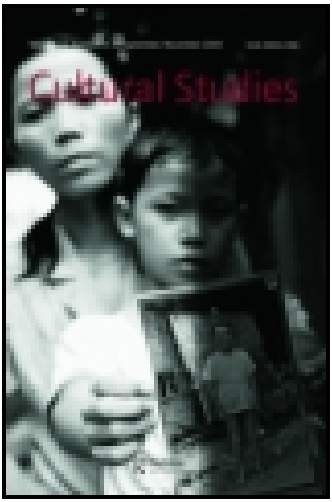

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CLUBS TO COMPANIES: NOTES ON THE DECLINE OF POLITICAL CULTURE IN SPEEDED UP CREATIVE WORLDS

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CLUBS TO COMPANIES: NOTES ON THE DECLINE OF POLITICAL CULTURE IN SPEEDED UP CREATIVE WORLDS

Abstract

This article proposes a recent acceleration in the nature and pace of work and employment in the UK culture industries. Multi-skilling and de-specialization are a result of growth, change and competition in the arts and media sector. Creative work increasingly follows the neo-liberal model, governed by the values of entrepreneurialism, individualization and reliance on commercial sponsorship. One consequence for the relatively youthful workforce is the decline of workplace democracy and its replacement by 'network sociality', which in turn is influenced by the lingering impact of dance and club culture. Independent work finds itself squeezed, compromised or brokered by the venture capitalists of culture as government encourages the 'freedom' allowed by this kind of labour.

Keywords

culture industries; club culture; network sociality; individualization; incubator

The 'Arts Labs' of the new cultural economy

Creative Industry Sectors as defined in Creative Industries Mapping Document,

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(DCMS, 1998): music, performing arts, publishing software, TV and radio, film, designer fashion, advertising, arts and antiques, crafts, design, architecture, interactive leisure software.

Cultural Entrepreneur Club (initiative led by ICA, London, Nesta, Arts Council England, Goldsmiths College London and Cap Gemini Ernst and Young, 2000): selected 'new job' titles of 400 invited members including arts promoter, incubator, consultancy for inventor, cultural strategist, multimedia artist, visual support consultant, media initiatives and relationships, digital design consultant, branding and communications, arts in business consultants, art-to-go sales, events organizer, new media agent, net casting/e label/cdrom, music portal, dance/music/youth culture, bio-entrepreneur.[1]

THIS ARTICLE PROVIDES a preliminary and thus provisional account of some of the defining characteristics of work and employment in the new cultural sector of the UK economy, and in London in particular.[2] It also describes a transition from what can be labeled 'first wave' culture industry work as defined by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's creative industries document published in 1998 (see above) to the more economically highly-charged and rapidly mutating 'second wave' of cultural activity that has come into being in the last three years. This latter development is marked by de-specialization, by intersection with Internet working, by the utilizing of creative capacities provided by new media, by the rapid growth of multi-skilling in the arts field, by the shrunken role of the sector that I would describe as the 'independents', by a new partnership between arts and business with public sector support, and by government approval as evident in the most recently published Green Paper from the DCMS (2001).[3] (For new job titles see above). The 'second wave' comes into being as a consequence of the more rapid capitalization of the cultural field as small scale previously independent micro-economies of culture and the arts find themselves the subject of intense commercial interest.

The expansion of these sections of employment also brings about, for a more substantial number of people, a decisive break with past expectations of work.[4] Given the extensive press and television coverage of these kinds of work, a wider section of the population has available to it new ideas about how working lives can or might now be conducted. Through the profusion of profiles and interviews with hairdressers, cooks, artists and fashion designers, the public (especially young people) are presented with endless accounts of the seemingly inherent rewards of creative labour.[5] The flamboyantly *auteur* relation to creative work that has long been the mark of being a writer, artist, film director or fashion designer is now being extended to much wider section of a highly 'individuated' workforce. The media has always glamorized creative individuals as uniquely talented 'stars'. It is certainly not the case that now, in post-industrial Britain, people genuinely have the chance to fulfil their creative dreams. Rather it is the

case that there is a double process of individualization. First, this occurs in the obsessive celebrity culture of the commercial media, now thoroughly extended to artists, designers and other creative personnel, and second in the social structure itself, as people are increasingly disembedded from ties of kinship, community and social class. They are, in a de-regulated environment, 'set free', as Giddens would put it, from both workplace organizations and from social institutions (Giddens, 1991).

