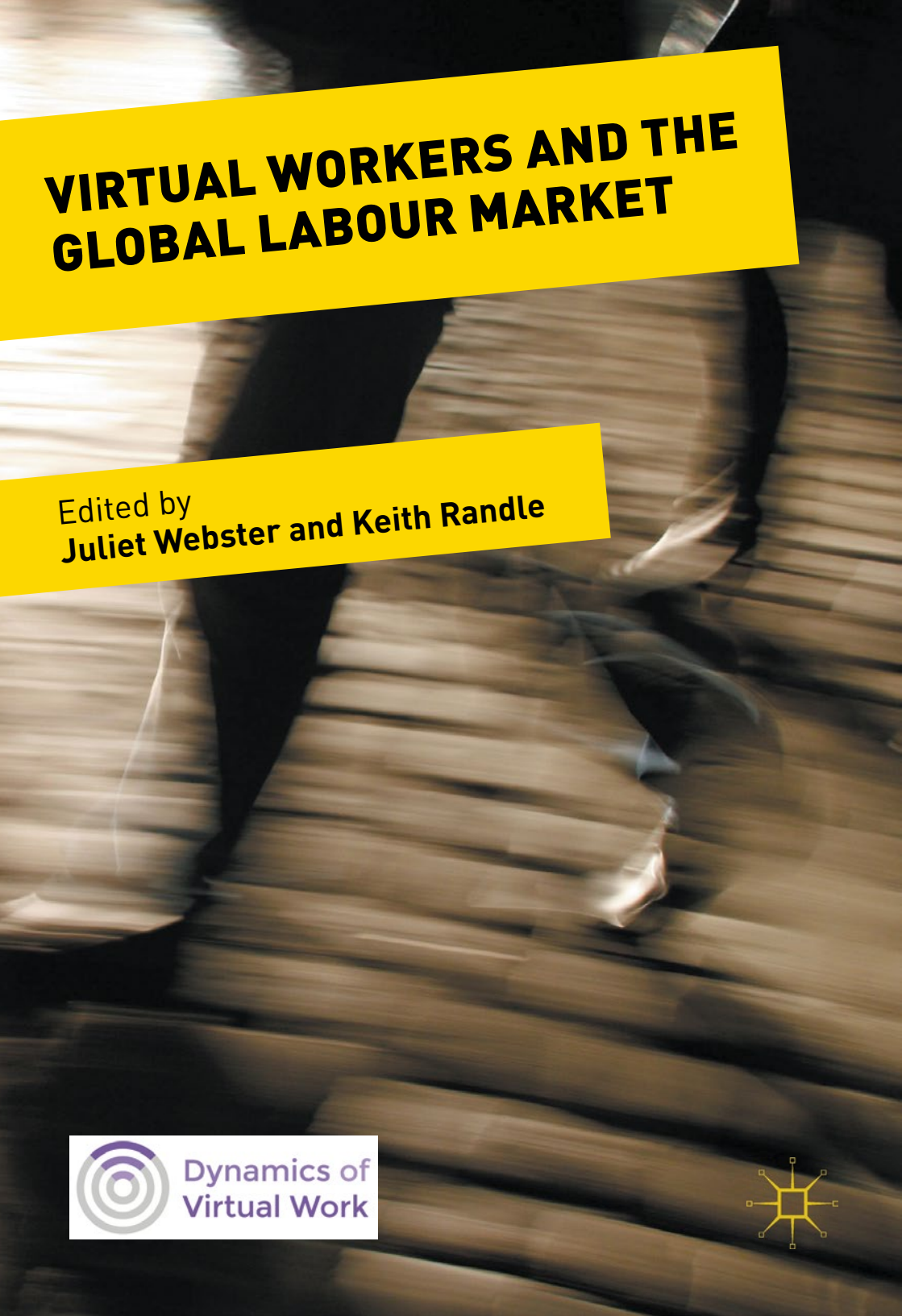
VIRTUAL WORKERS AND THE GLOBAL LABOUR MARKET

Edited by
Juliet Webster and Keith Randle



Dynamics of Virtual Work

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Series Editors: Ursula Huws, Professor of Labour and Globalization at the University of Hertfordshire, UK.

Rosalind Gill, Professor of Cultural and Social Analysis at City University, London, UK.

Technological change has transformed where people work, when and how. Digitisation of information has altered labour processes out of all recognition whilst telecommunications have enabled jobs to be relocated globally. ICTs have also enabled the creation of entirely new types of 'digital' or 'virtual' labour, both paid and unpaid, shifting the borderline between 'play' and 'work' and creating new types of unpaid labour connected with the consumption and co-creation of goods and services. This affects private life as well as transforming the nature of work and people experience the impacts differently depending on their gender, their age, where they live and what work they do. Aspects of these changes have been studied separately by many different academic experts however up till now a cohesive overarching analytical framework has been lacking.

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Virtual Workers and the Global Labour Market

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To Roger Till and Katya Atanasova

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Who Are Virtual Workers?

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Positioning Virtual Workers Within Space, Time, and Social Dynamics

Juliet Webster and Keith Randle

'Virtual work' evokes images of disembodied workers in a nameless cyberspace, yet as the chapters in this book demonstrate, it is very much embodied and anchored in physical space and it is spreading rapidly. Digital technologies permeate almost every occupation, from animation to administration, and affect the activities of most types of workers, from baristas to barristers. Digital technologies are now integral to working life, civic life, consumption, social interactions, and personal relationships; we are interconnected via a host of devices at home and at work, in public spaces, and on the move. This fact, together with the deindustrialisation of the major Western economies, the emergence of new economic powerhouses, the global entrenchment of neoliberalism, and the associated shake-up of the capital–labour contract, means that we are witnessing a massive reshaping of work and of working conditions, and, as a result, a major restructuring of skills, occupational forms, and work identities.

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Efforts to grasp the dynamics and nature of these developments have been both numerous and multidisciplinary. Call centres and business process outsourcing, content creation in the cultural, creative, and new media sectors, gold-farming, and gaming—all of these phenomena and more—are the stuff of virtual work. The labour carried out by virtual workers has been variously described as: 'digital labour' (Scholz 2013), 'immaterial labour' (Hardt and Negri 2004), 'affective labour' (Hochschild 1983), and 'playbour' (Kücklich 2005). These concepts describe developments which are forcing us to revisit and scrutinise our established notions of work and employment. The rubric of 'work' or 'labour'—including, crucially, productive labour—can now cover activities never previously understood as such, for example: play, consumption, social reproduction, and other forms of unpaid activity conducted inside and outside the domestic sphere.

When the very foundations of our understanding of work, and the most basic concepts by which we analyse working life, are challenged by these developments, it is worth reviewing the insights offered by research into the features and dynamics of work in the digital era. What is virtual work and what is the social composition of the virtual workforce? Where can virtual workers be located in terms of our understandings of class? What gender divisions and gender relations are implicated in virtual work? Fundamentally, does the emergence of virtual work signal anything distinctive or novel in the global labour market?

This book brings together some of the research findings and insights developed and consolidated under the auspices of the European Union Cooperation on Science and Technology (EU COST) Action on the Dynamics of Virtual Work which ran from 2012 to 2016. The aim of the Action was to develop a clear conceptual framework within which such work could be studied, to develop an understanding of how new forms of virtual work emerge, and, in particular, to explore the shifting boundaries between paid and unpaid work and between work and play. The chapters in this book analyse some of the occupations which have arisen in the process of the virtualisation of work. They cover developments in the organisation and management of these jobs, the labour processes, knowledge and skills involved, and the workplace relations of virtual work—those between workers and management, workers and other workers, and workers and the consumers they serve.

This introductory chapter briefly reviews the main forms of virtual work and types of virtual workers. It explores the features of virtual work which seem to us to be the most striking and are those most frequently identified in research on virtual work: its diversity, its precariousness, and its boundarylessness. It considers some of the issues involved in positioning virtual workers in terms of class, and briefly discusses the interactions of class, gender, and race as structuring elements of virtual work. Finally, it introduces the subsequent chapters, highlighting the ways in which they individually and collectively demonstrate the nature and breadth of virtual work and its dynamics.

What Is Virtual Work and Who Are Virtual Workers?

Virtual work has been defined as 'labour, whether paid or unpaid, that is carried out using a combination of digital and telecommunications technologies and/or produces content for digital media' (Huws 2012: 3). As this formulation suggests, the spread of virtual work has been supported by several convergent technical developments, particularly the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the web, and the cloud, to a widening range of activities. Most workers now rely on some combination of these technologies to do their work. Virtual work is also, however, work that is mediated by online technologies that are used to organise work in ways which dislocate, redistribute, and relocate it in new work spaces: in virtual teams, in distributed workplaces, in offshore facilities, in restructured global value chains, and in outsourced functions. Virtual work may be dematerialised, but it is not hermetically sealed from the rest of the economy. It relies on and is linked to a material foundation of physical infrastructures and manufactured commodities (Qiu et al. 2014; Huws 2014b; Dyer-Witheford 2015).

As this characterisation suggests, virtual work is a very diverse phenomenon, and virtual workers carry out a wide range of activities. At one end of the labour market, they are paid for their professional or technical work in fields such as software, app, and web development; in management functions like sales and marketing and finance and accounting; or in

creative areas such as graphic design, video production, animation, multimedia production, writing, translation, and online journalism. A whole host of new media occupations of various stripes has sprung into being with the emergence of Web 2.0 and the Internet of Things: YouTubers, Vine stars, bloggers, vloggers, online broadcasters, editors, writers, artists, designers, and fabricators of digitally generated goods are both using and producing digitised content. Some virtual workers are employed as freelancers (see Pitts this volume) or secure their employment through web-based employment brokers. 'Elsewhere in the labour market, others are employed in call centres (D'Cruz this volume), in back-office information processing jobs, or in content farms churning out stories 'prepped for search engine friendliness and for maximum ad exposure' (Ross 2013: 15) requiring minimal, 'search and surf' skills (Wichterich 2000; Surugiu and Radu 2009). This is low-paid work (Brunton 2013). Meanwhile, anonymous 'clickworkers' find their livelihoods in the online labour market, bidding for very simple, routine tasks (typically simple clicks) requiring very little time or skill and 'piecing together lumps of income from motley sources' (Ross 2013; 20, and see also Aytes 2013; Holts 2013; Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft 2014). Game developers and players who are involved in game modification or testing, real money trading or 'gold-farming' in 'massive multiplayer online role player games', or who are engaged in managing the 'communities' around these activities (see Kerr this volume), players that harvest their unpaid efforts for financial gain, and paid online poker players or other online gamblers—all of these people are also doing virtual work, even though it may hardly look like work at all (Holts 2013: 36; see also, Goggin 2011; Nakamura 2013; Holts and Surugiu this volume).

Users generating content, as open-source and shareware contributors, Tweeters and social media users, as well as all those engaged in the panoply of unpaid online life activities are equally types of virtual workers. The rise of peer production, open-source software development, blogging, wiki writing, reviewing, and other forms of user-generated content have reinvigorated the moniker 'prosumption' first coined by Toffler half a century ago (Toffer 1970; see also Tapcott and Williams 2008). These are activities carried out in almost all sectors of the economy, in value chains marked by a combination of 'real' and virtual work,

with various types of actors—customers, business partners, employees, and unpaid labour—all involved in the process of value creation (Meil 2015).

Many users generate value in increasingly precarious conditions, often totally unpaid. Writing about free labour done online, Terranova sets out some of its parameters. 'Simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited, free labour on the Net includes the activity of building web sites, modifying software packages, reading and participating in mailing lists and building virtual spaces' (Terranova 2004: 74). Unpaid labour is a striking feature of virtual work; the expansion of the Internet has, indeed, given considerable material and ideological impetus to the harnessing of free labour power.

The apparently free activity of communication through social media is another form of free labour (Beverungen et al. 2015), and, as several authors have noted, an enormous source for the swelling profits of Web 2.0 capitalism (Ross 2013; Dyer-Witheford 2015). Consumption work online can be considered to be a further form of virtual work, and adds value to the service consumed without cost to the provider. Every time consumers access Internet bank accounts, use online booking systems, or billing systems, access welfare and public services or technical support online, shop online, or use one of the paraphernalia of contemporary online goods and services, they effectively perform the ancillary administrative work formerly done by corporations and public authorities and now outsourced to the consumer. The consumer's labour adds value to the services provided, while simultaneously supplying their personal data to be mined, monetised, and traded.

As soon as we include the labour of the consumer as a form of virtual work, we must recognise the activity of social reproduction as productive labour (Fortunati 2007; Morini 2007). Although it has always played a crucial role in capitalist value creation through the household-based reproduction and sustenance of the workforce (Gardiner et al. 1975), social reproduction gains new salience as a form of virtual work in the digital era. Now it includes the maintenance of socialities, for social relations and social contacts provide another means of valorisation for capital (Fortunati 2007). In this process, individual personal qualities and collective class, gender, and ethnic identities alike are mobilised for the pur-

poses of value creation. Activities like online identity management and the performance of emotional labour in the course of work exemplify the creation of value through subjectivities (Hochschild 1983; Illouz 2007; Neff 2012; McRobbie 2015).

As the foregoing suggests and as the chapters in this book show, the term 'virtual work' encompasses several distinct types of labour mediated by digital technologies, and, consequently, virtual workers are enormously diverse along occupational and social lines. They possess very varied levels of education and skill. They include workers educated to degree level and sometimes beyond, those with vocational qualifications, and those with only the most basic formal education and training (Eurofound 2015; Kuek et al. 2015). Virtual workers range from young, educated men such as, for example, entrepreneurs or software professionals (Michailidou and Kostala this volume) to lower-skilled women such as those employed in offshore information processing facilities (Mirchandani 2010; Freeman 2010; Webster 2010). As we have indicated, they are found across the economy in most established sectors and occupations, form the backbone of the newly emerging forms of economic activity centred on the Internet and social media and are distributed within global value chains, interconnected and interdependent with material workers. As this implies, they are also geographically dispersed, as a group and as individuals within the value chains they inhabit. It is to this first noteworthy aspect of virtual work that we now turn.

Virtual Workers Are Mobile and Dispersed

One of the defining features of virtual work is the fact that it can be located and delivered almost anywhere. Mobile telephony and cheap wireless connectivity have largely abolished the need for fixed workplaces, and it is now common to find all kinds of professionals, creatives, and others working from home, in public spaces, on transport, in cafés, or in the streets. Despite the difficulty of distinguishing between the different types of coffee shop workers on the basis of their appearance alone, there is a world of difference between those who are securely employed profes-

sionals working on the move and using every spare second of the working day to keep on top of their workloads, and those who are contract freelancers for whom workplace-less working can be a way of life.

Virtual workers are dispersed in another sense. The growing global trade in telemediated business and information services has distributed whole groups of service workers along global value chains, in much the same way as their counterparts in manufacturing are recruited and located in distributed global factories on the basis of labour costs, skills availability, local tax incentives, and inward investment subsidies (Henderson 1989, Dunning 1993). Software developers, information processing workers, call centre employees of telecommunications companies, banks, energy companies, and other private and public services including local government—all these groups of workers have been progressively dislocated from the markets they serve and dispersed in offshore offices, in outsourced business process facilities, and in shared service centres, providing round-the-clock services to clients around the globe (Posthuma 1987; Heeks 1993; Mitter and Rowbotham 1995; Freeman 2000; Wichterich 2000; Belt et al. 2002; Mirchandani 2010; Howcroft and Richardson 2010). Class and gender form the structural and economic underpinnings of this labour force. Educated urban women, for instance, are the mainstay of Caribbean and South Asian call centres and outsourced business process facilities, where cultural performances of femininity (i.e. respectability, commitment, sedentariness) and women's pivotal role in maintaining the social fabric are repurposed in the provision of these services. Outsourced and offshore service centres fragment and disperse clerical labour processes, simplifying the work and harnessing gendered labour to carry it out. Indeed, gender permeates both labour and labourers to create what Freeman has called 'a mutually reinforcing system of oppression reliant on specific strategies of gendering workers and class-ifying women' (Freeman 2000: 59).

A third form of dispersed labour is crowdsourced labour. Crowdsourced labour is sourced online and involves work that is contractually (and frequently geographically) dispersed among freelancers who carry out individual tasks or projects for a client without continuous employment and without any knowledge of one another. This type of virtual work reproduces, entrenches, and extends the general division of labour between the skilled and unskilled. On the one hand, 'clickwork' is a form of task

subdivision that centres on basic, low-skilled tasks, such as data entry, text transcription, and image tagging, broken down into microtasks to be completed in minutes or seconds (Lehdonvirta and Ernkvist 2011). This work is 'so fragmented that [workers] are very unlikely to understand what relation any given task has to the final commodity to which it contributes' (Huws 2014a: 93). On the other hand, crowdsourced labour is also sought for more complex tasks such as administrative support, review writing, blogging or tweeting, and for professional services like software development, IT networking and security, data science and cloud computing work, sales and marketing, academic writing, ghostwriting, social media work, design, animation, and modelling (Hippler 2014). In providing the material foundation for the dispersal of these forms of work, the Internet simultaneously supports an unprecedented rupturing of secure employment relations. A tenuous relationship to employment is the second striking characteristic of virtual workers.

