theorists, but the *central* function for labour process writers, the *raison*

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*d'être* for management agency in the firm. This is evident in the hierarchical ordering of most work organisations, of the control invested in the design of jobs, through technology pacing of work for example. Supervisors or team leaders not only co-ordinate, but ensure that workers work with purpose during the working day.

The means of control in creative industries reflects the character of the sector so far described. Labour market pressures to access the industry ensures high self-motivation for those working, as the weight from the mass reserve army of unemployed (and under-employed) actors or musicians is acutely felt by the working individual. Self-motivation and control is also high due to the identification between the individual and the product or creative process, such that considerable pleasure and satisfaction is derived from working hard and productively. Normative or value control evident in other occupations is magnified in this sector. Finally, self identification and occupational identification are strong in the sector, and the prestige, status and glamour attached to many creative occupations in public perception and media interest reinforces the emotional and personal attachment between the individual and their work.

Perhaps the most striking features of the creative economy are the continuation of the deeply held attachment to a form of *gift economy*. It is not that workers in the digital economy are having their knowledge wrested from them and bitterly resent excessive hours and constant demands upon technical and aesthetic skills. Rather, as Terranova (2000: 37) argues:

the end of the factory has spelled out the obsolescence of the old working class, but it has also produced generations of workers who have been repeatedly addressed as active consumers of meaningful commodities. Free labour is the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities are pleurably embraced and at the same time shamelessly exploited.

We can contest the Italian autonomists notions of the 'social factory' and 'immaterial labour', but still acknowledge that 'creative labour' is not duped or coerced by management but typically *engages* with the production process and is profoundly attached to the integrity of the product (McRobbie, 1998, 2000; Ursell, 2000). The profundity of this attachment is signified by extraordinary displays of commitment and pleasure: extremely long working days combined with the acknowledgement of poor or no pay and uncertain career prospects. This contrast between an awareness of the precarious nature of employment and careers in the creative industries is used to underscore the depth of the individual's attachment to their aesthetic practice. For advertising practitioners, for example, uncertain employment combines with an

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equally uncertain professional status to produce an intense form of self-scrutiny, a critical evaluation of their work relationships, and a profound unease about their work identities (Alvesson, 1994: 545, 558; Cronin, 2004; Nixon and Crewe, 2004: 142–3).

Unlike manufacturing or routine service work, the moment of production is difficult to monitor, far less to evaluate or codify. This is clearest during live radio or television broadcasts. Organisational logics – structures, budgets and performance measures – are of no consequence to work in practice. Formally distinct roles – director, vision mixer, floor manager – overlap as tasks become less differentiated. Coordination is achieved not through the articulation of formal roles and responsibilities but via gestures, signals, looks and routines (see Glevarec, 1999: 287–90). Such production processes are coordinated by interpersonal exchanges rather than managerial direction. Indeed, the intimacy of such coordination renders it – temporarily – both *opaque* and *impervious* to formal management control. Similarly, through the mid-1990s, despite major investments in understanding the creative moment – driven by tight markets and margins – advertising agencies remain under-managed organisations. Several London agencies dissolved the relationship between status, function and space to maximise the frequency, diversity and rapidity of interaction between all types of staff (Nixon, 2003: 52–6).

Nor does the opacity of production depend upon the labour process being confined to a single space. The importance of place in the creative industries has been highlighted by the research of social geographers into the emergence of new media companies and their interaction with clients. Place remains vital not just in establishing pools of skilled labour but also permitted San Francisco's new media companies to develop the 'studio model' in which management overcomes the small-scale of the individual firm through building project teams (Pratt, 2002: 40–1). During the new media boom of the late 1990s the lack of standardised protocols for project management and the permanently unfinished product development was reflected in organisational practices:

In the dizzyingly fluid environment in which new media evolve, organisational practices are driven by the imperatives of bricolage, improvisation, self-organisation, and adaptability. Problem definition and goal setting are shared and symptomatically involve constant negotiation and recalibration. Instead of a strictly sequential work process, with central subsystems defining the boundary conditions for the subsequent design of subordinate components, separate project teams subsystems concurrently (Grabher, 2002: 1911, 1913).

The technical and business uncertainty of the web products and services resulted in close, intense co-production by client and producer (Wittel *et al*,

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2002). Inside new media firms, the inter-penetration of design and execution, relentless redesign, and the radical form of simultaneous engineering involved in product development and delivery resulted in constant re-negotiation as these parallel labour processes jostled for priority, without clear, directive organisational direction or structure. Longitudinal studies of London and New York new media firms have charted significant shifts in their competitive strategies, organisational structures, and internal management processes (Lash and Wittel, 2002; Girard and Stark, 2002). Successful survivors from the new media boom have moved from direct providers of new media products towards consultancy services and close relationships with relatively few clients. Organisationally, new media firms moved from heterarchy towards hierarchy and increasingly controlled, more linear labour processes.

### Conclusion

Let us return to our three themes. A consistent feature of the labour of creative labour, narrowly defined, is its opaque nature. The process of creative labour is often difficult for management to monitor and observe, far less to codify and control. The dynamics of skill are also distinctive in two ways. First, skills are highly socialised in that they rely on the imaginative borrowing from other areas of life, not just other art forms, youth cultures, or historical genres. This is true for 'creatives' in advertising or in film or music. The idea of work as 'life style' rather than economic action rigidly divided from a non-work sphere is important here. Skills are also, secondly, highly socialised at the moment of production. Jazz improvisation, so often a motif used to capture the improvisational capability required of post-bureaucratic organisations, relies upon a prior and shared mastery of standard tunes. Only this collective control of a standard repertoire allows improvisation to break from these conventions. In film and television, similarly, technical crews' shared technical background allows them to work effectively in short-cycle project teams and to work at the interface of the technical and the aesthetic. In film, television and advertising the introduction of new technologies has not displaced these collective, highly tacit skills, although they have shifted the balance between preparation and the quick decision-making during the production and editing. The overlap between aesthetic, commercial and technical decision-making remains a distinctive feature of creative labour.

If continuity is a major theme of creative labour processes, then with few exceptions, the labour markets for creative labour have experienced major shifts as major cultural organisations have progressively marketised and outsourced their operations. Again, these changes are evident across the creative sectors. Chronic insecurity and limited controls on entry to creative labour

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markets have weakened trade unions and increased the vital importance of social networks in finding jobs and building reputations. There may be exceptions to this move to market, Haunschild's (2003) research on German repertory theatres reveals a stable 'employment system', underpinned by state funding, collective bargaining and functioning 'rules of the game' in which employment is more secure. But he acknowledges that this is exceptional, and the embracing of short-term and dynamic networks remains more typical of creative labour in theatre and film elsewhere. But his work does serve to underline the importance of the societal contexts for industries, including creative industries, and the institutional variations that can flow from the embedding of labour within different state and cultural contexts. Our paper has aimed at a broader argument, but would not wish to discount this layer of meaning and diversity.

Finally, the dominant strategy for management is that which allows the organisation to mobilise the deep attachment displayed by creative labour to the product. The paradox is that management cannot be content with simply assembling crews for different projects and setting broad parameters. In films, television, advertising and web production, firms have not just experimented with different organisational forms but also invested heavily – if sporadically – in attempting to monitor, cost, and control the creative labour process itself. It is not so much that the creative industries are impervious to deskilling, but that Taylorism would so severely damage the very creativity it was attempting to control.

### Note

- 1 Indeed Hollywood writers and actors have been exercising the collective voice in 2007–8 with major industrial disputes, emphasising the 'worker' element of their position.

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