What individualization means sociologically is that people increasingly have to become their own micro-structures, they have to do the work of the structures by themselves, which in turn requires intensive practices of self-monitoring or 'reflexivity'. This process where structures (like the welfare state) seem to disappear and no longer play their expected roles, and where individuals are burdened by what were once social responsibilities, marks a quite profound social transformation as Bauman, Beck and others have argued (Bauman, 1999, 2000; Beck, 2000). In the British context, this process of individualization could summarily be defined as the convergence of the forcefulness of neo-liberal economics put in place by the Thatcher government from 1979 onwards, with mechanisms of social and demographic change that result in new social groupings replacing traditional families, communities and class formations. Individualization is not about individuals *per se*, as about new, more fluid, less permanent social relations seemingly marked by choice or options. However, this convergence has to be understood as one of contestation and antagonism. Individualization thus marks a space of social conflict, it is where debates about the direction of change are played out and where new contradictions arise. This is most apparent in the world of work since it is here that the convergence is most dramatically configured. Capital finds novel ways of offloading its responsibility for a workforce, but this relinquishing process is confronted no longer by traditional and organized 'labour'. Instead, the new conditions of work are largely being experienced by 'new labour'. By this I mean those sections of the working population for whom work has become an important source for self-actualization, even freedom and independence. This includes women for whom work is an escape from traditional marriage and domesticity, young people for whom it is increasingly important as a mark of cultural identity, and ethnic minorities for whom it marks the dream of upward mobility and a possible escape from denigration.

The cultural sphere provides an ideal space for young people to explore such individualized possibilities, just as it also offers the Government opportunities for a post-industrialized economy unfettered by the constraints and costs of traditional employment. The impact of this intersection accounts for what I want to propose here as an acceleration in the cultural realm. There is a much expanded workforce comprising of freelance, casualized and project-linked persons, and there is also a more fiercely neo-liberal model in place with the blessings of government for overseeing the further de-regulation and commercialization of the cultural and creative sector (DCMS, 2001). The culture

industries are being 'speeded up' and further capitalized as the state steps back and encourages the privatization of previously publicly subsidized cultural provision. (For example, by buying in freelance arts administrators for single projects, rather than employing full time staff.) Those working in the creative sector cannot simply rely on old working patterns associated with art worlds, they have to find new ways of 'working' the new cultural economy, which increasingly means holding down three or even four 'projects' at once.[6] In addition, since these projects are usually short term, there have to be other jobs to cover the short-fall when a project ends. The individual becomes his or her own enterprise, sometimes presiding over two separate companies at the one time.[7] To sum up, if we consider the creative industries in the UK as a kind of experimental site, or case study, or indeed 'arts lab' for testing out the possibilities for 'cultural entrepreneurialism' (see Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999), then I would suggest that we can also see a shift from first to second wave that in turn (ironically) marks the decline of 'the indies' (the independents), the rise of the creative subcontractor and the downgrading of creativity.

On the guest list? Club culture sociality at work

Given the ongoing nature of these developments, the authorial voice of the following pages is tentative in that I am drawing on observations and trends emerging from my current work in progress on this topic. I propose a number of intersecting and constitutive features. First, imported into the creative sector are elements of youth culture, in particular those drawn from the energetic and entrepreneurial world of dance and rave culture. Second, the realm of 'speeded up' work in the cultural sector now requires the holding down of several jobs at the one time; third, that such working conditions are also reliant on intense self promotional strategies, and, as in any business world, on effective 'public relations', and fourth, that where there is a new relation of time and space there is little possibility of a politics of the workplace. That is, there is little time, few existing mechanisms for organization, and anyway no fixed workplace for a workplace politics to develop. This throws into question the role and function of 'network sociality' (Wittel, 2002). Thus fifth and finally, we can see a manifest tension for new creative workers, highly reliant on informal networking but without the support of these being underpinned by any institutional 'trade association'. They can only find individual (or 'biographical' as Beck puts it) solutions to systemic problems (Beck, 1997).