Virtual Workers Are Precarious

Insecure work is fast becoming a defining characteristic of work in many Western economies, with a great mass of people enjoying none of the benefits of previous generations of organised labour (Standing 2011). The casualisation of work that we are currently witnessing is taking place in a context of globalisation in which capital has unprecedented access to a reserve army of labour, regardless of national borders, in addition to which the global value chains that capital controls are becoming increasingly elaborate (Huws 2011). Virtual work has emerged in this context and much virtual work feeds these increasingly globalised value chains in one way or another. It has proved to be a vital buttress to capital's retreat from the obligations of employment. Virtual work, as many of the chapters in this volume and other research shows, is quintessentially precarious (Gill and Pratt 2008; Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Brophy and de Peuter 2007; Gregg 2011; Holts and Surugiu, Michailidou and Kostala; Pitts; Primorac all this volume).

Insecurity, then, is a trademark of several types of virtual work, cultural and creative work, and new media freelancing in particular, though,

like virtual work itself, it is a diverse phenomenon which varies between occupations and sectors. Nevertheless, Ross (2008) has argued that the precariousness of work in the creative economy reflects the uptake and infiltration of models of employment from low-wage sectors in general. Significant proportions of cultural and creative workers but also, for example, game developers, open-source software developers, and clickworkers typically work as self-employed freelancers. They may be hired on extremely short-term contracts of days or weeks, on zero-hour contracts, or as unpaid interns (Neff et al. 2005; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010; Shade and Jacobson 2015). In the UK, for instance, the proportion of young people working as unpaid interns is high and growing, and nearly half of the workforce has worked unpaid at some time (Siebert and Wilson 2013). Precarious workers are both disposable and excluded from opportunities for promotion and career development within firms.

New media project freelancing, for instance, though much vaunted for its informality and the flexibility of its working arrangements, is based on back-door recruitment practices, work secured through personal recommendations, contract working, long and antisocial hours, gender inequality in pay, exclusion from professional networks, and barriers to access to opportunities (Gill 2002; Pratt 2002; Perrons 2005; Thanki and Jeffreys 2007). As this catalogue of its features suggests, it is permeated with class and gender inequalities and, as Sennett (1998) has noted, with an overall shift towards the individualisation of risk.

Crowdsourcing perhaps epitomises the replacement of the traditional employment relationship with more casual and short-lived forms of contracts which is typical of virtual work (Holts 2013: 40). The work is often done by freelancers and the self-employed, or partially self-employed, and it is frequently seasonal and low paid (Eurofound 2015). Competition between workers bidding for online work is intense, and this drives down the price they receive for their services (Holts 2013; Eurofound 2015). Crowdsourced workers are exposed to considerable uncertainty about their next source of income. Many workers can only do this type of work to supplement their incomes from inadequately paid employment, other self-employment, or when undertaking full-time education, or caring work (Eurofound 2015). Crowdsourced workers additionally have

almost no protection compared to those in traditional employment, since there is no legal or collectively agreed framework governing their working arrangements. As freelancers, they do not receive the benefits of unionisation, collective bargaining, social benefits, or legal protection such as minimum wage or maternity protection in most countries (Eurofound 2015; Kuek et al. 2015). Information about the tasks to be performed is not always transparent and the absence of reliable dispute resolution systems exposes online workers to payment disputes which they are poorly positioned to win (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft 2014). This, then, may be not so much the 'dawn of the elance economy' (Malone and Laubacher 1998), but rather the application of web technology to lock a growing segment of the labour force out of more protected employee status (Taylor 2015).

The absence of collective organisation in many areas of virtual work, particularly in the creative and cultural industries, both flows from and reinforces the precariousness of employment in these industries: in general, those in insecure work are less likely to form or join collective organisations, and are thus unprotected from irregular or exploitative employment practices (Conor et al. 2015, Primorac, Surugiu this volume). It is not yet certain how this may affect the sense of solidarity of these workers, but it clearly forces them back onto their own individual resources, and sharpens their need to rely on their own self-branding to maintain their profiles and streams of income. The ceaseless demands of online image-making and polishing—in place of continual professional development—mean that this work activity, among many others, demands more of their time and seeps into greater areas of workers' lives. The moving frontiers of virtual work are the aspect of virtual workers' lives that we discuss next.

The Lives of Virtual Workers Are Boundaryless

> If the office exists on your phone, how is it possible to claim the right to be away from it for any length of time? (Gregg 2011: 14).

Whether welcome or not, the performance of paid work encroaches into more and more areas of individual workers' personal lives. Overall, the

territories of work and life that were once firmly delineated (at least for male workers)—paid labour from unpaid labour, production work from consumption work, work time and space from private time and space—are no longer clearly distinguishable in virtual work.

Virtual work, as we have seen, has seeped into spaces and times which are unprecedented as sites of day-to-day labour, but were usually previously reserved for unpaid reproductive activity. Digital devices and wireless networks clearly play a vital role in the shifting locations and times of work. As Gregg has commented, 'Like never before, communications technologies grant access to the workplace beyond physical constraints' (Gregg 2011: 14–15).

Gregg's extensive analysis of the diffusion and impact of technologically mediated work in offices and homes identifies the ways in which paid work has become boundaryless. One form of boundarylessness is the encroachment of work activities into private space and time, exemplified by the tendency of professional information workers to manage their burgeoning workloads at home outside of their normal working hours, checking emails, clearing inboxes, writing papers and reports, filing news stories, and so on. Considerable amounts of work-related communication are done from home, facilitated by online technologies which allow the home 'to stretch to accommodate the limitations of contemporary work culture' (Gregg 2011: 53).

The growth of home as a place of work has complex gendered associations; it is a space which has been conventionally reserved for the performance of domestic and caring labour, and for private and personalised pursuits free from the contamination of paid work, though for women, it has never been synonymous with leisure. It has now become the workplace of the mobile professional and of the self-employed creative freelancer sometimes driven to the margins of the labour market by a lack of suitable employment opportunities (Taylor 2015); for women in these types of work, it is now the site of competing forms of physical, administrative, and affective labour (Gregg 2011).

> For these women, the boundaries between labor and leisure, work and home, have blurred to such an extent that it is no longer possible to describe what actually *counts* as work. Any concept of labor limits is abandoned (Gregg 2011: 54, emphasis in original).

A further manifestation of boundarylessness is the invasion of work into times of the day and night, even into the thoughts and consciousness of workers, such that ordinary activities in non-work time are rendered precarious. Cultural work, for instance, is already well known for its extraordinarily long working hours (Gill and Pratt 2008), but this 'always-on' work culture now characterises an increasing number of sectors and job roles, and not only those of the creative, the freelancer, or the on-call worker. It can leave the worker unable to predict or control working hours, plan private time, disconnect from work, or connect (offline) with family and friends.

Boundarylessness, then, has several implications for the nature of virtual work. One of these is what Gregg refers to as 'function creep', in which the obligations, including online obligations, placed upon workers far exceed their stated roles and responsibilities. This is apparent in the expectation by managers and workers alike that the latter will perform social media and online branding tasks in addition to their normal activities. Related to this, 'presence bleed' refers to the once clear boundaries between professional and personal identities which no longer apply. Many virtual workers, particularly cultural workers and particularly young people, frequently make no distinction between work time and other time. Finally, the total invasion of work and the demands on workers to be totally available affects their ability to conduct their daily lives and sustain their personal relationships. The consequences of the progressive encroachment of work in these ways, plus the continual switching between different activities encouraged by the proliferation of digital devices and online accounts, for the social, physical, and mental well-being of virtual workers and their families still have to be fully appreciated (Whiting et al. 2015). It is already apparent, however, that many workers experience acute feelings of anxiety from communication overload together with constant feelings of guilt, personalising both the problem and the solution in relentless self-exploitation often justified by employers and workers alike as 'flexibility'.

Work reaches into private spaces and time, and also into emotional life in another sense, in that it makes commodities from our deepest subjectivities and puts 'life back into work by appropriating life itself' (Fleming 2009: 40). This appropriation has been manifest in the deploy-

ment of affect in the delivery of services for some time (Hochschild 1983; Adkins 1995). It is now apparent in the self-branding that has become an indispensable aspect of creative work, self-employment, and social media presence generally (Conor 2015; Scharff 2015). In 'selling themselves' professionally, creative workers, for example, must negotiate and present themselves in fields that already carry connotations of gender, race, and class, and these require particular representational strategies by these workers (Conor et al. 2015). Self-marketing goes well beyond paid work, however, and has become a commonplace aspect of social media use in which people become their own agents and make brands of themselves (Turkle 2012; Keen 2015), partly in order to manage the precarity of contemporary employment, virtual and otherwise.

People's private lives and affects may be becoming progressively socialised, but their resistance and coping strategies are being privatised. Since virtual work is dispersed and often domesticated, it defines paid work as an individual matter while configuring private space as a sphere of paid work and considerably intensified consumption work. As a result, virtual workers have to adopt highly individual strategies in order to survive. Online technologies facilitate the pursuit of these strategies. As Gregg has pointed out, 'Online technology allows workers to carve out strategies to cope with conditions that are highly intensified because they are taken to be individual rather than structural in nature' (Gregg 2011: 3). In this process, the antagonistic class relations of capitalism have become more masked and it is possible that they have never been more hidden than they are in virtual work.

As we have already noted, users' participation in the digital economy through consumption labour online provides a further example of the way in which the production of value has moved outside of the spaces and times of waged work, and in doing so, it calls into question the conceptual separation of production and consumption (Terranova 2013). Huws (2014a) has noted that 'consumption work'—the work previously carried out by paid workers as part of the distribution process of commodity production and now performed by consumers—is increasingly carried out online. In transferring the paid labour of employees to unpaid consumers, online consumption signals the dissolution of

another boundary and draws this form of domestic labour into the ambit of productive work. The implications of these shifts in the terrain of work are the subject of the next section.

Positioning Virtual Workers: Class, Gender, Ethnicity

> Labour markets have shifted to places where labour does not look like labour at all (Scholz 2010: 242).

Understanding the class position of workers is a complex project. Where do virtual workers fit into the class structure? Do they, indeed, constitute a single class in itself, as Florida's (2002) concept of the 'creative class' suggests, unified by the virtual nature of their work? Can the concept of class be applied to virtual workers at all, given the pervasiveness of virtual work in almost all areas of social life? How can we distinguish the virtual worker from any other? A further series of questions arise concerning the labour market for virtual workers. Does it operate on the basis of credentials and qualifications, on the basis of professional status, or on some other basis? Is the virtual labour market located online, or offline, in institutional or regulated space (Meil 2015)?

Several issues complicate the analysis of virtual work. First, the very newness of many of the occupations involved and currently evolving means that existing occupational classifications, and understandings of class, may have to be revisited. Second, the variety of work activities which are covered by the rubric of virtual work defies simple analysis. As Holts (2013) has pointed out, the range of activities included under the umbrella of virtual work makes it very difficult to locate virtual workers in the occupational and class structure, and we still know comparatively little about their own experiences and responses to their situation. The occupational categories of, for example, creative and cultural workers are umbrellas for a multitude of job types from independent artists to content farm workers to freelance web developers, and are frustratingly nebulous (Conor et al. 2015). The other side of this coin is that virtual work is pervasive: there are few activities, including material goods

manufacturing, which do not involve some form of digital labour and, as this chapter and those to follow argue, much of it is low grade and menial. It is also often insecure and simultaneously invasive of people's lives. These increasingly blurred boundaries between work and play, production and consumption, and paid and unpaid work pose significant challenges for the theorisation of virtual labour (Huws 2014a), but they clearly place gender at the centre of the picture.

Unpaid online work is particularly ambiguous. 'In most corners of the information landscape,' writes Ross, 'working for nothing has become normative, and largely because it is not experienced as exploitation' (Ross 2013: 17). The types of class identity, forms of consciousness, and sense of solidarity which might emerge as a result of this type of work organisation are issues which are not well understood. Undoubtedly, however, unpaid labour impacts upon paid labour, eroding the bargaining position of those in the same roles, reducing overall employment levels and intensifying work, undermining trust between groups of employees, and generally encroaching on the livelihoods of those who lack subsidy and rely on their work for their income (Siebert and Wilson 2013; Huws 2014a: 101–102).

Despite the ambiguities and complications in analysing the class position of virtual workers, it is clear that, in various ways, different types of virtual work represent the continuation and entrenchment of the capitalist project of simplifying, fractionalising, and cheapening labour power. This is a long-run process, going back to the first imposition of the technical division of labour in the workshop during the early nineteenth century, and running through the twentieth century with the implementation of scientific management on as widespread a basis as possible (Braverman 1974). The 'detail worker', created by the application of Taylorist methods and new technologies, and 'reduced to the level of an instrument in the production process' (1974: 172), was the predominant form of labour. The development and diffusion of ICTs in the last quarter of the twentieth century has facilitated the decomposition, and more recently, the complementary delocation of many types of work, unleashing a simultaneous process of creation and destruction which has given rise to whole new areas of work and to the entry of new groups of workers into the global labour market (Kraft 1979; Appelbaum and Albin 1989;

Cockburn 1983; Posthuma 1987; Greenbaum 1998; Korczynski 2001; Pratt 2002; Gill 2002).

Virtual labour can be regarded as a renewal and extension of the fractionalisation, dispersal, and cheapening of work. The very dynamics of virtual work, particularly its precariousness, its reach into the private lives of workers, and thus the transfer of so much risk from capital onto the shoulders of labour, are fundamentally connected to relations of capitalist appropriation and exploitation. These relations have, if anything, been significantly buttressed by developments in virtual work. Virtual workers themselves may no longer be brought together under one roof, but this does not mean that they are unexploited or classless. Neither class nor class antagonism have disappeared, though they may have become harder to discern in virtual work, and this raises questions of how workers may articulate grievances and further their individual or collective interests within the employment relationship if not 'at work'. This makes their analysis all the more pressing, however.

One of the key issues to be confronted in a discussion of the class position of virtual workers is the question of whether virtual work is qualitatively different from other types of work. Creative and cultural workers, for example, have been taken to represent a new and distinctive class of virtual workers enjoying considerably more autonomy and flexibility than others (Florida 2002), and this is one basis for the supposition that virtual workers cannot be considered as members of the working class. Not all virtual work is creative, however, and conversely, most work involves some creativity (Smith and McKinlay 2009b). For every such virtual worker in a privileged labour market situation, there are several others either converting their autonomy into brutal self-exploitation, or doing routine toil for a pittance. The 'bulimic working' (Pratt 2002) of new media work and the 'sacrificial labour' (Ross 2013) of professional workers are patently double-edged, reflecting both the hegemonic discourse of the free agent in neoliberal capitalism, and the undeniable pleasures and satisfactions of the work itself (McRobbie 2002; Pratt 2002; Ross 2003; Banks 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010). On the other hand, the fact that many virtual workers are now found on the fringes of 'standard' employment at best, or working for nothing at worst, confirms the

view that significant groups within the global labour force are becoming increasingly immiserated. Therefore, when the employment position, working conditions, opportunities, and prospects of different groups of virtual workers are unpacked and differentiated more precisely, it becomes clear that these workers straddle several different positions in the labour market, from ownership, to self-employment, to semi-slavery, rendering their class position and class identity not only diverse but potentially contradictory (McKinlay and Smith 2009; Smith and McKinlay 2009a; Huws 2014a).

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the patterns of gender and race inequality which pervade the labour market in general are equally characteristic of new media and creative work, and may even be more pronounced. Despite an absence of thorough data collection of the relative presence, precariousness, or pay of different social groups in these industries, it appears that women as a group fare consistently worse than men, and ethnic minority workers fare worse than others in employment, pay, contractual status, and seniority (Shorthouse 2010: Conor et al. 2015). At another level, class, gender, and race are central dimensions of all virtual 'labor-scapes' (Freeman 2010: 33), and they are highly interactive, not just intersecting pre-given categories, but mutually determining (Dyer-Witheford 2015). For example, companies are drawn to offshore zones because of the availability of a low-wage and well-educated workforce and based on a familiar litany of rationales inextricably bound up in gendered as well as racial and cultural ideologies of production (such as manual dexterity and patience for repetitive work). Dyer-Witheford (2015) has summarised the creation and exploitation of a gendered global labour force thus:

> To be 'black', 'brown', 'yellow' or some other shade of 'non-white' is not just a matter of colour but of how skin encodes a legacy of slavery, indentured and bonded labour and other forms of super-exploitation in the one-time colonies and peripheral zones of capital. That is why so much of the new intensification of exploitation required and enabled by cybernetic accumulation is borne by women and non-European populations, even as this digitization reworks both the organization of the home and the geopolitical division of labour (Dyer-Witheford 2015: 14).

Gender is also central to capital's increasing reliance on the labour of social reproduction, now recast as productive labour which contributes directly to valorisation processes. This type of labour, once associated principally with domestic work in the form of family care and labour force maintenance, has now entered the realm of paid employment in the form of emotional labour which is quite explicitly required and deployed as part of the service offering (Hochschild 1983; Adkins 1995; Belt et al. 2002; Howcroft and Richardson 2008). Affect has been made an essential aspect of economic behaviour and follows the logic of economic exchange, valorisation, and capital accumulation just as surely as if it were any other formal skill (Illouz 2007). Here, virtual work is fundamentally gendered labour, in which all workers, regardless of sex, mobilise and perform masculinity and femininity and make these performances part and parcel of their working resources (Adkins 2001).