The dance/rave culture that came into being in the late 1980s as a mass phenomenon has strongly influenced the shaping and contouring, the energizing and entrepreneurial character of the new culture industries. The scale and spread of this youth culture meant that it was more widely available than its more clandestine, rebellious, 'underground' and style-driven predecessors, including

punk. The level of self-generated economic activity that 'dance-party-rave' organizations entailed, served as a model for many of the activities that were a recurrent feature of 'creative Britain' in the 1990s. Find a cheap space, provide music, drinks, video, art installations, charge friends and others on the door, learn how to negotiate with police and local authorities and in the process become a club promoter and cultural entrepreneur. This kind of activity was to become a source of revenue for musicians and DJs first, but soon afterwards for artists. It has meant that the job of 'events organizer' is one of the more familiar of new self-designated job titles. The form of club sociality that grew out of the ecstasy-influenced 'friendliness' of the clubbing years gradually evolved into a more hard-nosed networking, so that an informal labour market has come into being which takes as its model the wide web of contacts, 'zines', flyers, 'mates', grapevine and 'word of mouth' socializing that was also a distinctive feature of the 'micro-media' effects of club culture (Thornton, 1996). The intoxicating pleasures of leisure culture have now, for a sector of the under 35s, provided the template for managing an identity in the world of work. Apart from the whole symbolic panoply of jargon, clothes, music and identity, the most noted feature of this phenomenon was the extraordinary organizational capacity in the setting up and publicizing of 'parties'. Now that the existence of raves and dance parties has become part of the wider cultural landscape – having secured the interest and investment of major commercial organizations – it is easy to overlook the energy and dynamism involved in making these events happen in the first place. But the formula of organizing music, dance, crowd and space have subsequently proved to give rise to 'transferable skills', which in turn transform the cultural sector as it is also being opened up to a wider, younger and more popular audience.[8]

The example of the shaping-up influence of club culture, therefore, sets the scene for this article. And where patterns of self employment or informal work are the norm, what emerges is a radically different kind of labour market organization. While the working practices of graphic designers, website designers, events organizers, 'media office' managers and so on inevitably share some features in common with previous models of self-employed or freelance working, we can propose that where in the past the business side of things was an often disregarded aspect of creative identities best looked after by the accountant, now it is perceived as integral and actively incorporated into the artistic identity. This is illustrated in the activities of the young British artists for whom the commercial aspect of the art world is no longer disparaged but is welcomed and even celebrated. Mentor and tutor to the Goldsmiths graduates (including Damien Hirst), Professor Michael Craig Martin reputedly encouraged the students to consider the partying and networking they had to do to promote their art as a vital part of the work, not as something separate.[9] He also insisted that artistic values were not incommensurate with entrepreneurial values. To some extent this more openly commercial approach is also part of the logic of breaking

down the divide between high and low culture. If, for example, art is not such a special and exceptional activity, if it ought not to see itself as superior to the world of advertising, then what is to stop the artists from expecting the same kind of financial rewards, expense accounts and fees as the art directors inside the big agencies? The new relation between art and economics marks a break with past anti-commercial notions of being creative. Instead young people have exploited opportunities around them, in particular their facilities with new media technology and the experience of 'club culture sociality' with its attendant skills of networking and selling the self and have created for themselves new ways of earning a living in the cultural field.

In this creative economy, older features of working life such as the career pathway, the ladder of promotion, the 'narrative sociality' of a life spent in a stratified but secure workplace have been rapidly swept away to be replaced by 'network sociality' (Wittel, 2002). Work has been re-invented to satisfy the needs and demands of a generation who, 'disembedded' from traditional attachments to family, kinship, community or region, now find that work must become a fulfilling mark of self. In this context, more and more young people opt for the insecurity of careers in media, culture or art in the hope of success. In fields like film-making or fashion design there is a euphoric sense among practitioners of by-passing tradition, pre-empting conscription into the dullness of 9–5 and evading the constraints of institutional processes. There is a utopian thread embedded in this wholehearted attempt to make-over the world of work into something closer to a life of enthusiasm and enjoyment. We could also note that for young women, now entering into the labour market as a lifelong commitment instead of a part-time or interrupted accompaniment to family life as a primary career, the expectation that work is satisfying and inherently rewarding has a special significance alongside the need now to be one's own breadwinner.[10]