Virtual workers, then, are neither disembodied nor classless. They are not so new or so unique as to fall outside the class system, as Florida suggests. Rather, they are groups of workers united by the fact that their work is digitally mediated, but occupying and supplying different areas of the global labour market and subject to differential dynamics of capitalist work rationalisation, just as their predecessors were. As Gill and Pratt (2008) have remarked:

> While it might be true that most work today is in some sense impacted by information and communications, the grandiosity of such a claim obscures profound differences between different groups of workers—between, for example, the fast food operative with a digital headset or electronic till in their minimum wage McJob, and the highly educated, well-paid cultural analyst. Both are touched by the 'information revolution', to be sure, but is the 'interactivity' or 'affectivity' deployed in their work sufficient grounds for treating them as similar kinds of labouring subject? (2008: 9)

Gender and race, as well as class, all segment virtual work and are central to employers' labour deployment strategies; they are harnessed and repurposed to create ideal pools of labour power and newly productive human attributes. That virtual labour involves some of the unprecedented innovations in the organisation of work and workers that are described above

and in the following chapters should come as no surprise, for capital searches ceaselessly for new ways to rationalise and cheapen the performance of work.

If virtual workers cannot all be considered as a single group, the purpose of this book is to illustrate something of the variety of work they do, and to identify the conditions within which this work is carried out. The following chapters consider the nature of emerging types of virtual work in the digital era, and workers' experiences of this work. Although they do not settle the issue of how labour and class are to be understood in virtual work, they contribute empirical evidence to this class debate (see, e.g. Florida 2002; Smith and McKinlay 2009b; Fuchs and Sevignani 2013). The book shows that virtual work has some distinctive features, but it also reveals some very familiar ones denoting a legacy from the past. In this sense, the dynamics of virtual work are no different from those of work under capitalism in general. While we see change, we also identify continuities. Over the past century or more, work under capitalism has seen the creation of new occupations, the development of new techniques, and the identification of new armies of labour while old ones have been discarded. In the process, capitalism has discovered new ways to ensure that the accumulation of capital 'as the central mainspring of the entire system' (Cunningham Wood 1988:148) continues, but it has also thrown up new contradictions and created new sites of conflict and resistance.

What are the implications of these developments for class identity and collective work-based organisation? Virtual work clearly atomises virtual workers in many ways, the most obvious of which is through the fragmentation and dispersal of the work to different workers who may be barely aware of each other's existence. Shared experience of the workplace has clearly been weakened, as collectivities have been disrupted, and group occupational identities undermined in virtual work. What does this imply for class conflict and worker resistance, so axiomatic to the capital–labour relationship? Clearly, the industrial relations landscape of virtual work is not going to look the same as that of Fordist mass production, when employment was the norm and when workers were collected together under one roof. At the time Marx was writing Capital Volume 1, it was probably true to say that 'As a general rule, workers cannot

co-operate without being brought together, their assembly in one place is a necessary condition for their co-operation' (Marx Capital Volume 1: 447). However, it is notable that, even then, this was only a 'general rule'. Furthermore, he goes on to say, 'Hence wage-labourers cannot co-operate unless they are employed simultaneously by the same capital, the same capitalist, and therefore unless their labour-powers are brought simultaneously by him.' These important conditions do not seem to have been subject to radical change, and perhaps it is merely the means of co-operation that has changed. Nevertheless, the implications of this aspect of virtual work for collective organisation and specifically for trade unionism are critical and have as yet to be fully appreciated. As Primorac's chapter argues, virtual work poses enormous challenges for organising and sustaining union membership and protecting worker's rights. The foregoing discussion suggests, however, that the impetus for worker resistance has not disappeared, though the opportunities for it might have been weakened or changed. Alternative forms of organising are nevertheless springing up, for example, through workers' centres and advocacy organisations of low-paid workers who are often missed by conventional unions (Hackman 2014), through alliances of cultural and artistic workers who have historically worked independently and individually (de Peuter and Cohen 2015), and through certification schemes for good-quality internships (Pradal 2015). These so-called 'Alt-Labor' initiatives are building new forms of resistance to exploitative working conditions in parts of the virtual labour market, but their extent and potential in the context of a much-changed work landscape needs to be much better understood. It seems undeniable that the global economy has drawn in (and expelled) virtual workers in constantly innovative forms of capitalist valorisation and exploitation, rendering them collectively and objectively a 'cybertariat' (Huws 2003, 2014b)—an increasingly precarious 'cyber-proletariat' composed of diverse waged and unwaged labourers in digital networks—even if they do not define themselves as a class for themselves.

The chapters which make up this collection are predominantly empirically informed and based on data collected from virtual workers across a range of countries, including Germany, Greece, India, Romania, Spain, Sweden and The Netherlands. The book provides us with insights into the work experiences of among others: victims of workplace cyberbully-

ing in call centres, research and development (R&D) workers frustrated by the impact of ICT-driven bureaucracy on innovation, young media workers struggling with the presentation and management of the self, community managers in online gaming required to demonstrate passion, digital journalists feeling the erosion of a traditional professional identity, and members of virtual teams experiencing 'presence' or 'absence' at meetings along a number of dimensions.

Following this chapter, in part two, we focus on virtual occupations, work process, and preparation for the virtual labour market. Jörg Müller, first of all, argues for a stronger exchange between the educational literature dealing with young people's career choices, on the one hand, and the field of youth studies explorations of late modern individualisation, on the other. The changing notions of autonomy, self-responsibility, and identity establish fruitful grounds for investigating why the next generation of young workers will stay away from STEM (science, technology, engineering, and maths) careers, but will be prepared to sign up for 'cool' alternatives in the creative industries. Meanwhile, media consumption, entry into the labour market or the very condition of late modernity, forces young people to actively engage in a constant process of presentation and management of the self. The question of identity and presentation of the self is a regularly occurring theme in this volume and is touched upon by Michalidou and Kostala, Kerr, Primorac, Surugiu, and Bengtsson in the chapters which follow. These 'expressive' concerns lie diametrically opposed to supposedly 'dry', 'boring', or overtly 'formalistic' STEM careers and professions. At the same time, this focus on the more vital, aesthetic concerns of many young people puts into sharp relief their strong commitment to working in the creative industries, where job morale is surprisingly high despite the precariousness of the work itself, a characteristic again picked up by both Primorac and Kerr. Based upon a literature review and evidence from a Spanish case study, Müller's chapter recommends a closer exploration of 'virtual work' to further explore the way in which it is characterised by free labour with no immediate, obvious financial return. Labour is invested for rewards that are indeterminate, uncertain, and unlikely to be reaped until sometime into the future, if at all.

Martha Michalidou and Eleni Kostala also focus on young people entering the labour market in their analysis of some of the forms of new

media work currently evolving in Greece. Based on in-depth interviews with new media workers, the chapter examines the different employment relationships and working conditions currently prominent in the field of new media work, the career paths new media workers carve out in the field, the degree to which their conceptualisations of creativity are both shaped by these structuring parameters and are in turn shaping them, and the ways in which they attempt to define and control the labour process itself and the multiple forms of value resulting from it. The authors focus on two expressions of new media work identities they see currently developing—young entrepreneurs and creative collectives—and position these findings in the context of the extremely fluid character of the field of new media work in Greece.

Demonstrating that creative virtual work is not confined to the 'creative industries' and focussing on a sector where STEM subjects still predominate, Sabine Pfeiffer and her co-authors describe how virtual work in R&D is increasingly being standardised by formal organisational processes. They demonstrate how an ICT-driven process – Stage-Gate – designed to produce more effective, less risky, and entirely predictable innovations, jeopardizes creativity and innovation. Making use of wide-scale qualitative empirical research on German manufacturing, this chapter demonstrates how the standardisation of innovation can cause new tensions in the relationship between the formal and informal within organisations and how virtual workers cope with the resulting new paradoxes in everyday innovation work.

In a chapter that takes us into the previously little explored world of online gambling, Kaire Holts and Romina Surugiu describe an emerging form of work and show how it is challenging conventional categories of 'employment' and 'self-employment'. Based on an activity, poker playing, which might normally be considered a form of leisure, or at best a highly individualised approach to income generation, this chapter demonstrates how a form of employment relationship can be found within the online poker community. The authors draw on in-depth interviews with professional online poker players in Romania who are involved in 'staking'—an arrangement in which a player is provided with money to gamble in exchange for a share of the winnings. In order to investigate how staking might fit into existing typologies of employment, the authors examine

how the work of online poker players is organised, the extent to which they are able to exercise autonomy and control in carrying out their work, contractual relationships, and how they are recruited and rewarded. The findings point to the resilience of the employment relationship in a world characterised by discourses of enterprise and the rise of 'self-employment'.

Aphra Kerr's chapter examines the recruitment, work, and identity of community managers in online games. Community management has emerged as a new occupational role in the past decade and community managers occupy an important intermediating position between game players and game developers. Drawing upon an analysis of job advertisements and data from face-to-face interviews, Kerr argues that the location of these jobs is shaped by existing labour mobility and geo-linguistic markets; while recruitment practices, working conditions, and working practices are often shaped by gendered and heteronormative norms. Community management allows game players to convert informal forms of social and cultural capital into low-paid, precarious, and largely invisible forms of work. As a type of creative work, it demands passionate commitment and requires real emotional and cultural labour.

In part three of the book, we present chapters which focus principally on the conditions and experiences of virtual work, although this is, of course, not free of the preoccupations of the earlier chapters and an inevitable overlap of issues, concerns, and characteristics is clear. Harry Pitts's study of freelance creative workers begins by acknowledging that they work for companies, but also apart from them—at home, on site, or in shared workspaces. His chapter examines how clients and freelancers manage the employment relationship at a distance. Drawing on interview data with Dutch creative freelancers, Lefebvre's method of 'rhythm-analysis', Nitzan and Bichler's theory of 'capital as power', and Holloway's understanding of human creativity as 'doing' are used to interrogate the conflicting rhythms of freelance creative work. This work is shown not to be exempt from the processes of measurement, abstraction, time discipline, and worker control to which labour under capitalism has traditionally been subject. Rather, it appears to make these processes more transparent. Freelancers then remain subject to traditional workplace-oriented structures of control particularly, Pitts suggests, in creative

agencies. Freelancers' use of time must correspond to client processes of measurement and valuation.

If Pitts's work examines a specific group of workers and concludes that a simple dichotomy between freelancers and employees does not translate to an equally simple division between autonomy and control, Jaka Primorac confirms this in a broader overview of the relationship between virtual work and creative labour in the cultural and creative industries. Based on a review of current literature, her chapter begins by highlighting the need for a new paradigm that goes beyond the standardisation/non-standardisation in employment thesis, outlining how the everyday work of creative cultural workers is entwined in a complex net of online and offline work practices. These practices contribute to the further blurring of the border between work time and leisure time, and to the implosion of the public sphere into the private sphere in the lives of creative workers. The chapter also draws attention to how virtual work practices contribute to the gendered self-exploitation of creative cultural workers. In the context of rising insecurities and inequalities in cultural and creative industries on a global level, Primorac's work explores whether new forms of unionisation and a new labour rights framework for creative cultural workers are possible, though it concludes that the barriers to this should not be underestimated.

In a chapter that demonstrates the further erosion of unionateness in a traditionally collectively organised sector, Romina Surugiu investigates the challenges and opportunities presented by digital labour from the perspective of digital journalists in contemporary Romania. She argues that journalism as a profession has changed dramatically, not as a direct result of the evolving digital technologies that undoubtedly pervade the contemporary media, but rather by rapid changes in the working conditions of journalists presumed to be necessary for this transition. Ideologies associated with freelancing or entrepreneurship and the growing tendency to use micro-work or piecework in many contexts have influenced the way digital journalism is performed. The chapter argues that economic factors thus represent the greater factor in determining and therefore understanding media work. The outcome of these changes, Surugiu argues, is that digital journalists have developed a fragile professional identity despite working for powerful media companies.

Beginning with a recognition that global virtual work is increasingly commonly organised around virtual meetings which connect workers across space and time boundaries, Anu Sivunen turns her attention to questions of 'absence' and 'presence' at such meetings. As virtual team members often belong to multiple groups over the course of their work, finding time for global team meetings may be challenging due to competing priorities and roles as well as different time zones and schedules. Furthermore, what she describes as 'social presence', an important element in ensuring the efficiency and value of meetings, does not automatically emerge simply as a result of physical or virtual presence. Sivunen's chapter emphasises the importance of the physical, virtual, and social presence or absence of members in global team meetings and underlines how this might affect the collaboration of global work groups. Yet, as she points out, these dimensions are dynamic, rather than simple fixed phenomena where members are either 'present' or 'absent' in a virtual meeting. The chapter presents a propositional model through which the physical, virtual, and social dimensions of presence and absence are examined in both co-located and virtual settings and some of the implications for managers and team members are considered.

Stina Bengtsson analyses work conducted in a virtual world, Second Life, from the perspective of public servants and volunteer journalists. Her analysis focusses upon the virtual workers' presentations of themselves, their experiences of interaction, and the interaction orders structuring their lives online. These workers related to two different interaction orders in their work: the online and the offline. The public service professionals had to conform to regulations regarding transparency whilst serving diverse clients. The volunteer journalists had to work anonymously and unpaid, but could be playful online. Unpaid working persists in today's social media environments, but online identities are more likely to be polished for self-promotion than hidden.

In our final chapter, Premilla D'Cruz argues that workplace cyberbullying has received limited scholarly attention, despite its presence and predictions that it will increase. D'Cruz reviews the literature we have on cyberbullying, and adopting a power perspective finds that virtual misbehaviour is distinctive and has its origins in both external and internal sources. Through interviews with call centre workers in India, D'Cruz

finds that some characteristics of cyberbullying seem to exacerbate its effects, while others could be argued to make it less of a threat. While the boundarylessness that arises out of the virtual mediation of technology has the capacity to increase the suffering of victims of bullying, the physical distance that is also implied helps them feel safer and more detached. At the same time, and as has been experienced in a more public virtual arena, the anonymity afforded by virtual technologies seem to allow the perpetrators of bullying to dissociate themselves from their activities and become less inhibited. Combined with the ability to reach wider and more distant audiences, this makes potential victims more vulnerable. Of course, one aspect of the application of virtual, digital technologies is that they leave a 'footprint' and therefore victims of internal bullying may have recourse to processes through which to redress abuse. However, those subject to abuse from external sources, for example the customers of a call centre, may have no such option and often have to defer to the ideology of 'customer sovereignty'.

The chapters which follow cannot claim to provide a comprehensive account of virtual work in all its guises. However, while each has a distinct focus, it should be clear that they share a common concern with many cross-cutting themes and issues. Furthermore, if virtual work is the future of an increasing proportion of all work, then it also shares many of the central characteristics of 'real' work. The contribution of this collection, therefore, is to both add to our social scientific understanding of work in general and highlight what we see as distinctive in this emerging form.

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Part II

Virtual Occupations, Work Processes and Preparation for the Virtual Labour Market

2

Engineering Lifestyles: Career Choices in Late Modernity

Jörg Müller

Introduction

There is widespread concern about the low and declining participation of young people, and women in particular, in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Becoming a scientist is the least attractive option for children aged 12–13 (Archer et al. 2014). While engineering is a more attractive choice for boys (after business and sports), it is the least attractive for girls, along with science. Warnings by the European Round Table of Industrialists (2009) and others (OECD 2008; Osborne and Dillon 2008) about the declining labour supply in mathematics, science, and technology should therefore come as no surprise.

We know that there is a complex interplay of individual and structural factors involved in this decline, but this insight can be enriched with perspectives from youth studies. Young people stay away from STEM fields for many reasons, including their decreasing interest, the

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perceived difficulty of STEM subjects, rejection of outdated models of STEM education, negative parental influence, school context, and patterns of gender and ethnic exclusion. However, their choices are also related to the formation of increasingly expressive and creative identities. Contemporary trends towards individualisation and a widespread social emphasis upon creative self-expression form part of the context for their study choices and preferences. Although processes of identity formation have long been the subject of educational and sociological research (especially in relation to gendered study choices), these processes have seldom been treated as key factors influencing career trends. Only recently has there appeared 'an emergent agreement that students' choice of higher education is closely interwoven with their identity construction' (Holmegaard et al. 2012: 188).

For some time, youth studies and cultural studies have highlighted the delayed entry of young people into an increasingly unstable and erratic labour market, and detailed its consequences for delayed adulthood (Ainley and Bailey 1997; Ashton et al. 1990; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Consumption has also displaced work as a fundamental element of youth identity formation. Music, fashion, and leisure are becoming more important to identity formation than traditional forms of work, not least because work itself has become erratic, temporary, and often precarious. This shift, in late modernity, places specific demands upon young adults, who now have to construct themselves as autonomous actors responsible for their own work destinies. Certain professional fields are less attractive to young people because they are fundamentally incompatible with the identities being fostered in today's young.

Whilst, however, traditional, very formal, and, to students, 'boring' technical careers are losing their attraction, apparently more creative work in design, fashion, or music, for example, involves an unprecedented level of self-exploitation, and this is partly due to a powerful personal identification with their work on the part of creatives. The desire for autonomy, self-management, and identity fulfilment helps to explain why the current generation of young workers is not only staying away from STEM careers but also enticed by more attractive alternatives, whose benefits have been 'virtualized'. As the present chapter will argue, the alternatives to technical careers are creative occupations that can be understood as forms of virtual

work, not so much because they rely upon immaterial forms and circuits of production, but rather due to their immaterial quality of the benefits. Virtual work refers thus in the context of the present chapter specifically to the creative industries (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; McKinlay and Smith 2009) where the enabling mechanism for the virtualisation of reward can be observed particularly well due to the over-identification of workers with their job. The fact that job satisfaction remains high despite very delicate working conditions draws the attention to those mechanisms that have managed to replace concrete (monetary) rewards with other types of benefits. Work is done not necessarily for monetary remuneration but for much more ephemeral assets such as networking and potential customers, portfolio building, or simply self-interest. Examining thus the ways in which identity is woven into the workings of the creative industries achieves a much deeper understanding of the virtualisation of work, including specifically the processes of its valorisation.

Changing Attitudes Towards Technological Work

The following discussion is the product of an extensive literature review across a diverse body of research, including youth studies and the increasingly late and complicated transition of young people into the labour market, cultural studies and the role of consumption for young people's identity formation, management literature on how to accommodate a new generation of young workers, and STEM education. Regarding the latter, the literature reviewed dealt specifically with the persistent under-representation of young women in Computer Science and Electrical Engineering. Overall, the literature review was designed to gather evidence for the ways in which contemporary youth identities are formed by their different types of life activities. The aim here is not primarily on dimensions of social identity such as gender or class, and their impact on career choices, which have been widely studied and are relatively well understood (Eccles and Davis-Kean 2005; Sáinz and López-Sáez 2010). Rather, I wish to highlight the insights generated by a treatment of identity construction as a personalised, self-conscious, and self-directed process in late modernity.

The analysis drawn from the literature review will be complemented by the results of case studies of the participation of women in Spanish university telecommunications and computer science departments. I carried out these case studies in six departments of four universities, conducting 44 semi-structured interviews, focus groups (with a total of 63 students), and an analysis of curricular plans and official gender equality documents (for details on the methodology across the four major technical universities in Spain, see Müller 2011). The case studies showed the deep incompatibility between students' identity projects and the nature of technical careers for which the students were being prepared by the teaching staff.

The waning attraction of STEM careers is well illustrated by the underrepresentation and declining representation of women in these fields, specifically Computing and different forms of Electrical Engineering. That women are predominantly employed in female-dominated professions like nursing or teaching, and much less in male-dominated fields like computer science or electrical engineering, are not new. Extensive research testifies to the persistent under-representation of women in STEM, discussing the major causes and possible remedies (for a critical review see, e.g. Cohoon and Aspray 2006; Singh et al. 2007). One of the main explanations for the dearth of women entering engineering careers, and especially computer science as a profession, is the close association between technology and masculine culture (Cockburn 1985; Wajcman 1991). Many of the attributes of hegemonic masculinity, such as aggression, hierarchy, dominance, and competition, are also features of some information and communication technologies (ICT) activity. Computer slang, for example, includes violent terms, while computer gaming is regularly associated with first-person shooter games, predominantly male gaming pursuits. As Faulkner (2000) argues, 'being machine focused' versus 'being people focused' further sustains this disjuncture between the feminine and technology. The hacker, nerd, or 'geek' is one of the most iconic stereotypes of computer- and technology-related activity. The association between the nerd—an impoverished, asocial being—and computing results in technical professions having little appeal for many women. Feminine gender identity is usually associated with communicative and expressive behaviour; for women, computing work thus involves 'gender inauthentic' behaviour (Cockburn 1999). Indeed, the

popular image of technology, and more specifically computing as a profession, lies at the centre of a semantic discourse that codes technology as predominantly masculine, deterring women and resulting in female under-representation in these fields (Cohoon and Aspray 2006: 145 ff).

While aversion to technological, and indeed science, professions is much more pronounced among girls, boys exhibit a similar, albeit less pronounced, reluctance to going into STEM careers. There is a surprising relationship between the level of development of a given country—measured in terms of the UN Index of Human Development (IHD)—and young people's attitude to science and technology studies and professions: the more developed the country, the less willing are young people to engage with science and technology (Sjøberg and Schreiner 2005). This relationship is most pronounced among schoolgirls, who are less willing than their male counterparts in the same country to work in technological fields. Norway, which tops the IHD ranking, ranks lowest in terms of pupils' propensity to pursue technical or scientific careers. Statements such as 'I would like to get a job in technology' are negatively correlated with the level of development of the country. A partial explanation is that, in countries with lower living standards, technological professions are meaningful choices that can make a difference to those countries; in countries with higher standards of living, this is not necessarily the case. Technological endeavours recede in significance and get taken for granted. What then becomes paramount is how well certain fields of study and working life fit into young people's existential concerns. Young adolescents look for options that are meaningful and fulfilling to them, and that they can be passionate about.

Paradoxically, students do perceive sciences as interesting, fun, exciting, and enjoyable when they study them at school (Jenkins and Nelson 2005; Sjøberg and Schreiner 2005). However, they do not picture themselves in these types of professions; indeed, there is a 'fundamental mismatch between the images students have of scientists and their own identities' (Archer et al. 2010; DeWitt et al. 2014: 1624). As Osborne and Collins (2001) argue, science is a neglected option because it apparently leaves little space for creativity, imagination, discussion, and self-expression. Even when students say that they are 'crazy' about them, these subject fields appear 'too uniform, square and fixed' and hence 'too narrow a platform

for constructing an attractive identity' (Holmegaard et al. 2012: 200). Technological work is equally unattractive to a large proportion of students because they fail to perceive it as an outlet for their expressive concerns. In fact, the handful of students who do choose sciences or engineering do so precisely because they enjoy this highly defined quality: the clear guidance and rigorous methods involved make them feel safe and ease the burden of navigating in a complex world (Holmegaard et al. 2012).

Rigidity of pedagogical method and a 'hardship culture' characterise technical higher education, particularly in engineering and computer science (Müller 2011). With recent curriculum changes following the Bologna Process, however, there is increasing emphasis on cross-cutting, soft competences that include communicative and teamwork skills. The requirement for these skills does not sit easily with the established culture and technical teaching methods applied in traditional technical education. For example, instead of setting a single final exam, teaching staff are required to guide students more closely and provide more feedback on their learning progress over the duration of a course. However, several staff members whom I interviewed argued that too much guidance does a disservice to students by delaying their maturity. These technical courses, especially in engineering disciplines, are based on the premise of forging successful professionals by imposing a certain hardship upon them. Interviewees declared that this hardship and a degree of suffering form part of the engineering training, shape an engineer's identity, and are silently acknowledged ingredients in the formation of a good professional. This view is corroborated by the dominant image of engineering as a rational, task-oriented, instrumental undertaking where emotional or relational labour does not belong. If, as one interviewee maintained, employers hire engineering graduates less on the basis of what they have learned than for their capacity to 'suffer', then we can assume that there is a tension between this and the leisurely, playful activities of students.

This tension is easy to discern when we consider, for example, the curriculum design of a Spanish first-year course in engineering. Spanish engineering degrees are probably not much different from most other European and non-European engineering degrees, in that the first stages of the curriculum are packed with theoretical and abstract material on the basic mathematical and physics tools that students will need to pur-

sue in the field of work. Among the basic set of courses, one usually finds Calculus, Graph Theory, Linear Algebra, Statistics, introductions to electromagnetism or electronic circuits whose necessity and application to real-world problems is hard to discern when confronted with the often formalistic, proof-based introductions. As Becker (2010) succinctly remarked, introductory courses that establish the theoretical foundations of engineering are more often than not conceived as a way of 'weeding out the weak' (Becker 2010: 364), that is, of filtering them out and retaining only those students with narrow, formalistic aptitudes. Since the implementation of the Bologna Process, however, engineers not only have to know their maths, but they have to be equally capable of collaborating in teams, of communicating effectively, of working autonomously, and they also have to be flexible and creative. Several of my case study interviewees recognised the importance of social skills and interpersonal attitudes, but for many, these also obstructed traditional, instrumental engineering skills and knowledge, as the following quote demonstrates.

> In the end it depends whether the engineer that graduates now is a better engineer than those in the past who graduated according to the old study plan, and I'm not so sure that this is the case. I think his education will be much worse, they know less of programming, know more about working in teams but I'm not sure if this will function well, you know? If they know how to work in groups but do not know how to make useful products (Computer Science professor, female).

This disjuncture deepens the chasm between students' lifestyle expectations and the prospects held out by formally technical careers. It is therefore not surprising that, even when they have taken the decision to enter a STEM career, students experience difficulties in reconciling the rigidity of their studies with their own self-understandings as creative, autonomous thinkers (see also Holmegaard et al. 2012). Engineering is more attractive than science because of its hands-on, problem-solving aspects, but, by as early as their first year at university, engineering students see their future careers as instrumental, formal and rigid, and miles away from their personal identity concerns.

Put simply, technical careers, particular engineering careers, are unattractive, not only because of their image, but also because they do not fit the self-perceptions and lifestyle concerns of today's young people. STEM careers in general are hard to match with personal aesthetic orientations to taste, style, and consumption. (We can speculate that even if young people, especially young women, had a more accurate idea of what these careers entail, they would probably still stay away.) This is not to suggest that career choices can be reduced to a question of lifestyle concerns, ignoring other factors such as professional status, pay, or demand. Nor does this mean that 'youth' is a homogeneous category with undifferentiated attitudes. However, the incompatibility of these study choices with young people's aesthetic aspirations poses both existential and practical challenges for them, as the next section shows.

Young Lives: How Virtual Work Taps into a Need for Self-expression

What, then, are the major changes affecting young people in late modernity, which could be related to their changing attitudes towards technological work? The general detraditionalisation of social structures has been very significant for young people across the advanced economies (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). Social identity markers such as class, race, and gender have been weakened; labour market restructuring, the rise of flexible employment, and an increased demand for educated workers have also had a profound effect on young people's life experiences (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Their transitions from education to employment, and into independent living and family formation, have become delayed and prolonged (Brannen et al. 2002). Direct transitions from school to work are now extremely problematic in all European countries. Consequently, since the 1970s, a growing number of young people have been delaying to complete their education, as finding appropriate employment immediately after school or university graduation is no longer a given (Ashton et al. 1990). The dominant pattern of linear transitions from education to employment has been replaced by fragmented, protracted, insecure periods of training, employment and unemployment, 'waiting halls', and

requalification schemes (Ainley and Bailey 1997). The increasing complexity and insecurity of youth transitions is also reflected in the changing metaphors used in labour market research to describe them. During the mid-twentieth century, young people's entry into the labour market was seen in terms of filling waiting and abundant social niches, more recently, a language of 'pathways', 'trajectories', and 'navigation' documents the crisis and turbulence in the youth labour market (Evans and Furlong 1997; Raffe 2003).

Changes in education and the youth labour market are, of course, embedded in broader transformations in late modern societies. Ulrich Beck's term 'individualisation' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) describes the phenomenon in which people are liberated from traditional social bonds, forms of organisation, and group identities such as class, ethnicity, or family. Gone, too, he argues, are the traditional beliefs, social norms, and social certainties; individuals are now obliged to make their own personal choices and take responsibility for themselves, so they need to determine and construct their own futures. However, these liberties, won from tradition, can only be had by new and equally powerful dependencies on social institutions such as the education system and the labour market. The 'choice biographies' of Beck's analysis have in fact become compulsory in the sense that not only do we now have to make choices regarding most aspects of our lives, but also these decisions are dependent upon greater external circumstances that lie completely beyond our control, and that exacerbate the insecurities and uncertainty experienced by people such as the young.

Identity Formation: Occupation Versus Consumption

A series of cultural and youth studies emphasise the parallel and increasing importance of consumption for the formation of youth identities. 'In the age of high modernity, as subjective class affiliations, family ties and "traditional" expectations weaken, consumption and lifestyles have become central to the process of identity construction' (Furlong and Cartmel 2007: 11). Established socio-structural arrangements are being displaced by new cultural spaces that allow and demand constant reinterpretations of the

self. Personal identity is no longer fixed, but rather has to be actively negotiated. The self is now experienced as an unstable thing, demanding constant reassessment and attention, and requiring personalised, stylised, and often short-term shaping and adjusting. Harris has argued that '[…] as work diminishes as a mechanism of identity formation, self-presentation and lifestyle are becoming more important as resources for cultural capital' (Harris 2004: 165). The market, and particularly the sphere of consumption, thus constitutes the primary arena in which young people experience independence and through which they acquire their sense of self. Traditional identity markers such as class, gender, and ethnicity remain crucially important (Roberts 2010; Woodman 2010), but there has been a significant shift to a strong individually directed sense of life choices and opportunities, even in the context of clear social constraints (Baker 2010).

In an article entitled 'Unemployed by Choice' (Pultz and Mørch 2015), young, unemployed people in Denmark, far from lamenting the lack of work, embrace their precarious status, which they regard as an opportunity for pursuing their creative ambitions. These young people see unemployment benefit as entrepreneurial support, which allows them to pursue and implement projects that are in tune with their creativity and self-expressive desires. Benefit dependency is more than simply a means of managing their lives autonomously, but rather, and more importantly, is actively chosen by Danish young people in order that they may create their own artistic life course. Granted, this Danish case is unlikely to be applicable to youth more widely and in other countries, not least because the Danish social security system offers benefits that are almost unheard of in other countries in Europe or beyond. However, my general argument here is that youth identity formation in late modernity is an expressive project conducted using the discourse of entitlement and choice, and played out through the freedom and, often unacknowledged, constraints of the market (Miles 1998, 2000; Osgerby 1998; Ziehe and Baines 1994).

Civic and Political Engagement Among the Young

The aesthetic thesis also provides a fruitful explanation for the political behaviour and civic engagement of young people. On this front, too, it

appears that youth identity has become first and foremost an expressive project. Whereas some commentators have lamented the declining political participation of youth (Putnam 2000), others have pointed instead to a change in the form of young people's political activity (Bennett 2008; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). They point out that their movement away from formal, large-scale party politics—itself an expression of their decreasingly stable identities—does not necessarily imply that young people are apathetic and disengaged. Rather, new patterns of civic engagement are emerging, highlighting the 'transient and self-expressive nature of participatory practices' (Harris et al. 2010: 13). What has changed is the *form* of political action, which lies much more in the realms of self-expression, self-confrontation, leisure, and even play. In their study of twenty-first-century youth culture, Riley, More, and Griffin (2010) draw on Maffesoli's idea of 'neo-tribes', to argue that partying and the culture of electronic dance music need to be understood as a form of political participation in that they create 'temporary pockets of sovereignty in which to live out alternative values' (Riley et al. 2010: 48). In this analysis, political activity has been taken out of the sphere of the State and its institutions, and towards the sphere of the personal and the informal—those pleasurable, expressive activities where people can enjoy a sense of autonomy and self-determination. Similar trends have been noted in relation to another form of civic engagement, work in humanitarian aid (Chouliaraki 2013). Chouliaraki observes the emergence of a morality that is not inspired by solidarity based on pity for common humanity, but instead draws on a 'neoliberal lifestyle of "feel good" altruism' (Chouliaraki 2013: 4). It is the pleasure of the expressive self that becomes the guiding principle for people's care towards others in need, rather than demands for social justice made through the grand narratives of traditional politics. In other words, people's engagement with social causes, whether political, civic, or humanitarian, meets their personal expressive and aesthetic needs.

'Generation Me' Work Attitudes

In the sphere of employment and work, too, a lifestyle-oriented youth culture is apparent. The detraditionalisation thesis in the writings of Giddens

(1991) and Beck (1992), for example, describes the social changes being experienced by the young at a high level of analysis. More detailed micro-level research draws similar conclusions about shifting value sets, personality traits, and attitudes held by the 'Millennials' (those born between 1980 and 1999) compared with 'Generation X' (1965–1981) or 'Baby Boomers' (1946–1964) (see, e.g. Howe and Strauss 2000). One distinctive trait of so-called 'Generation Me' (Twenge 2006), apart from its members being much more immersed in digital technologies than their predecessors, is their individualism and desire for self-fulfilment. Twenge and her co-authors identify a notable increase in the desire for work–life balance in recent generations compared to older ones (Twenge and Kasser 2013). Work is less central to the lives and identities of these younger generations, who make leisure a 'particularly salient work value for GenMe' (Twenge et al. 2010: 1133). As Millennials make their transition into the labour market, their desire to achieve a better balance between paid work and other parts of their lives materially affects the strategies and practices of employing organisations in relation to working time and place (Ng et al. 2010: 289).

Within leading companies in the ICT sector, such as Google, today's workers' desire for adequate leisure time is reinterpreted as a need to engage in creative, playful, self-expressive activities in the workplace. The Google '20 % rule' (and similar rules in other technology companies such as 3M and HP) allows employees to devote about one day a week to their own interests. This is very attractive to young university graduates who want to have some degree of autonomy but also their employer's sanction to indulge their personal interests—activities with which they identify and for which they believe themselves to be capable (Girard 2009). By making employees' leisure pursuits part of their work, these types of organisation therefore seem to be acutely aware of the values and expectations of the younger generations. Softonic is a Spanish company that offers software downloads and won the 2011 'Best Place to Work' award. Its corporate image and online recruitment material (http://corporate.softonic.com/careers/office-tour) suggest that in this company, work and leisure, or play, have become indistinguishable. Part of the company's office space is set aside for table tennis, darts, a pinball machine, and table football, and employees have the opportunity to play video and arcade

games, or to make music. For its employees, work, in this environment, is another way of being themselves, and of engaging in their preferred leisure pastimes. It seems that, in making their work decisions, and equally in pursuing political, civic, or humanitarian projects, young people use criteria which go well beyond simple labour market or job prospects; they increasingly seek and demand activities which respond to their existential and expressive needs.

The 'Cool' Alternatives and Their Implications

The way that technical subjects are taught within higher education has been identified as one of the most important factors in the decline in student interest in this field as an eventual work destination (Osborne and Dillon 2008). There is a widely recognised need for modernisation of technical education. Similarly, it is clear that the attitudinal changes among the educated young which have been analysed by Twenge and other researchers pose a serious challenge to the education system: the Millennial generation's need for immediacy relates to the achievement of academic and intellectual results as well as to the acquisition of resources more generally. The sustained motivation of students over a long-term education programme is a major challenge for the content and delivery of technical education. And there are now increasingly popular career alternatives. If, as careers advisers note, computer science, for example, is increasingly seen as being 'nerdy', too difficult and 'too boring' (Careers Research and Advisory Centre 2008), the prospect of 'cool' and attractive alternatives naturally arises. What are the enticing choices for contemporary youth with technical training or higher education?