To have seemingly circumvented 'unhappy work' and to have come upon a way of earning a living without the feeling of being robbed of identity is a social phenomenon worthy of sociological attention. But the larger question of course is how this fits with the needs of a form of cultural capitalism that is currently re-inventing itself as innocuous or 'soft', at least in its Western forms. For the young woman fashion designer working 18 hour days and doing her own sewing to complete an order, 'loving' her work but self-exploiting herself, she only has herself to blame if things go wrong. After all she opted for this kind of unstable career choice.[11] This is exactly the scenario described by Bauman in his description of the stealthy ways in which the new capitalism seems to absolve itself from responsibility by creating invisible structures, and by melting down or liquefying the old social order (Baumann, 1999). Self blame, where social structures are increasingly illegible or opaque, serves the interests of the new capitalism well, ensuring the absence of social critique.

A further defining feature of new cultural work is that its 'time and space' dynamics contribute to a marked absence of workplace politics in terms of

democratic procedures, equal opportunities, anti-discrimination policies and so on. Maybe there can be no workplace politics when there is no workplace, i.e. where work is multi-sited. The necessity of speed and the velocity of transaction, along with the mobility and fluidity of individuals, throws into question a defining feature of this kind of work. This is its relation to the idea of 'reflexivity'. Underpinning both Giddens' and Beck's deployment of the concept is a traditional notion of the unified subject increasingly able – indeed called upon – to undertake self monitoring activities. But in both writers' use of the term, reflexivity has retained an abstract character, requiring us to ask, what are the limits of reflexive practice? Is reflexivity applied primarily to the job in hand? Or to put it another way, the socially valuable outcome of reflexivity is yet to reveal itself. We would need some ethnographies of reflexivity before it would be possible to draw any conclusions, or indeed before the actual mechanisms of reflexivity could be assessed. What are its parameters? Under what circumstances does it lead to social critique? If we alternately consider reflexivity as a form of self disciplining where subjects of the new enterprise culture are increasingly called upon to inspect themselves and their practices, in the absence of structures of social support (other than individualized counseling services), then reflexivity marks the space of self responsibility, self blame. In this sense, it is a de-politicizing, de-socializing mechanism: 'Where have I gone wrong?'

One way of explaining how and why things go wrong might involve turning to sociology. And, indeed, having recourse to specialist knowledge is how Beck understands reflexivity as operating. For him it is related to the wider dissemination and application of sophisticated sociological knowledge to the issues that sociology (or another academic field) has engaged with, usually as social problems and attempted to explain. (In the UK this is most apparent in the concept of the 'moral panic' in relation to youth culture; see McRobbie and Thornton, 1995.) Thus with an increasingly higher-educated population it might be surmised that critical reflexivity becomes a more widespread practice. But how does this tally with Bauman's argument that the more opaque the social structures of inequality and injustice, the less likely people are to understand how the society actually operates. At present, there is no obvious point of entrance for sociological explanations into these creative sectors since the trade media that covers these industries considers such knowledge as old fashioned or irrelevant. This is partly the result of the pervasive success of neo-liberal values, their insinuating presence in the culture and media sector, and their successful discrediting of the political vocabulary associated with the left and with feminism (including equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, workplace democracy, trade union representation, etc.). The only site for the dissemination of these values is the academy, the place of training or education of the creatives. But whether or not these are remembered or acted upon or cast aside is an open question. Only anecdotal evidence exists.[12]

The extent to which the new world of work contributes directly to the

decline of political antagonism is a clear gain for the free market economy. In the cultural sector, with its emphasis on the creative and expressive, it might be imagined that this could be the right place for social minorities to succeed and for women to achieve equal participation. However it seems possible that quite the opposite is happening. What we see – in as much as it is possible to track these developments – is the emergence of working practices which reproduce older patterns of marginalization (of women and people from different ethnic backgrounds), while also disallowing any space or time for such issues to reach articulation.[13] In this case the club culture question of 'are you on the guest list?' is extended to recruitment and personnel, so that getting an interview for contract creative work depends on informal knowledge and contacts, often friendships. Once in the know about who to approach (the equivalent of finding where the party is being held), it is then a matter of whether the recruitment advisor 'likes you' (the equivalent of the bouncer 'letting you in'), and all ideas of fairness or equal representation of women or of black or Asian people (not to mention the disabled) fly out of the window.