New media work, or cultural work more broadly, appears to be much more attractive. As Gill notes, this type of work is regarded as exciting and at the cutting edge, 'and its practitioners as artistic, young and "cool"—especially when compared with the previous generation of technologically literate IT workers' (Gill 2002: 70). Creative work in different occupations in the film, television, or music industry, as well as in design, fashion, advertising, video game development, or new media, is attractive because of its apparent informality, autonomy, flexibility,

and absence of hierarchy—all features that contrast strongly with the rigid and fixed features of traditional technical careers and jobs. Indeed, work in the creative industries is attractive because it necessitates a much deeper integration of affective labour and the self into the performance of work. This work, often in the form of self-employment, is appealing and sought after because it exploits feelings of individual responsibility, self-exploration, and self-fulfilment—in short, it possesses exactly those attributes that are absent from traditional, technical work, such as STEM employment.

The embracing of the creative as a career is not without its drawbacks. The dangers lie precisely in employees' over-identification with work, which often goes hand in hand with levels of self-exploitation unheard of in other domains. As Arvidsson, Malossi, and Naro (2010) show in their study of the Milan fashion industry, working conditions are very punishing. Low pay, long hours, and unstable working patterns are legion, and extend well beyond the fashion industry. More generally, high levels of instability in temporary and precarious jobs are typical of a great deal of cultural work (Gill and Pratt 2008). What is perhaps surprising is the fact that job satisfaction is exceptionally high in these creative fields. It seems as though the 'cool' image of this type of work, together with the autonomy and the satisfaction derived from it, compensates for all its negative features. Since the work is experienced as meaningful and intrinsically fulfilling, the precarity of the working conditions is overlooked or forgotten about, at least for a while. Creative work may be more attractive to young people because it matches up better with their identity concerns, but it is also the case that identity has become one of the main sources of value in the creative industries. In the case of the Milan fashion industry, for example, 'the value of work as well as one's own value as a worker are increasingly conceived in terms of identity and lifestyle' (Arvidsson et al. 2010: 306).

Thus, young people's expressive ambitions become just another form of labour, the outcome being the closing down of any space outside of work. For work, 'just be yourself' is the new credo of much management thinking (Fleming and Sturdy 2009). Indeed, it is the intimate relationship between self and work that characterises creative work as

virtual work. The scarcity of this type of employment, coupled with over-identification with work, and self-exploitation by virtual workers, allows first and foremost for postponing the receipt of the rewards of their efforts, and consigning these rewards mercilessly to the future. The creative, first-choice careers of today's youth are to be understood as virtual work because the benefits of this work are immaterial: its value seldom lies in pay, pensions, in-work benefits, or other forms of social protection, but rather is expressed in intangible benefits to be cashed in further into the future. '(T)he creative career, like the creative economy, is about immanent, unfulfilled potential' (Morgan et al. 2013). Indeed, an increasing proportion of creative work involves building portfolios, developing and honing social networks, performing internships, doing 'playbour' (Kücklich 2005), or supplying other forms of free labour with no immediate, obvious financial return. Its salience lies in the fact that it is labour invested for rewards that are indeterminate, uncertain, and unlikely to be reaped until sometime into the future, be it 'in the form of potential leads, potential loyalty, or potential customers' (Adkins 2008: 195)—or, one might add, potential employability.

However, virtual work conceived in terms of a virtualisation of benefits is not restricted to the creative industries. Students rejecting formal, boring, and rigid technology careers and turning towards more creative activities that offer them authentic engagement and self-fulfilment as described in detail in the preceding paragraphs offer one route into virtual work. Similarly, the scarcity of stable employment as observed across European countries over the past years obliges many to become entrepreneurs and convert their necessity into a virtue by setting up small companies (Røed and Skogstrøm 2014). Becoming one's own boss under conditions of economic hardship, however, sets the ideal stage for self-exploitation and the concomitant virtualisation of benefits. A strong identification with one's enterprise—for whose success one is now the sole responsible—makes it easy to postpone benefits into an indeterminate future. As such, 'entrepreneurs out of necessity' (Poschke 2013) can be found across all disciplines, including Computer Science or Telecommunications Engineering. What all these forms have in common is the fact that the grip of work tightens considerably because self-fulfilment and identification with one's work

rules supreme, accommodating otherwise quite precarious working conditions. In closing, we can say that the identity projects of young people reveal the self-expressive but ultimately unrewarded dynamics of virtual work, as this new generation of workers tries to carve out a place between the hardships of relatively secure technical careers and the freedom of a creative precariousness.

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3

Young Entrepreneurs and Creative Collectives: Greek New Media Workers in Constant Crisis

Martha Michailidou and Eleni Kostala

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the different forms of new media work currently evolving in Greece. Based on in-depth interviews with new media workers, the chapter examines the ways in which new media work is shaped in Athens in the current context of the sovereign debt crisis. The chapter takes its cue from recent repeated calls for more localised and locally sensitive research into the characteristics of new media work (Banks et al. 2002; Vinodrai 2013; Stahl 2014; De Peuter 2014), discussing the ways in which new media work in Athens not only conforms to the patterns established in critical analyses of creative labour that have been produced in the last 15 years but also locally articulates them in ways which are dependent on national, institutional, and sectoral characteristics. Turning our attention to the local articulations of new media

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work, we follow the broad argument set by the 'Varieties of Capitalism' approach, that different national institutional arrangements structure labour markets, knowledge production, and the production of innovation in distinct manners that tend to produce recognisable patterns (Hall and Soskice 2001; Heinrich 2012; Herrmann and Peine 2011). Even though we are sceptical about the degree to which a strict typology of liberal market economies, co-ordinated market economies, and Mediterranean market economies (Hall and Soskice 2001) can be simply applied for the study of globally informed local labour markets, especially in the context of advanced European integration, we agree with Vinodrai that 'the strategies taken by creative workers to respond to changing economic conditions are actively shaped and constrained by their geographic and institutional contexts' (Vinodrai 2013: 160).

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section offers a brief outline of the basic characteristics of creative labour, and especially of new media labour, situating it within the wider transformations that have been brought about through the virtualisation of work. The second section provides an outline of the policy directions and initiatives, Greek and EU, which have operated as a context for the rise of the Greek creative industries. The last section concentrates on creative workers' own experiences of the precarity and fluidity characteristic of the field of new media work in Greece, and discusses the ways in which these experiences both resonate with the patterns identified by the largely Anglo-Saxon literature, itself formed in critical response to Anglo-Saxon policy, and depart from it to the degree that they are responses constituted in the local context. This section investigates the different employment relationships and working conditions currently prominent in the field of new media work in Athens, the career paths that new media workers carve out in the field, the degree to which their own conceptualisations of creativity both are shaped by these structuring parameters and are in turn shaping them, and the ways in which they attempt to define and control the labour process itself and the multiple forms of value resulting from it. The chapter focuses on two articulations of new media work identities currently arising: the 'young entrepreneurs' and 'creative collectives'. It positions these findings in the context of the extreme fluidity and uncertainty characteristic of the field of new media work in Greece, a fluidity resulting both from the lack of sustained policy addressing contemporary creative work, and, on a more macro level, from the extreme precarity that has arisen as part of the Greek sovereign debt crisis.

The Virtualisation of Work

Creative labour is now the theme of major works in cultural sociology and cultural and media studies (Banks 2007; Banks et al. 2014; Deuze 2007; Hesmondhalgh 2002), both because of the expansion and (political) visibility of the creative industries and because of the ways in which it sharply illustrates wider transformations of work in post-Fordist economies. These transformations, initially enabled by information and communications technologies (ICTs), and then magnified and spread by the rise of Internet connectivity, and, eventually, cloud computing, have been extensively discussed in debates about virtual work and, later on, digital labour (Belt et al. 2000; Brophy 2010; Burston et al. 2010; Fuchs 2010; Huws 2010, 2013; Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Ross 2013; Terranova 2000). While a single definition of virtual and digital labour has yet to be agreed on, and the boundaries which separate virtual from non-virtual work are still open to debate (Holts 2013), there are nevertheless certain key characteristics which have been central in the virtualisation of work and the subsequent expansion of the category of digital labour. The rise and increasing centrality of ICTs, the web, and the cloud for an ever-widening horizon of activities, whether paid or unpaid, work organisation in virtual teams, the dissolution of physically located workplaces and their replacement with distributed workplaces and mobile workers all point, as has frequently been remarked in the literature, to a significant qualitative shift in the nature of work and an increasingly porous distinction between labour and leisure and the concomitant rise of 'free labour'. Nowhere have these developments been more evident than in the field of new media work.

Creative Labour: Valorisation and Critique

Policy discourses have persistently valorised and celebrated creative work, as part of a political strategy of encouraging investment in the creative industries and stressing the role of the creative entrepreneur as the vanguard of the 'new' or knowledge economy (Leadbeater and Oakley 2005). Within this discursive framework, networks of cultural production are seen as non-hierarchical and democratic, open to any-

one with reasonable talent and skills (DCMS 2001; Indergaard 2004; Ross 2007), and committed to fostering creative autonomy. This commitment is very important, as it has been conceptualised as ensuring both innovation for the industry and emancipatory careers for creative workers, away from the dreary realities of salaried employment in hierarchical and controlling managerial structures. Creative workers and entrepreneurs are thus regarded as highly privileged, independent, well rewarded, and standing a good chance of being professionally successful (Florida 2005; Leadbeater and Oakley 2005). Flexible forms of work and project-based production have also been celebrated as characteristics of the 'Independents' (Leadbeater and Oakley 1999). At the same time, the ongoing convergence of digital technologies (Deuze 2009; Jenkins and Deuze 2008) has disrupted workers' previously necessary attachment to specific workplaces and work groups, enabling the flow of ideas, concepts, and digital products in global networks, and freeing the process of creative work from boundaries of time and space. Creative workers can thus be productive anywhere, anytime, without the traditional constraints of industrial work organisation. Flourishing via networks, the creative worker can easily be transformed into the creative entrepreneur, carrier of innovative practices, and producer of high-value cultural commodities.

This 'cool, creative and egalitarian' image of creative labour has been consistently questioned by empirical research and critical analyses of creative workers' lives (Gill and Pratt 2008; Gill 2002, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; McRobbie 2009; Neff et al. 2005; Ross 2009). These works look into the material conditions of creative production and are informed by the production of culture perspective in cultural sociology and political economy of culture (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011) often combined with 'neo-Foucauldian' or 'governmental' approaches (Conor 2013), that interrogate both the capitalist relations of production and workers' tendency to 'accept and reproduce for themselves the precise conditions of their subordination' (Banks 2007: 42). This body of research offers concrete evidence, often based on in-depth, detailed, and focused qualitative employment data, which dismantles the overpolished accounts of creative labour. More importantly, the research has offered empirically informed accounts of the stresses and pitfalls, but also

the joys, of working in the creative industries and pursuing a creative working life, while emphasising the importance of subjectivity, creativity, and relative autonomy in the occupational choices, work organisation, and career paths of creative workers.

The Awkward Turn to Creative Industries in Greek Cultural Policy

The term creative industries first entered the vocabulary of Greek cultural policy in 2012 (Giannopoulos et al. 2012), while first attempts to provide a framework for measuring the economic output of the creative industries in Greece took place a couple of years later (Avdikos 2014; Lazaretou 2014). This relative lateness by Greece to develop a cultural policy for the creative industries, by now an organising theme of cultural policy in Great Britain and most EU countries (Braun and Lavanga 2007; CMSC 2007), derives from its distinct genealogy. Since World War II, Greek cultural policy developed mainly on two pillars: the protection of cultural heritage and the promotion of high arts. This conservative, top-down, nation-centred cultural model was the norm during the post-war years (Zorba 2009: 246), up until the 1980s when cultural industries in Greece began to expand and commercially flourish.

In the midst of the economic crisis, a Ministry of Culture White Paper (Giannopoulos et al. 2012) proposed innovative measures for a new approach to contemporary culture, explicitly including the creative industries as a category of beneficiaries and possible partners in their implementation. More recently, a working paper by the Bank of Greece (Lazaretou 2014) portrayed the creative economy as a field of sustainable economic development and called for a comprehensive national development strategy for the field. At the same time, significant buzz about the creative industries and especially new media had already risen in the market: an entire field of activities, not only of production but also of services like mentoring, networking, and consultation, has grown in Athens since the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis, most clearly evident in the foundation and increased visibility of co-working spaces, hubs, incubators, and, lately, clusters. So, institutional recognition and endorsement of the

potential of creative industries for the Greek economy were both belated and awkward, with policy trying to catch up in a field where the market and creative production seem to have already moved onto without strategic institutional support.

New Media Work in the Context of the Sovereign Debt Crisis

The fact that EU cultural policy prioritised creative industries as a main pillar for development and economic growth, in combination with the recent buzz in the Greek new media market, prompted us to research the work conditions and experiences of new media workers. Due to the fragmentation of the Greek new media sector and the lack of data mapping the field, we conducted open, in-depth interviews with selected interviewees from different backgrounds and work environments through snowball sampling. Our interviewees were primarily designers, digital content providers, and application developers, though these titles did not exhaustively describe the range of their new media activities. A total of 11 personal and group in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 new media workers in Athens throughout 2012, offering detailed accounts of interviewees' education and work paths, their motives, aims, and expectations. Our methodological approach emphasised the workers' subjective experiences, since they are the immediate recipients of any policy or market effect in the sector (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009). The categories 'Young Entrepreneurs' and 'Creative Collectives' emerged as heuristic devices for making sense of the differences in worker identities and work organisation that emerged from the fieldwork.

As Avdikos (2014: 84–85) has shown in his review of the creative sector in Greece, high levels of self-investment, risk and precarity, and project-based work often carried out in the shadow economy are characteristics of creative labour in Athens. The majority of creative workers are young (up to 40 years old) and highly educated, but the consequences of the economic crisis and the recession for the creative industries are

clearly visible. Employment in Greece's creative workforce has decreased by 30 % since 2008 (the largest decrease among EU countries) (Avdikos 2014: 84). Not all sectors have been equally affected however. While most sectors have lost a significant proportion of their employees—with 'traditional' sectors of cultural production bearing the brunt of the recession (printing was most deeply affected, with museums, cinema, and music production following)—in design and software production, employment has risen (by 62.2 % and 26.9 %, respectively), in line with wider EU trends (Avdikos 2014). While stable employment has been decreasing, the numbers of self-employed creative workers and creative collectives in Athens have been rising, as many specialised employees who lost stable jobs have turned to self-employment (Avdikos 2014: 111). This trend signifies both emerging new dynamics of the creative economy and the constantly shrinking opportunities for permanent full-time employment.

The new dynamics are characterised by a mixture of entrepreneurialism *and* precarity, manifested in differing degrees in the different types of new media work undertaken by the new media workers participating in our research, in the different ways they manage work and risk, in the different modes of organisation they choose for their processes of production, in their differing conceptions and practices of networking, and in their differing conceptions of the future. Our research revealed two distinct tendencies in the occupational identities formed by these practices, which we provisionally entitle 'Creative Collectives' and 'Young Entrepreneurs'. The former tend to work in the field of graphic and web design. Their tactics in dealing with the economic environment and the challenges of precarity can be best understood as forms of 'forced' and 'necessity entrepreneurism' (Oakley 2014; Garcia-Lorenzo et al. 2014). The latter tend to work in software and application design. Their responses to the combined challenges posed by the economic crisis and their professional environment are fundamentally shaped by a belief and investment in the dominant orthodoxy of entrepreneurialism (an orthodoxy which is not supported by any evidence to show that entrepreneurialism necessarily drives economic growth (Nightingale and Coad 2014)).

Necessity and Start-up Entrepreneurialism

The new media workers who have elected to form Creative Collectives are 'necessity entrepreneurs' who 'do not recognize themselves in the institutionalised entrepreneur narrative as empowered, creative and independent individuals. It is necessity, not opportunity that is pushing, not pulling, them to become entrepreneurial' (Garcia-Lorenzo et al. 2014: 144). Their entry into entrepreneurship thus has to be understood as a process which constitutes a 'narrative journey' (Garcia-Lorenzo et al. 2014: 150), from disorientation to seeking alternatives, entering freelance work and slowly attempting to construct a new employment condition, with no clear entrepreneurial success story as the ultimate goal:

> Necessity forced us to become a company… Some projects came up and we started rolling… so today we are a company, which, however, is based on different things [to standard corporate organisations], it's based on good relations between its members, and that's the most important thing for us (Members of C, Creative Collective).

These necessity entrepreneurs saw entry into freelance work as inevitable, especially in the context of the dwindling benefits of incredibly scarce full-time employment. So, the formation of semi-permanent work groups was primarily a spontaneous response to necessity.

Young Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, viewed their work choices through information- and technology-centred narratives of career, market, and products, where designing applications is a smart business choice. They clearly differentiated themselves from the average new media freelancer, because they invested considerable time, money, creativity, and skill in order to build and run their own successful companies. Their production work was part of a clear business plan, often similar to those established in traditional media, whereby applications deliver audiences to advertisers. They therefore entered this field with a market in mind, consisting of general users and advertisers, and often global in reach. They estimated that global reach would be possible if the local economy was more conducive to innovative entrepreneurialism:

> [When we launched our app] it was one of the first attempts of the kind worldwide and it was very interesting both commercially and technically. In the course of events the Greek crisis occurred, which definitely does not help at all, given the general problems entrepreneurship encounters in Greece, innovative entrepreneurship that is (D, Young Entrepreneur).

Community and Affinity

These different conceptualisations of work organisation and professional identities resulted in different ethical commitments, with Creative Collectives prioritising the language of community and affective affinity as important and Young Entrepreneurs prioritising professional and business networks as their locations of practice and networks of support. For Creative Collectives, the notion of a community of *peers*, no matter how loosely defined, was not just instrumental but in fact crucial to their professional existence—to how they conceived of and practised their work.

> We are basically a community, a community of people. And we hope to grow into a larger community… Love and respect, nothing else (C, Creative Collective).

In this context, free labour was seen primarily as an affective and ethical investment rather than a financial one. Pleasure was gained through increased and unexpected creativity, which compensated for the lack of financial remuneration. Within this context, Creative Collectives actively engaged in a series of what they referred to as 'seemingly pointless' projects that were unrelated to their paid activities, on the basis of their social utility and value. They set up a web radio station and curated art exhibitions in collective spaces, in the spirit of generosity which they felt should function as a corrective to the imposed hardships of the crisis and the recession:

> The difficulties (getting by every month, making the rent etc.) make us more determined to pursue different, more creative, projects, which are not necessarily financially successful (P, Creative Collective).

Young Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, appeared to have a much more instrumental approach, structured around the applications and technologies market as a stable and growing source of income and then wealth.

> It is a huge market where literally every six months we check the numbers and we can see tremendous growth, 200-300 per cent worldwide … so this is a very interesting field to work and be creative in (D, Young Entrepreneur).

The long working hours, the incessant demands on their personal time, the constant training, and need for networking were all seen as a long-term investment; pleasure was certainly neither the primary organising principle nor the main aim of their activities. Creativity was thus primarily understood in business terms, as 'the magic of having your own enterprise' as 'problem solving' and 'innovative delivery of information'. The Young Entrepreneurs' main commitments thus lay with the business and technology communities, where organised, goal-driven networking takes place in TEDx academy events, Pecha Cuchas, and start-up mentoring and networking events designed to link investors with innovative technology entrepreneurs.

Negotiated Creativity, Autonomy, and Control of Creative Labour Process

Creativity is both workers' capital and their means of pursuing self-realisation through work. In the context of the Greek crisis, it is also the prism through which both Young Entrepreneurs and members of Creative Collectives responded to problems and possible opportunities. Young Entrepreneurs and Creative Collective members both placed the autonomous creative process at the heart of their work to varying degrees, according to their level of self-investment, their specific goals, and their self-image as either a creative first and then an entrepreneur, or vice versa. Although in both cases creativity was ensured via autonomy, it was interpreted and performed in different ways.

All our interviewees stressed the need to safeguard self-expression and their creative autonomy. Their professional choices, the organisation of their work, and the selection of specific projects were driven by these

imperatives, and appeared to be non-negotiable, even at the expense of financial remuneration, and were also seen to guarantee a good result:

> [Personal expression at work] is most important. If I didn't enjoy it or if I weren't any good, I would stop, I'd do another job. This is my credo (B, Young Entrepreneur).

However, this pursuit of autonomy often creates internal tensions in creative workers, when confronted with dilemmas such as creative versus secure employment choices (Huws 2010). They usually choose the creative, involving loose relationships with old and potential new clients.

> I choose to [only] work on a few projects with every client… if you have a relationship logic with your client, you lose part of being a freelancer (O, Creative Collective).

Creative and professional autonomy were valued much more than security and stable conditions of work. This tension was evident in the interviewees' views on commissioned work: commissions were viewed ambivalently, as preventing workers from fully expressing their creative potential, and there was also a significant gap between the clients' and the producers' perceptions of the value and use of the final product. Tensions also arose from Young Entrepreneurs' and Creative Collective members' attempts to control the creative process, which often determined their choices of projects. One interviewee stressed the importance of a job being completed according to the creative worker's standards of quality. If those were not met, these workers preferred to reject these projects. However, the creative worker could only control the product for as long as it was in their hands. Once it was completed, it was taken up by the users or clients, without any way of ensuring the future its creator might have imagined for it:

> I designed the infographics for [a major daily] and then I spent a month training the designers who would be working with them. After I left, they forgot everything and they did it their own way. And that was an award-winning project! (B, Young Entrepreneur).

The need for creative autonomy was the most common reason for flexible work choices. Young entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of

controlling their time and setting their own work rhythms. A workforce with these characteristics is ideal for the new media industry, which is always in need for innovation (Flew 2002). However, some of them had problems in managing their time. In addition, flexibility combined with the high level of self-investment in the work led to work intensification. Because of the uncertainty of the next job, and the consequent need to accept whatever work did come in, all young entrepreneurs described bulimic patterns of work (long hours, working non-stop, working through the night) (Pratt 2002):

> You don't have a boss, you are your boss, and all this is magic, the hard part is to manage to organize yourself (O, Young Entrepreneur.).

Flexible working seems to be a precondition for the creative process and an integral part of the worker's identity (Gill 2002, 2007), but often leads to the blurring of boundaries between work and free time. This was even more the case for the members of the creative collective, for whom work and leisure were indistinguishable:

> There are no [specific] work hours, I don't know, it is not a job to us; it feels like home here (at the company's office) (…). It is like living together and working at the same time (P, Creative Collective).

The need for self-management and self-organisation is a result of project-based work, itself a central feature of every empirical account of creative labour and especially of new media work (Blair 2003; Blair et al. 2001; Christopherson and van Jaarsveld 2005; Neff et al. 2005). Both Young Entrepreneurs and Creative Collectives had to manage their time in the context of continuous parallel projects: 'Yes, there have been times when I am running five different projects, but every project has its own rhythm' (B, Young Entrepreneur).

Managing Risk

Precarity and risk (Beck 1992) arise not only from the individualisation of creative work but also from the desire for a high degree of autonomy on the part of creative workers (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010; Menger

1999), which often leads to a 'problematic normalization of risk' (Neff et al. 2005: 308). Both Young Entrepreneurs and Creative Collectives internalised the risk of their labour, while employing different ways to manage it. The Creative Collective members shared the risk whilst mobilising a wide network of outsourcers and friends to support them. Thus, their strategy was to spread the risk among a wider group. The Young Entrepreneurs, however, treated the risk of doing business as an investment in the future success of their enterprise. For example, the Young Entrepreneurs recognised the importance of lifelong learning and on-the-job training in order to deal with the multifaceted technical needs of creating applications or keeping up with new versions of programmes without having to rely on outsourcing. This allowed them to control the labour process and the final product.

There was a strong belief among the Young Entrepreneurs in the value of hard work, meritocracy, and talent. They rejected what they saw as traditional forms of social protection associated with salaried employment, such as health insurance and social security, which they saw as irrelevant to them. The risks they undertook were amplified both by their individualised working conditions and by the intensified competition in the Greek business environment, since, as we have already stated, the growth of self-employment and of creative collectives within the Greek creative industries has coincided with the economic crisis (Avdikos 2014). Our two groups of creatives nevertheless exhibited some of the key characteristics of creative labour: constant training and learning in personal time (Batt et al. 2001; Gill 2010) leading to the intensification of digital production, the incursion of work into free time, and an 'always on' culture of work (Kennedy 2010; Terranova 2004).

Members of the creative collective seemed to employ different strategies of dealing with risk, which derived from their organisation as a creative team, with three permanent members and an extended network of outsources, with a variety of backgrounds and specialisations, who they often referred to as 'friends' or 'kindred souls', but whom they could not afford to employ. They valued input from their collaborators and every project brought different disciplines and specialisations together with the aim of achieving an unexpected result. This was the main strategy used by the members of this creative collective in order to manage risk.

Rent arrears and cash flow problems, intensified in the economic crisis, beset these workers. Projects were being pitched continuously, but only a few proceeded. The members of the creative collective tried a variety of tactics to increase their firm's profile. They employed an open policy towards ideas, projects, and, most importantly, people:

> It is not easy to advertise any more, so the best advertisement is for as many people as possible to participate and to keep the doors of the office open (P, member of Creative Collective).

Such openness, and a reliance on a network of semi-permanent associates, requires good project management and people skills, in order to balance not only different projects but also different collaborators. The culture of co-operation and co-creation helped the members of the creative collective to manage these complexities, in the sense that they shared responsibilities and tasks, invested their time together, and generally shared the experience of risk. Work partners and collaborators provided, if not exactly a safety net, at least a supporting network in times of extreme precarity.

Survival Strategies and the Future

The patterns of creative work organisation and worker identity described in this chapter are only a part of an evolving picture. New media workers, and especially artists, have also formed, and become increasingly visible in, collectives and self-organised groups. They do so with an explicitly politically committed vision of self-organisation, not simply *adjusting* to the harrowing conditions of risk, but employing 'collective efforts to *confront* precarious conditions of labour and life' (De Peuter 2014: 266 emphasis added). Our analysis is not intended to downplay the importance of forms of organisation whose autonomy is non-negotiated and is, therefore, constitutive of more radical possibilities for the field of creative production (Bain and McLean 2013) and the wider field of social organisation (Daskalaki 2014). Rather, we wanted to understand the nuances and implications of more pragmatic approaches to the challenges with

which new media workers in Greece are faced, approaches which remain within the realm of the 'market' and attempt to carve out a living, an occupational identity, and an occupational space at times when these have been threatened or even attacked. As such, the patterns of creative work described here are themselves incremental rather than radical transformations of virtual work but, because of this, perhaps they are more likely to prove resilient and be sustained.

The work patterns, forms of organisation, and experiences of new media work that we encountered in our fieldwork were formed in the context of a fragmented and incoherent national policy for the creative industries, and a wider socio-economic and political landscape of extreme uncertainty and precarity. The pragmatic responses of creative workers to the conditions of creative work in crisis-hit Greece are not responses to inevitable developments in new communications technologies or new media labour. The virtualisation of work and the increasing centrality of ICT-mediated labour, especially in the field of new media work, may have normalised project-based work and dissolved traditional workplaces and work identities (in the process, eradicating established notions of work, leisure, and remuneration, and bringing about what has, ironically, been recognised as the feminisation of work), but their corollary is not inevitably the extreme expressions of precarity, individualisation, necessity entrepreneurialism, and market evangelism that we have been discussing in this chapter. Greek cultural policy—or rather, its relative under-formulation—has played a key role in shaping the terms within which creative labour is carried out. The residual ambivalence of the Greek Ministry of Culture towards contemporary cultural production, combined with the effects of the continuing sovereign debt crisis on state funding for the creative sector, has meant that when new media work did emerge, it did so in the context of a national policy and practical discourse which over-emphasised entrepreneurial innovation and start-up success stories and constructed them as a solution to the structural problems of the Greek economy and economic crisis. The lack of a comprehensive national policy for the creative industries, their unexplored relations with urban and regional development (Karachalis and Deffner 2012; Souliotis 2013), and the fragmented and fluid nature of the field (Avdikos 2014) have carved a pathway for entrepreneurialism to be treated as the only

way forward and out of the crisis, bolstered by the individualisation and internalisation of risk by creative workers themselves.

These dynamics have, of course, been compounded by the simultaneous demolition of labour regulation, an extreme rise in unemployment, and the casualisation of *all* work that have so far characterised the sovereign debt crisis. New media workers' response to this set of challenges has been to either manage risk through socialising it into extended networks of informal relations or valorise it through incorporation into the familiar Silicon Valley narrative of new technology start-up entrepreneurism and success. Both forms of creative work organisation may not be sufficient long-term strategies: the socialisation of risk as a survival strategy may result in ambiguities and inequalities in informal work relations, which then risk fracturing the delicate boundaries between friendship, collaboration, and professionalism. The valorisation of risk, individual talent, and personal investment may also prove insufficient capital in an extremely competitive and fragmented new media sector.

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4

Virtual Innovation Work: Labour, Creativity, and Standardisation

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Virtual Innovation Work: Organisational Standards, Heightened Paradoxes, and the Role of Labouring Capacity

Innovation work usually is seen as the most creative form of day-to-day virtual and/or knowledge work, often considered to exist more on the playground than on the factory side of the contradictions of digital

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labour (see Scholz 2012). Whether in the context of the processes of creative generation of ideas or in the images of the brilliant developer and the intrinsically motivated intrapreneur, uncertainty and risk seem essentially connected with innovation (Berker 2010). Although on the spearhead of the digital revolution, innovation work is increasingly virtualised and standardised, with the 'creative class' becoming part of the 'cybertariat' (Huws 2003), increasingly confronted with an unknown quality of information and communication technology (ICT)-driven and organisationally driven formalisation that is partially jeopardising and restricting innovative dynamics. The design and management of innovation processes are therefore constantly torn between taming and setting free these creative forces. However, the more innovation itself becomes the decisive competitive factor for enterprises, the more this perspective fades from view. Schumpeter's distinction between invention and innovation offers enterprises the discursive legitimation (which has now become hegemonic) for separating the apparently essentially informal nature of the creative genesis of ideas (invention) from the process of implementation (innovation), which is regarded as amenable to formalisation (Pfeiffer et al. 2010). The one is, so to speak, assigned informal space, for example, in phases of 'creative chaos' (as they are explicitly known), while in the case of the other an attempt is made to completely formalise the process by means of standardisation and complementary processes of informatisation. Through this separation, organisations are increasingly attempting either to utilise the various demands of incremental and radical innovation ambidextrously or to dissolve them contextually (Andriopoulos and Lewis 2009). This ultimately fails; however, as in the context of innovation, more than anywhere else, organisational paradoxes are particularly evident. Profit versus breakthrough, tight versus loose customer relationships, and discipline versus passion (ibid.) are seen as having the same relevance as the dichotomies of centralisation versus decentralisation, stability versus flexibility, and control versus freedom (Eisenhardt 2000).

In relation to these paradoxical categories, there seems, currently, to be a boom in processes of standardisation of innovation, which at the organisational level favours profit, discipline, stability, and control, while at the level of the work of employees calling for flexibility and passion within decentralised structures. Stage-Gate—a business model of enterprise consultation (Cooper 2001)—may be interpreted as such an experiment.

Cooper's Stage-Gate model presents the stages of product development in a generic, abstract project life cycle, from the idea through evaluation and project development. It consists of five stages, between two subsequent stages there is always a gate. At each gate, top management and senior staff from all relevant areas decide on whether to break off or to continue the project and move to the next stage (ibid.). The process is seen as state of the art in business and enjoys wide distribution (Von Ahsen and Heesen 2009). Following Brunsson (2002), we are talking here about an organisational standard that attempts to standardise processes of innovation on the basis of cost neutrality and minimisation of risk.

Theoretical debate within organisational sociology has long since taught us that enterprises cannot resolve the antithetical relationship between formality and informality through organisational structure. Every type of organisation is governed by both informal and formal hierarchy (Diefenbach and Sillince 2011); instead, relationships become more dynamic and varied. The theoretical debate on organisational paradoxes also points to their inherent and unresolvable dialectic (Da Cunha et al. 2002). What this organisational viewpoint fails to explain when taken in isolation, however, is that these tensions are either functionally productive and thus ultimately unproblematic or continually resolved and *dealt with* at a different level. The place where these paradoxes of innovation are dealt with—*and this is the proposition on which this chapter is based*—is at the level of concrete innovation work. Organisational standards like Stage-Gate, which aim to formalise processes of innovation, require all the more urgently the informal qualities of the work carried out by employees, intimately bound up with their life and experience as it is—their labouring capacity (Pfeiffer 2014). The central concern of this chapter is to empirically trace, focusing on the exemplary case of Stage-Gate, the newly arising reciprocal relationships of the informal and the formal, and in so doing to reveal *how* the paradoxes and side effects of new organisational standards are subjectively experienced, treated, and dealt with at the level of concrete innovation work.

In the second section, the chapter shows, by means of condensed empirical results, how Stage-Gate works in practice and what difficulties and disruptions it has to contend with at the level of concrete virtual work in R&D. This chapter should be understood primarily as an empirical contribution to the realities of current—and that means, above

all, increasingly standardised—innovation work. In the third section, we summarise the empirical results and complement these with a conceptual proposal from the sociology of work for the amplification and expansion of the theories of organisational paradoxes around the labouring capacity perspective. Finally, we outline the principles to be followed by a future-oriented form of standards in such dynamic areas as innovation work. Here we must state in advance a central result of our empirical work. It is that complex innovation processes need neither complete taming nor total setting free; what is needed is, rather, a meaningful degree of support for the qualities of innovative work, which ultimately again and again successfully copes with the tension between these extremes in the concrete everyday activity of virtual work.

Tamed or Set Free? An Empirical Analysis of Virtual Innovation Work

This chapter is based on the results of a multiple-company case study (Yin 2009) including five cases from one of the most important industrial sectors in Germany: mechanical engineering (VDMA and McKinsey 2014). The companies represent the industry's central categories: machinery production for general industries (Case C), machinery production for specific industries (Cases A and D), production of components for different machinery (Cases B, D, and E), and production of machinery tools and other wearing parts (Cases B and E).