In this new and so-called independent sector (see Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999) there is less and less time left in the long hours culture to pursue 'independent work'. The recent attempts by the large corporations to innovate in this sector means that the independents are, in effect, dependent sub-contracted suppliers. And where such contracts are to be had, in a context of increasing competition, it is hard to imagine that there is time and space for private reading never mind wider critical debate. (As Lash and Urry comment, 'information technology can . . . erode the critical crafts of reading and writing. What Agger calls 'fast capitalism' undermines the power of the book', (1994: 324).) And after-hours, in the dedicated club/networking space, with free vodka on tap all night thanks to the sponsorship of the big drinks companies, who dares to ask 'uncool' questions about the minimal representation of women and non-white young people, about who the big clients are and what they do with the product, and about the downside of the 'talent-led' economy? In an atmosphere of businesslike conviviality overseen by accomplished 'PRs', the emphasis on presentation of self is incompatible with a contestatory demeanour. It's not cool to be 'difficult'. Personal angst, nihilism or mere misgivings must be privately managed and, for the purposes of club sociality, carefully concealed.[14] This is a 'PR' meritocracy where the question of who gets ahead on what basis and who is left behind finds no space for expression. Speed and risk negate ethics, community and politics.

The demise of the indies?

Given the picture that I have been sketching, it is incumbent upon social scientists and cultural studies academics to develop a vocabulary and a methodology

for tracing freelance pathways in the cultural sector. We need to be able to understand at the level of experience how this terrain is negotiated. There remains a chasm of difference between middle-aged academics for whom the university sector has provided a single sourced income more or less since graduation, and young people whose portfolio careers increasingly mean not serial jobs but multi-tasking. The latter becomes necessary partly because there is no cushion of welfare to cover periods between jobs, also because labour costs are falling in the cultural sector, and finally because creative work, as various studies have shown, is simply low pay work except for those at the very top.[15] Since 1998 I have been engaged in a tracking research study of freelance, self employed and contract creative workers (a handful of whom are fashion designers who participated in my earlier study (see McRobbie, 1998)). For them the kind of conditions which prevailed in the 'independent' cultural scene in London and in other UK cities between 1986–1996 are very much a thing of the past. Despite the hardship faced by the fashion designers I interviewed, including the long hours and the difficulties of maintaining a cash flow, the luxury they had, as my more recent respondents see it, was of being able to concentrate on their 'own work'. This sector of independent fashion design has been swept away as the high street chains are able to translate the catwalk styles into off the peg items literally within days. Likewise with the spiraling of urban property values there are fewer opportunities for finding cheap centrally located market stalls. By the end of the 1990s the only way to be 'independent' was to be 'dependent' on Kookai, Debenhams, Top Shop. Indeed the only way fashion design could survive was to sign up with a bigger company and more or less relinquish 'creative independence'. The corrosion of creativity was further achieved as the chain stores 'adopted' less than a handful of graduate stars a year and often discarded them within the year. State support for young and struggling designers working from tiny outlets is no longer available following changes to the benefits system. Voluntary sector support is also limited. The Prince of Wales Trust, for example, only offers a loan scheme for up to £5,000 for the under 30s. As a consequence fashion designers become a scattered and disconnected profession. They can no longer be found in key city centre locations. The small shops are all gone. An important outlet like Hyper Hyper, a unit space for up and coming designers situated in Kensington High Street, London disappeared in 1998. What now happens to the annual crop of 4,000 fashion graduates who relied on this kind of space? The answer is that they are now advised to play safe and get a job with a high street retailer. A tiny number are recruited by the European fashion houses or by the American conglomerates, and one or two are awarded grants. Hence I think we can surmise that there is a decline in creativity, as the incubation period that was documented in my earlier research becomes increasingly unviable. There is nothing like the vibrancy and the collective (and competitive) spirit which characterized the earlier period. Fashion design graduates today must become multi-skilled. If they are doing a collection it will be at weekends, or perhaps in the odd day they can

find between other jobs. Typically magazines like *i-D* find ways of celebrating this new scenario. In a recent article published in the magazine, the journalist wrote, 'Fashion multi-taskers: suddenly they're everywhere. . . . And its addictive. Once you've tried doing four jobs you'll never want anything less. . . . It's no longer necessary to be a full time anything to be successful and respected' (Rushton, 2001).