Selection criteria of the cases followed the vanguard model, which focuses on high-performance organisations that often set standards, values, or principles for peers (Kanter 2009). Since other organisations are likely to follow vanguard models, the analysis of vanguard organisations enables the identification of general trends and developments within industrial sectors. The selected five companies can be classified as vanguard models because of their outstanding innovative performance and for 'building an enduring culture for the long term that enables continual change and renewal' (Kanter 2009: 3). The companies are world market leaders with their products and have a high product innovation rate. The size and revenue of the five cases have grown considerably within the last

Table 4.1 Company case sample compared to industry average

	Employees'	Turnover in Mio €	*n*
Industry average[a]	191	28	
Case A	3800	800	19
Case B	350	40	12
Case C	8500	2300	10
Case D	39,000	5198	13
Case E	1350	137	17
Total	53,000	8475	71

[a]Source: VDMA 2012

Table 4.2 Socio-demographic structure of the interviewee sample

	Gender		Training				Age[a]			
	M	F	Vocational	Academic	Both	Managers'	<30	30–39	40–49	50+
Case A	17	2	11	16	8	14	0	5	9	5
Case B	11	1	10	9	8	9	1	2	6	2
Case C	10	0	3	6	0	3	0	4	3	2
Case D	13	0	7	11	5	11	0	3	8	2
Case E	17	0	6	13	2	11	1	7	8	1
Total	68	3	7	55	23	48	2	21	34	12

[a]For two persons, age information is missing

decade and are extraordinary compared with the industry's average (see Table 4.1). Four of the five enterprises have a works council.

Despite the companies' leading roles within the industry, they retain some characteristics traditional to the mechanical engineering sector (Case A = technologies for tobacco industry, Case B = sheet metal processing, Case C = laser technology, Case D = drive components and systems for rail vehicles, E = mechatronic and drive technologies). The product ranges and legal forms are typical for the mechanical and plant engineering industry. The five enterprises are largely still family owned and operated. Also, their company cultures are typical of traditional family-run businesses (Schütt 2010).

According to the company size and type of innovation process (incremental or radical), the companies chose the departments, number, and names of operationally involved personnel for interviews. The overall number of interview partners was 71, ranging between 10 and 19 per company. The socio-demographic structure of our interview sample is shown in Table 4.2.

In order to manage these sometimes conflicting settings in the field, a specific research design called 'Innovation Process Analysis' was developed. Traditional and contemporary interview methods were combined: a semi-structured interview guideline was chosen to enable narration and explore subjective and everyday work actions of innovation actors. In order to stimulate and focus narration, several visual elements were used during the interview. For example, the interview partners were shown illustrations of a plain work flow chart, a blank pie chart for the working content, and a blank stress scale. These visual elements provided an open ground for the interviewees' drawings, sketches, and explanations in regards to the innovation process (for greater detail on method and sample, see Wühr et al. 2015).

Organisational Standardisation, Paradoxes, and Concrete Innovation Work

Four of the five companies have introduced processes of standardisation of innovation. This fact could foreshadow a future model for the industry as a whole. Stage-Gate is an accepted and widely used process that has joined many other long-established process standards, and in all cases is linked with a highly developed, conventional form of project management and control.

Stage-Gate, as an organisational standard, aims to formalise the innovation process, the risky side of which is delegated to the upstream processes of 'creative chaos' and invention, but is supposed to be tamed when the actual innovation takes place. The paradoxes between the formal and the informal cannot, however, be resolved, since the separation between creative invention and incremental innovation is artificial, and employees daily experience the inevitably heightened tension between the formal process and the real demands. The interview excerpts[1] below demonstrate this and, in particular, make two things clear: (1) The organisational standardisation of the innovation process heightens the paradoxes it sets

[1] The interviews were conducted in German and translated for this chapter into English by the authors.

out to resolve. (2) The accompanying dysfunctional fields of tension—for innovation and organisation—are resolved, and *must* be resolved, at the level of concrete innovation work.

These findings relate to the difficulty of synchronising the real innovation process with the phases laid down by Stage-Gate, and also apply to the accompanying replacement of the Stage-Gate process by the objectively necessary steps of concrete innovation work. Employees must not only tolerate this paradox, but also 'operate' the standardisation process, even though it is perceived as superseded:

> When we're told 'released for development', I mean if we didn't start the development until we had the development release, we wouldn't stand a chance. So we actually make a start with the development during the project phase, we begin with concepts, and sometimes even with detailed plans. That is, activities start earlier, much earlier, than they really should according to the quality gate. (Case D, male, product manager)

The interviewees state that requirements of Stage-Gate standards are decoupled from the concrete virtual innovation work and their experience. This causes permanent discrepancies which become evident in the next excerpt:

> The processes are not appropriate to the work. Or the complexity has increased to such an extent that it just cannot be represented in a process of that kind. Or the people who have tried to make the processes don't know how to approach it. [...] so much knowledge is unspoken, it's in your unconscious mind and you're not aware that you know it, and normally in life you just use it and don't give it another thought—you simply have to know it to be able to do your job properly. That can't all be packed into a process. (Case E, male, employee technical sales)

In this context, one respondent emphasises the complexity and abstraction of the process, which is such that it is not only almost impossible to convey to outsiders—even internal staff question it and have difficulty grasping it. Illustrating this, he describes his interaction with a girl student to whom he had to convey the complexity of the process. For the explanation of the first three gate stages alone, the whole morning was

needed. She said, 'No one can live that!', and the respondent answered: 'I say, yes they can, we live it". The interview data show in an especially striking way that the process, despite its abstract irrationality, still has to be fulfilled.

A recurring theme in the interviews is the pressure, in the gate meetings, to make a decision on the releases that are due according to the plan—even when the material and technical basis for this decision is lacking. The following two excerpts from interviews with R&D workers illustrate this pressure to decide: in the first case, mistakes that have been made once ought not to be repeated, which at the time of the gate meeting would be an argument against a series release. These factually correct, customer and market-related considerations are accompanied, however, by the expectation of being 'told off', as the above quotation illustrates. In the second excerpt, there is a description of the real fears of the pressure to which one can be subjected when there are sound reasons for not agreeing to a release. Carrying on along the fixed plan seems to be an organisational dogma. Raising objections—even though they seem highly justifiable in a given case—is sanctioned:

> I'll give you an example: I'm one of those people who don't agree to the series release of the machine. Reason: lack of data for specific type of handling. [...] We put a machine on the market for which we did not have full data. In other words we've actually had this experience and it was painful. [...] Due to our failure to provide the documentation and information, we jeopardised the success of its launch on to the market—no doubt about it. (Case D, male, product management)
>
> For example, we did not agree to this production release [of the machine], because our suppliers could not guarantee a reliable supply of parts, and I think that in the case of a process like this the management has the right to step in, but we ought to be able to come along with measures and say: 'Okay, if you can't manage this, what do you need?', and not then say: 'Oh they can cope with this.' So we have so far objected to two releases. After the production release comes the sales release and finally the series release. We always expressed our misgivings, and we were given a lot of stick as a result [...] and now we have the series release, we've had the meeting and we said: 'Okay, we'll manage it now under these conditions, but we need a bit more time to produce the machine.' [...] Perhaps people are frightened or

> don't have the confidence to point out the mistakes or the difficulties there are, and then say: 'Yes we can do that by January, we still have a bit of time.' And it doesn't get done and then you have no choice and have to slam on the brakes. [...] So as I said before, you get some stick, you have to justify yourself to the top management. (Case D, male, project development manager)

So the Stage-Gate process leads to a tendency to give approval against one's better judgement, as we see from the statement of a developer in the context of a group discussion: 'Everyone puts their hand up, although everyone knows: The machine is not yet ready for serial production. But the main thing is that we go through the gate as planned.' Bit by bit a façade is built up, and there is an increasing degree of decoupling between the standard and the real demands, as this quotation concisely puts it: 'The joke about the situation is that everyone knows that the process won't function like that. [...] We're living in a world of make-believe. The process is make-believe: the way we act is different. And all levels of the hierarchy are aware of this.' What is important to stress here is apparently not the fact that organisational requirements are decoupled from real processes—this is well-documented and long recognised by organisational sociology (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Our concern is to emphasise, by means of the selected interview excerpts, that the employees are not only well aware of this decoupling, but that it is they who have to do the work to overcome, deal with, and compensate for the accompanying tensions, contradictions, and irrationalities. After all, what is explicitly perceived as a make-believe world has real consequences. These can even go as far as knowingly allowing technically misleading approaches to be further developed in order to satisfy the formal process. The following descriptions of a development process for an external customer, who had specified Stage-Gate as the basis for the product development, are a good example of this. First, two male development staff persons describe the situation:

> Well, I think you have to make a distinction. On the one hand, this quality gate is design points [required by the customer], whose only real purpose—stupid though it may sound—is to check whether the supplier who wants

> to do business is in a position to keep his promises. So it would actually be more straightforward at this point to say: Let's make a product, push it through the quality gate, and this would ultimately be linked with what we should like to deliver. […Instead] we have to construct an appliance and it can happen that in the end we're kicked out of the entire project. In the meantime we've made advance payments here and there which, when it comes down to it, we shan't see again. […] you have to try and achieve these quality gates in order to move forward. So you may be forced to build stuff that you know very well you'll never build again; it's only there so that [the customer] can tick the box that says: 'This is proof that the test has been passed, they have delivered on time.'
>
> [At a particular point in the project] we had to struggle with these quality gates units. […] And that was the gate that we had to get through, because otherwise we couldn't progress. At the same time we knew that we couldn't get anywhere with [the customer's product]—it was impossible. It wouldn't work. [...] We knew we had to get this junk to run in order to get through this gate, and yet we knew we had no chance whatever with this concept, in other words, we had to come up with a second concept in parallel.

The risky aspect of innovation must continually be dealt with by the employees, but on the formal side the process does not allow for any such difficulties. The innovation workers are obliged to deal with this existing paradox (as it might be called) in their day-to-day work. It cannot be resolved, quite the reverse: the contrast between work for the real demands of innovation on the one hand and work to reach particular process standards on the other hand heightens the paradox to the point of encouraging technically and economically meaningless practices. The passionate commitment of employees and their expenditure of labouring capacity become tainted with the stigma of having taken a wrong turning technically as developers, something that can cause them lasting harm on a personal level and have a very real impact on their reputation for competence and on their place in the hierarchy:

> You know, and the worst of it is always that you come under attack from all sides. If we had put the kibosh on these quality gates at the time, then people would have pointed the finger at us and said: 'You're useless', and we

> would have been labelled as the ones who put the kibosh on the project. Well, we somehow got the project through and now they're saying: 'Well, it wasn't all that brilliant what you did then' [...] And the new project leader made a few staffing changes and, well, in the end what happened was that I was given a rather different job […] I had devoted myself to the project for a year, […] and at the end of the day it was somehow a demotion. (Case E, male, member of development staff)

Many of the interviews indicate that in the real-life working environment, Stage-Gate (like many other standardisation processes) often seems inseparable from rampant bureaucracy. Both employees and management discuss this in the interviews and express strong views on the subject, sometimes illustrated at length with examples. Thus, one member of the sales staff, talking about having to fill in 'an incredible number of forms', says it reminds him of 'the planned economy [...] in the former East Germany'. One of the management team puts it like this: 'They have to introduce rules, and if you're not very careful the whole thing rapidly gets out of control and it takes on a life of its own and you find yourself *filling in endless forms*.' This expansion of bureaucratic work also shows that the bureaucracy that accompanies standards is not always and not necessarily the intention and/or consequence of a particular standard itself, but evidently also has a dynamic of its own, which itself calls for an explanation. As the formal stage gives way to real processes, the flow of forms to be filled in turns into a flood—it is almost as if the formal stage, having become detached, has taken concrete form. Here too the real demand for innovation is delegated to the working capacity of employees. The organisational standard promises a more efficient innovation process, but actually produces increasing inefficiency. In the daily work of innovation, the individual must decide according to the situation what formal demands need to be met, but conversely also which ones can be ignored or deliberately circumvented in order to protect, so to speak, the heart of the work, the innovation itself, from the aspects of the process that are a hindrance to the innovation.

These condensed examples from our empirical findings serve as a snapshot of the bigger picture, and indicate that at many points the Stage-Gate process is inappropriate to the innovation requirements of mechanical

engineering, although it still needs to be 'satisfied'. The conflict between the real process and the unrealistic, but nevertheless objectively definitive, target process is what innovation actors must work to resolve. It is they who in their day-to-day work must try, time after time, to reconcile the realities of the innovation work and the absurdities of planning. In doing so, they develop the ability again and again to reduce the existing paradoxes to manageable proportions and in this way to make innovation, with its systematically informal qualities, possible, despite its increasing taming and standardisation. At the same time, the formal standardisation process itself makes extra work. With Stage-Gate and the associated project management, a considerable amount of additional administrative work is created in connection with planning, legitimation, and reports: for the interviewees, this takes up an average of 30 % of their working time. These efforts, which are often seen as irritating add-on tasks, amount to an ongoing and significant burden on employees concerned with innovation (Wühr et al. 2015).

The Handling of Organisational Paradoxes

Stage-Gate has been the empirical focus of this chapter. We see it as a good example of new organisational standards, which are more than merely an instrument for the formalisation of the innovation process itself. What is characteristic and representative of a new quality is that current standards of innovation do not deny the element of risk involved with innovation, that is, its informal content, but very much recognise this component, and do so in a twofold way, yet at the same time turn it into an object of formalisation itself:

> Firstly, the informal and risky aspect of innovation is delegated to the phase of invention or of 'creative chaos'; what remains of it in the innovation process is dominated by planned decision processes previously determined according to certain criteria and contained within the corresponding project management and control. The informal aspect of innovation is thus recognised, inasmuch as it receives its assigned scope through the requirements of the organisational standard. Thus the formal aspect can—

> and must, at least according to the organisational imperative—be executed in a manner apparently outside this containment, without regard for informal necessity.

Recognition of the informal aspect relates, secondly, to the context to which innovation in the organisation is formally assigned: the actual R&D area. Here there is also a new recognition of the contribution to innovation of those organisation areas that do innovation work outside this formal assignment, and therefore are informally innovative in this sense. In Stage-Gate, this is shown in the importance given to the composition of the group of decision-makers in the gate meetings. At first sight, this appears to recognise informal innovation knowledge, which is not formally represented in organisational functional logic, since great importance (to the level of a formal standard) is attached to consideration of the perspective of downstream areas such as production or service. The form in which this informal contribution is fed into the formal innovation process, however, is in turn itself the object of formalisation and is only given consideration if the formal process is not thereby jeopardised.

So current standardisation processes like Stage-Gate increasingly recognise the informal in its new quality, but on this basis they expand the formal and formalisable and additionally make the drawing of boundaries between the formal and the informal itself the object of formalisation. At the outset, we posed the question of whether or not the tensions that have been identified in the theory of organisational paradoxes—especially the tension between the formal and the informal—are functionally productive and thereby ultimately unproblematic for innovation processes. We have attempted, by means of the empirical extracts and using the example of Stage-Gate, to show that new organisational standards that aim at the formalisation of innovation are in fact problematical and may even include dysfunctional elements. It is initially unclear why these are not (yet) visible at the organisational level, and in our opinion this can only be explained if organisational scrutiny is widened to take in the work of the employees and their labouring capacity. It is here, at the level of concrete innovation work—this much should be clear from the empirical evidence—that developments that have the potential to be organisationally dysfunctional are dealt with. It is the employees who,

on a daily basis, experience, suffer, and compensate for the paradoxes that are identifiable by organisational sociologists. The organisation itself is, in a manner of speaking, immune to the paradoxes it generates as long as their dysfunctionality is 'only' at the level of concrete innovation. As Diefenbach and Sillince (2011) have argued, Stage-Gate cannot simply be seen as an example of a formal organisational structure; it should be seen as a process that constantly produces new tensions between the informal and the formal. Smith and Lewis (2011) stress the difference between latent tensions that arise out of organisational complexity and those that are evident and perceived by the actors. From our analytical perspective focusing on labouring capacity, it is clear, for one thing, that the employees not only experience both qualities of contradictions and are not afraid to verbalise them in the interview, but that dealing with latent contradictions has become a relevant part of their daily innovation *work*. This continual need to deal with the paradoxes generated by the organisational standard cannot become evident at the level of the organisation, as it takes place at the level of concrete work and is therefore only visible to the eye of the sociologist. In the face of the complexity and dynamics of organisational change, international organisational sociology is currently discussing in a very self-critical manner a lack of new and autochthonous theories within its own discipline (Suddaby et al. 2011). Our aim in this chapter is not only to give an empirical insight into virtual innovation work but also to combine this with a conceptual proposal to expand organisational sociological theories regarding the analytical perspective of the labouring capacity that focus on paradoxes (Pfeiffer 2014). A summary that is concerned with empirical organisational work practice, however, should, in our view, include not only an empirical interpretation and a linked conceptual conclusion, but also a look at possible consequences of our results for this practice. Stage-Gate unreflectively carries with it logics and mechanisms that are similar to many other existing organisational standards that the process meets when introduced into a given context. Notions of total planning certainty and predictability are ultimately the driving force behind the introduction of these plans, inspired by the idea that complexity is, in the end, controllable, provided it is broken up into sufficiently small individual units. The limits of this essentially Taylorist perspective have long been appar-

ent in many places and, as we have shown, have to be compensated for permanently in the everyday work situation. Stage-Gate does not solve these problems and cannot do so as long as there is no plant-level strategy to break free from the old established dogma of *controlling* complexity and to start thinking organisationally and at the level of the individual employee in the direction of enabling the *management* of complexity. The demands of innovation cannot be met in the long term by means of standards that follow this logic of control. Neither can organisational standards be abandoned with no replacement; even the employees do not want to be allowed total freedom. What they want are meaningful standards that support them in their *work* of innovation. To achieve this, as we see it, what is needed is a recognition of the immanent risk inseparable from innovation *and* an acknowledgement of the ability of the employees to cope with it. The element of risk cannot be eliminated from the innovation of complex and technically extremely sophisticated products. Meaningful standards of innovation enable more freedom of action for the innovation actors in the process—their technical expertise and their long years of experience are the irreplaceable resources that necessarily accompany the materially determined uncertainty of technical innovation processes. Future-oriented innovation standards support employees in this independent and responsible work.