The substance and tone of this article reflects the kind of upbeat business-minded euphoria which is a characteristic of the sector. So much for reflexivity. When it is inconceivable that the main trade magazine shows itself capable of seriously reflecting on conditions in the sector, then magazines like *The Face, i-D* and *Dazed and Confused* demonstrate themselves to be remarkably disengaged and complicit with the changes affecting the industry. These changes come from the increased presence of the big brands. The large companies need to innovate and to develop a more experimental youth-driven image and this is provided by the second wave of young cultural entrepreneurs hiring out their services on a contractual basis. But what is squeezed out in this process is independence and socially engaged, critical creativity. The same is true for many other of the creative sectors. Freelance economies in the field of film or video production cannot, for example, take the strain of turning down work to free up time to make, let us say, a short documentary film uncommissioned and with no apparent destination. Instead cultural production is increasingly driven by the imperatives of market and consumer culture, and the banality of pop promos, TV and cinema advertising is concealed by the technological euphoria, the association of newness and youthfulness, and of course by the parties, the celebrity culture and the cheque in the post. Granted there are still fashion designers, architects, writers, musicians and other creative occupations, but being a specialist rather than a multi-skilled 'creative' is becoming a thing of the past and a mark of being over 35.[16] The norm now is a kind of middle class 'ducking and diving'. In the shift from the first to the second wave of creative economy in the New Labour enterprise culture, the kind of small scale economies of the decade from the mid 1980s to mid 1990s have all but disappeared. Thus we could say that the cultural entrepreneurialization set in motion during the Thatcher years has in the Blair period been almost fully accomplished. Of course it is important to avoid a crude determinism. It is not, therefore, my intention to engage here with questions of cultural value, but rather to point to a process of creative compromise. There is more and more culture, more visual work, more novels being published, more music being produced, more magazines being launched and at the same time the shift from there being 'independent work' to there being any number of freelance workers is also a shift in the balance of power from a social 'milieu of innovation' to a world of individual 'projects'.

The loneliness of the long distance incubator

Let me conclude by rehearsing some of the features that serve to consolidate the new (and rarely spoken about) structural divides in the cultural economy. If the club is the hub, then age and domestic responsibilities define patterns of access and participation. While sociologists have pointed to the increasing impact of age in changing labour markets (especially for women; see Walby, 1997) in the creative sector, there is simultaneously a stretching out of the contours of youthfulness (such as 'middle youth') through the marketing of lifestyle goods to the under 50s, and also a retrenchment and re-marking of boundaries, in that the new ways of working bear the hallmark of the rave culture generation. The nighttime economy of club culture translates directly into the long hours culture of new media and creative work. This is obviously incompatible with having children, and certainly incompatible with being, for example, a single parent. Work merges with leisure and when a deadline must be met friends might lend their support and work through the night (McRobbie, 1998). The assumed youthfulness and the impregnable space of the club suggests that these are not such 'open-minded' spaces. Of course, all occupational groups develop their own ways of working, and nor is the club a novelty for artistic and creative persons *per se*. But there is an irony in that alongside the assumed openness of the network, the apparent embrace of non-hierarchical working practices, the various flows and fluidities (see Lash and Urry, 1994), there are quite rigid closures and exclusions. The cultural and creative sectors have in the past in the UK been led and administered by the public sector. Academics have also had a role to play. But a close reading of the recent Green Paper 'Culture and Creativity Ten Years On' (DCMS, 2001) implies that this will change dramatically, as artists and creative individuals are freed from the constraints of bureaucracy and 'red tape'. As the whole sector is more thoroughly entrepreneurialized there will be less need for the infrastructure of state, indeed it is argued that it will be to the advantage of the artists that administration will be cut. The result? Artists and cultural personnel will be free to carry on with what they do unhindered. Academics will be kept well out of the picture, indeed if the recent Cultural Entrepreneur Club is a model, their presence will be occasional and by invitation only. What warrants the presence of those who are not 'good for business'?[17]

The second structural dynamic is that of qualification. The conventions associated with the traditional CV and the job application process are nothing short of overturned in the network culture, and yet patterns do re-emerge. Top or 'branded' universities promise graduates better access to big companies seeking to outsource creative work, and the same holds true for appointments with venture capitalists. Universities and colleges become key sites for developing the social skills for the network (once again often as party organizer), so, for the 45% of young people who at present do not enjoy three years of higher education, this is a further absence of opportunity. (It is also unlikely that mature

students who are concentrated in poorer universities are in the position to immerse themselves in the hedonistic and expensive culture of networking.) Third, there is the spatial dynamic, with only a few urban centres providing anything like the cultural infrastructure for gainful employment in creative fields. With a handful of private–public partnerships now replacing the kind of city cultural policies for regeneration pursued in the 1980s and into the early 1990s, there is the appearance of shadow culture industries in Glasgow, Manchester and Nottingham (all of which are have large student populations) while, as Leadbeater reports (1999), Cardiff Bay has also seen the development of a thriving new media sector. But this leaves vast tracks of the country more or less untouched by the work opportunities provided by the cultural and creative network and it creates an enormous imbalance between London where, at least on the short term, freelance curators and art project managers can have five jobs on the go at once (and thus juggle the bank balance around the cash-flow) and elsewhere where 'portfolio income' is replaced by at best 'one job at a time', usually with spaces of no work in between. (Is London also disembedded and individuated, a city state with its own speeded up economy? What distortions occur as a result of this 'lifted out' status?)

Age, gender, ethnicity, region and family income re-emerge like phantoms (or in Beck's terminology 'zombie concepts', dead but still alive) from the disguised hinterland of this new soft capitalism and add their own weight to the life chances of those who are attempting to make a living in these fields (Beck, 2000). As Adkins (1999) argues, new forms of re-traditionalisation begin to have an impact on the participation of disadvantaged social groups and minorities. Adkins is suggesting that where state provided supports disappear and community weakens, and where individuated persons operate on a more self reliant basis, in this case in the new cultural economy, then there will almost inevitably be a process of having to fall back on traditional forms of support. This can mean a return to more rigid gender roles for women, for example, being excluded from the network because of children, or finding it difficult to avoid reproducing traditionally patriarchal family forms. Such changes are also the result of the double process of neo-liberal successes in the field of work and the negating of the values of the left and the women's movement. Finally there is the sheer incommensurability of working patterns in the creative network with existing official, governmental and social science paradigms. (Even the recent Green Paper fails to appreciate the growth of multi-taskers in the arts.) There is as yet no category for the curator/project manager/artist/website designer who is transparently multi-skilled and ever willing to pick up new forms of expertise, who is also constantly finding new niches for work and thus inventing new jobs for him/herself (e.g. incubator/creative agent), who is highly mobile moving from one job or project to the next, and in the process also moving from one geographical site to the next. Social interaction is fast and fleeting, friendships need to be put on hold, or suspended on trust and when such a non-category of multi-skilled persons is

extended across a whole sector of young working people, there is a sharp sense of transience, impermanence and even solitude (Auge, 1995).

Research on these areas would have to consider the specifically gendered and ethnic consequences of individualization. The existing methodologies of the social sciences might well be brought into crisis by the fluidity and hyper-mobility of these agents. There are a number of other points of tension or ambivalence that also throw our older political paradigms into crisis. In the past I have taken issue with those who have (often with a sneer) considered the ambition and energy, the glamour and desire for success on the part of these young people as evidence of their either being complicit with the aims and ambitions of the project set in motion by Mrs Thatcher, or else of their being ideologically bludgeoned into believing the Hollywood dream (McRobbie, 1999). My argument was that it was quite possible to adhere to principles of social justice, and gender and racial equality while working in the seemingly glamorous world of the culture industries. Of course, in the absence (yet again) of studies that systematically tracked creative employment with political sensibility, my comments were based on working closely with students who would be entering or who already had entered these fields. The accelerated speed of cultural working in the second wave, however, marks an intensification of individualization, a more determined looking out for the self. At this point the possibility of a revived, perhaps reinvented, radical democratic politics that might usefully de-individuate and resocialize the world of creative work is difficult to envisage.

To conclude, if the instruments of the social sciences are challenged by the flows of creative individuals, and likewise the vocabularies of social democratic practice seem ill-equipped for the new mobile work-sites of cultural capitalism, so also is it the case that the identity of these cultural workers as bounded by the characteristics of 'British creativity' is a quite profound misnomer. The creative work that central government in the UK wants to flag up is less British than is assumed.[18] Many are producing for a global market, as mobile subjects the political peculiarities of the nation state begin to look either insular, or restrictive, for example in relation to work practices and migration law. This undermines the value of a vocabulary of political culture bound by nation. The second wavers are redescribing culture and creativity as we know them, transcending and traversing a multiplicity of boundaries that come tumbling down in an 'ecstasy of communication'. We cultural studies academics might teach these young people in the relatively fixed space of the seminar room, but once they enter the world of work, our encounters with 'incubators' and others are increasingly estranged and contingent.

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Notes

1 This is taken from the guest list for the September 2000 meeting of the Cultural Entrepreneurs Club, attended by 325 people and hosted at Channel Four.

2 For London as a global city see Sassen (1995); for cultural economies and urban areas see Scott (2000).

3 By 'independents' I mean small scale micro-economies primarily in music and fashion and related fields, which emerged as post punk phenomena in the mid-1980s in response to unemployment and to government endorsement of 'enterprise culture'. Generally, these groupings presented themselves as radical, critical, innovative and loosely collective, e.g. the fashion duo Body Map, the 'indie' record label Rough Trade and the magazine *The Face* in its early days.

4 The DCMS Mapping Document (1998) indicates employment rates in culture and communication at over 1 million persons, the DCMS Mapping Document of 2001 puts the figure at 1.3 million.

5 In an earlier article on this subject I quoted a hairdresser interviewed in the *Independent* who said he was 'classically trained' (McRobbie, 1999).

6 This kind of comment is emerging from current interviews with respondents working in the cultural sector. They repeatedly tell me of small companies undercutting others by offering virtually no cost for jobs that will help their profile.

7 Another respondent currently runs one tiny TV production company, another media consultancy and alongside this she also teaches two days a week.

8 Rave culture is a much cited influence on the entrepreneurial activities of artists including Damien Hirst.

9 Personal communication from former MA student, Goldsmiths College London.

10 Young women are increasingly encouraged to consider work and employment as lifelong activities as partners can no longer be relied upon as breadwinners.

11 The Minister for Culture Media and Sports the Rt Hon Chris Smith actually suggested in a panel debate (Royal Television Society, February 1999) that the young people working in the industry 'do it because they love it, they know what they are letting themselves in for'.

12 An unexpected consequence of my study of UK fashion designers is that I have been visited by a stream of aspiring young fashion graduates who have come across the book and, as a result, seek my advice.

13 Cultural Entrepreneur Club (September/October/November 2000) comprised of a majority of white males from 'good' universities.
14 This point is made clearly in 'Good character and dressing for success' by Jesh Hanspal, unpublished MA Thesis Goldsmiths College (2000).
15 This is the result in my study McRobbie (1998), and also Ursell (2000).
16 At the above mentioned Cultural Entrepreneurs Club I was introduced to a trained architect working as a time-based arts agent, a photographer working as a curator/administrator and a graphic designer working as a website editor.
17 Again, on both occasions I attended this club I was the only academic present. Unlike the business mentors and venture capitalists also present, I found no immediate role to play other than to talk with former students.
18 The nominations for the Turner Prize 2000 included three non-UK artists, one German, one Dutch and another Japanese all based in London, and two of whom trained in London art colleges. In fact, a pattern is emerging where European and overseas student train in UK art colleges and then go on to enjoy better support for their creative activities from their own governments than is available in the UK. Hence the prominence of the new Dutch, Belgian and South Asian fashion designers.

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