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5

It's on the Cards: Emerging Employment Relationships in Online Poker

Kaire Holts and Romina Surugiu

Introduction

This chapter explores emerging employment relationships among professional online poker players in Romania. It focusses in particular, on 'staking', an arrangement in which a poker player is provided with a 'stake' (money), and in some cases with training, in exchange for a share of the winnings. Different types of arrangements exist between a staker (the person who provides the money) and the player. Staking is a global poker phenomenon, popular among high- and low-level players and in both online and offline poker. The specific interest of the chapter is in low-level staking arrangements in online poker, as these require a larger network of players in order to be profitable and are thus more likely to reveal general patterns.

There are several reasons for the focus on these staking arrangements in Romania. Romania is a low-wage economy compared to other countries in the European Union (EU), and the income that an experienced

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player can generate from online poker is above the country's average. This makes online poker a more attractive career option than in countries with higher average salaries. At the same time, low wages make it more difficult to access poker as it requires financial investments. Staking fills this gap by providing players with the means to play. Romania also has high unemployment rates among young people. In this context, engaging in a staking relationship is particularly appealing to young people because it allows them to embark on an activity without having to obtain start-up funding which can be an entry barrier for the young and/or unemployed. Once involved in staking, players can also access free training for which they would otherwise need to pay as extensive training is essential in becoming a professional player. Good-quality Internet connections are the norm in Romania and there is a culture which is supportive of gambling and gaming. Furthermore, until 2014 (when the gambling law was amended), tax rules on revenues from online poker were lenient. These conditions are likely to have contributed to the popularity of staking and online poker as a career option in Romania.

Online poker has generally been viewed as a recreational activity or as a high-income tournament sport. The study on which this chapter is based consisted of 16 semi-structured interviews with Romanian poker players, and investigates it as a form of income generation. In order to explore staking as a form of employment relationship, we examine the recruitment, contractual relationships, reward mechanisms, and work organisation common in staking to investigate how it fits into existing typologies of employment.

Making a Living Out of Online Poker

The popularity of gambling, and poker in particular, has grown hugely since it went online in the early twenty-first century (see e.g. Fiedler and Wilcke 2011; Wood and Williams 2011; Griffiths and Barnes 2008; Farnsworth and Austrin 2010; Jouhki 2011; McCormack and Griffiths 2012; Ranade et al. 2006). It is estimated that 40 million people across the northern hemisphere play poker regularly (offline or online) and that

online poker has become a multibillion-dollar market (Farnsworth and Austrin 2010; Fiedler and Wilcke 2011).

Existing research treats poker as a form of entertainment, consumption, and gambling (Cassidy et al. 2013) but rarely as a form of work. Occasionally, it is also discussed as sport (Schuck 2010). In this framework, popular topics include playing strategy (Turner 2008; Fiedler and Rock 2009; DeDonno and Detterman 2008; Chen and Ankenman 2006), psychosocial effects, such as problem gambling, game addiction, and substance abuse (see for instance Griffiths 2004; Winters et al. 2005), and demographic questions (Wood and Williams 2011; Wardle et al. 2007, 2011; Sproston et al. 2000). Academic articles about online poker continue this tradition by focussing on a similar range of topics and by treating it as a leisure activity.

However, in interviews with people involved in poker, a more diverse experience was encountered. A category of players was identified who have transitioned from playing online poker as a leisure activity to playing it to generate income—a subject that has been the focus of only one previous research study. Hayano (1977, 1982) studied professional (offline) poker players as a deviant occupational group in the card rooms of California and Nevada. Following Hayano, this study found that these players label themselves 'professional' or 'winning players'. Professional players are people who have made a conscious decision to regard online poker as their job even though their core activity (playing poker online) remains the same as when they played it as a leisure activity. This change in attitude or reinterpretation of the situation is often accompanied by their giving up other work if they were working previously, restructuring their days and having fixed 'working' hours, managing their bankroll,[1] having a personal trainer or another source of continuous training and skills development, and using strategies or tools which help generate a steady income. There are a number of digital tools that help players to reduce the risk factor in poker, track other players' performance (for instance, Hold'em Manager), or help them to distinguish between experienced and casual players (for this type of 'fish finder software' see

[1] 'Bankroll management' is a term well known among professional poker players. It refers to financial discipline and managing money that a player invests in poker.

e.g. Poker Edge, Table Shark, Tournament Shark, and Smart Buddy). Tools or 'pokerbots' exist that can partly automate humans' play. Players are also reducing the risk factor and making their earnings more predictable through increasing the numbers of tables at which they play. The number of hands[2] one can play online in an hour is considerably higher than in a brick and mortar casino. A 31-year-old male interviewee explained that online he would play 8000 hands a day when playing for 8 hours and at 10 tables in parallel, whereas in a casino, he would only be able to play 27 hands in an hour and 216 hands in 8 hours. Not only is it more profitable to play online and at multiple tables, it also allows players to make poker their primary source of income more easily. However, this requires a different set of skills compared to traditional casino poker. For instance, successful online poker players need to be able to focus for long hours, maintain good physical fitness, be able to make quick decisions, think fast, multitask, and click fast, which makes the activity particularly appealing to young people as many of them already have some of these skills thanks to being familiar with digital technologies. By contrast, in offline poker it is more important to command soft skills such as being able to read and observe people, and understand the psychology of other players. The Internet has also made training videos and knowledge exchange platforms accessible to a greater number of players. All of these technological developments have made it possible to 'earn/win money' on a more regular basis and establish a category of players for whom playing online poker has become a job. This research cannot answer questions about the numbers or percentages of people using it as a source of income as there are no cross-border statistics available. The aim of this chapter is specifically to look at 'staking': a form of social relationship based on its own rules among online poker players that we discovered during the fieldwork.

The study reported here is based on in-depth interviews with players who live in Romania (see Appendix 5.1) and play (or played in the past) online poker as either a main or part-time activity. All 16 interviews

[2] The cards held in a poker game, usually comprised of five cards.

were conducted in November 2013.[3] Interviews took place face to face in casinos and other semi-public spaces in four Romanian cities: Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Constanța, and Brașov. The total interview time amounts to 17 hours 46 minutes. Each interview lasted on average 1 hour. We used the snowball method to recruit respondents but also online forums to look for initial contacts. There are some limitations to the snowball method. Firstly, successful players are more likely to be suggested as possible respondents. A professional player who regularly wins money is more likely to share his or her success with friends and is therefore more visible. Secondly, we noticed that female players appear to be less connected to male players and this may result in a sample which is biased towards male players. Only one of our interviewees was female. The average age of the respondents was 30 years old at the time of the interview, the youngest being 20, and the oldest 42 years old. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using the qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo. We analysed the transcripts by looking for thematic patterns of employment practices.

From all the respondents, six were full-time, five part-time professional players (two of them in the past), two owned a poker company (one of them was also a professional player in the past), and three respondents considered themselves recreational players. From those part- and full-time professional players, five were involved in staking. These five interviews form the core of this article although we also draw on the interviews with a further 11 people.

What Is Staking?

The emerging employment relationship of interest to the chapter builds on one of the main obstacles to becoming a professional poker player—the financial investments needed. Typically, a poker player needs to invest money in order to participate in a poker game. This is called stake money and either comes from the player's own earnings or is partly or fully paid

[3] The research was carried out as part of a doctoral thesis by Kaire Holts at the University of Hertfordshire (UK).

by someone else. The higher the stakes, the higher the potential winnings, but also the potential losses. The research has identified three ways for a player to get involved in the game. In the first case, the player covers the stake money from his or her own earnings or from other sources. For instance, some online poker rooms offer 'freerolls' which give the player free access to a poker game in which they can win cash. In the second case, one or more persons pay a part of the stake money. This is often the case when the player wants to participate in an offline tournament and wants to cover his or her expenses including travel costs. In the third case, the stake money is fully paid by a third party. In the second and third case, any profit is typically shared between the player and the 'staker' (the person who provides the money). However, in some cases, a company sponsors the stake money in exchange for promoting their name. The chapter focusses on arrangements where the stake money is fully covered by a third party in exchange for a share of the winnings as this is where employment-like social relations which we describe in the next paragraph are likely to emerge.

A player may have a number of motives for becoming involved in staking. For instance, it can be for financial reasons, for having access to free coaching which is typically linked to a staking offer or 'for not wanting to take the risk of losing their own money'. Costin, one of our male respondents who had been involved in staking for two years, explains that he appreciates the easy access to poker and the way in which staking influences his style of playing[4]:

> It [staking] gives me the freedom to play the stakes and the tournaments that I want to and I don't have to invest any money into it and every money that I'm making I can save it. You know, I'm not investing in anything. So basically when you are playing with your own money, it's…you are playing different. Some players are playing different because they are… it's more stressful, it's more complicated, you know, and you are playing a different game. (Costin)

[4] All quotes are direct translations and may contain language and grammatical mistakes.

Those who provide players with funding consider it an 'easy way' to make a profit. Costin is an unusual case because he was staked as a player but was simultaneously employed by a staker to help him manage a network of (staked) players. He gave an insight into the other side of the player/staker relationship:

> There are people with money playing poker for a few years and they just want to invest the money in someone else, they are looking for players with good potential to make money for them and it's just easy to make money. (Costin)

Whether we call it 'winning' or 'earning' money at online poker, gambling activities and poker, in particular, are frequently associated with 'easy money' or 'easy living' (see, for instance, Spanier 2006; Lee et al. 2007; Hayano 1977). These arrangements provide players easy access to the game without the need for them to invest their own money which can be a barrier to entry, especially among the young and unemployed. If we used the same vocabulary, we could call staking an arrangement that provides players with 'easy access to an easy living'.

Staking in Romania

The Romanian National Gambling Office is currently collecting data about the number of players making a living out of online poker (from the interview with Odeta Nestor, president of the Romanian National Gambling Office, on 16 June 2015). However, we had the impression from talking to poker players in Romania that online poker is fashionable, especially among young people and that staking is gaining in popularity. Two possible explanations suggest themselves for the popularity of online poker as a form of income generation and staking in Romania. Firstly, the players we interviewed repeatedly used the expression 'easy money' in relation to online poker:

> Online poker in Romania is popular because it's easy money. I mean, OK, it's not easy money because I contradict what I said before. It's not easy

> money but it's much easier than to get any kind of job and basically in Romania is very hard to get a job. (Boris)

> I started playing poker in 2006, during the early days it was very easy to make a lot of money, especially compared to a regular job, that's what prompted some of my friends to pick up professional poker. (Adrian)

This suggests that the possibility of making money with little effort is appealing at least to the category of people we interviewed (predominantly male, and in their 20s or 30s). Furthermore, Coman (2014: 234) shows how Romanian media describe the 'temptation of easy money made with little effort' as stereotypical of Romanian society, though of course this is merely speculation. Secondly, the popularity or emergence of activities which promise an 'easy living' has been linked to a 'lack of opportunities' (see, for instance, Ridder-Wiskerke and Aggleton 2015: 19) and tends to be found more often in countries with high levels of poverty. Despite some positive economic developments in the first decade of the new millennium, salaries remain low in Romania and youth employment high compared to other European countries. According to Eurostat and the Romanian National Statistics Institute, the annual inflation rate decreased from 45.7 % in 2000 to 3.2 % in 2013 and over the same period of time, the gross domestic product (GDP) rose annually from 0.6 to 3.5 % (INS 2014: 78 and 89). Despite these positive figures, GDP and average salaries remain among the lowest in the EU. In 2010, relative poverty rates were the second highest in the EU, after Lithuania (Precupețu 2013). According to official data, in 2012, GDP (in purchasing power standards, PPS) reached 12,800 and the average national salary amounted to 5619 Euros in 2011 (Eurostat data quoted in INS 2014: 88). To compare, Sweden reported an average wage of 39,688 Euros and Poland, 9906 Euros (Eurostat data quoted in INS 2014: 81). Together with the persistently low unemployment figures (7.3 % in 2013), this suggests a situation where the workforce is largely employed but on low wages. In 2013, the unemployment rate among young people (15–24 years) was 23.6 % (INS 2014: 24). The young are also affected by poverty more than the older generation (Panduru et al. 2009: 41; Precupețu 2013: 258). Low wages and the

high youth unemployment rate are all likely to have contributed to the popularity of online poker as a career option. Mario describes the entry barriers many of the players face and the significance of staking in this regard:

> It's better to play without staking, you know. […] And if you don't have this kind of money, you have to be staked, you know. And is very profitable for both parties, you know. (Mario)

The Romanian cultural and legal environment is generally supportive of gambling and gaming. During the communist era (1947–1989), gambling was banned, with the exception of lottery and sport betting which were organised under the state monopoly. After 1989, new gambling legislation was passed and since then many forms of gambling have been permitted. With high-quality broadband connections, Romanians began to gamble on online platforms at the beginning of the twenty-first century, but the first law that regulated online gambling and, in particular, online poker was not enacted until 2010. There have been discrepancies with regard to its implementation. Although in theory, online gambling has been permitted in Romania since December 2010, such activity could not be legally practiced as there was no organisation authorised to monitor it. A National Gambling Office was established in 2013 to regulate gambling. In December 2014, the gambling law was amended again allowing foreign operators to carry out gambling activities in Romania and revising the tax rules regarding winnings. Before that time, tax rules on revenues from online poker were lenient—a condition that is likely to have contributed to the popularity of online poker—but after the amendment in 2014, players were required to declare their revenues from online poker and poker festivals.

The Social Relations of Staking

In order to explore the idea of 'staking', we look at the social relations in which it is embedded. We compare those relationships with those present in traditional models of employment which distinguish between

dependent employees and the independent self-employed (Collins et al. 2012; Freedland and Kountouris 2011: 112; Casale 2011: 38). A dependent employee is someone who performs work in return for a wage or other types of remuneration (Collins et al. 2012: 94). It is often argued that the main characteristics of an employment relationship are the power of the employer to control the manner of work of the employee, dependency, subordination, supervision, and authority (Kahn-Freund et al. 1983: 18; Casale 2011: 26; Hodgson 2014). Unlike employees, self-employed workers act on their own account and at their own risk (Parker 2004: 6).

These traditional categories of working relationships and, in particular, the binary employment model are being challenged by changes in the world of work (Stone 2004; Freedland 2005; Countouris 2007; Beck and Camiller 2000; Sennett 2011) such as changing organisational forms that have led to flexible working arrangements (Casale 2011; Kalleberg 2000; Marchington 2005; Theron 2003; Huws 2002), new working practices or the proliferation of new forms of work (Casale 2011; Davidov and Langille 2006), and the growth of the informal economy (Sankaran 2006; Chen 2005). In order to investigate how staking fits into existing typologies of employment, we examine how the work of staked players is organised, the extent to which they are able to exercise autonomy and control in carrying out their work, contractual relationships, and how they are recruited and rewarded.

Recruitment

In the following sections, we first look at the different types of recruitment which our respondents described and at the type of contract which some of the players have agreed with their stakers. We then explore how the stakers organise and manage the work of players and what type of reward systems they have put in place.

We encountered four different forms of recruitment among staked poker players in Romania. Some players are recruited via online platforms through which they can apply for staking. Some are approached by stakers via offline sites such as poker clubs and offline tournaments.

Others are put in contact with stakers through friends. Finally, some players transform the expenses of an upcoming game into shares and sell them on the Internet (mainly through social networking platforms and forums). The fourth type is more common in arrangements where only part of the stake money is paid by a third person and the rest by the player.

Recruitment through online platforms follows the most standardised process. In this case, the potential staker or a group of stakers ask players to fill in an online form and to provide them with a range of information which may include their poker history including graphs about their development as a player, game archives, profile names from online poker rooms they played in the past, a description of their motivation, and current activities. References from other players or previous stakers are also crucial. Claudia, a 22-year-old female player, had to send a copy of her ID to her potential staker. She referred to this organisation as 'they' without specifying the number of people she was communicating with. A 'staker' for her meant someone representing the virtual organisation, the online platform. It remained unclear whether she knew their real names or had ever met them in person. In order to get hired, Claudia had to go through an assessment by the 'virtual staking organisation'. She described the application process she went through:

> In that form there are more things: how much can you play poker per day. I mean they take into consideration all these things and they evaluate, like for how long are you playing, what is your occupation so that they know how much free time the person has to get involved in poker playing. (Claudia)

Whether or not someone is hired by a staker or a staking organisation depends largely on their poker experience, skills, and trustworthiness which they have to prove. Costin who was hired by a staker to manage the application process and to oversee the work of players describes the selection criteria:

> Testing, talking with them, seeing the previous history like how much did they play in the past few years and the results of them and finding also

> players that you know that can vouch for them…that they can say good things about them like: 'He's a good guy, he will never cheat you, he will work hard' and everything like that. (Costin)

Trustworthiness also plays an important role in other forms of recruitment. Andrei, a 33-year-old respondent who manages a poker club, had met stakers who recruited players on his site:

> In my poker club, there are a lot of people, they are looking for people that they can trust, people that can be serious, people who like this, who like to do this and they talk with them, they teach them, they make some lessons with them and these are the steps. (Andrei)

In addition to trust and personal references, skills or the potential to become a skilled player also play an important role in recruitment. Staking offers are often linked to coaching—regular training sessions. Building up their skills is also an important motivation for some of the players to get involved in being staked because hiring a coach is costly. However, players need to prove their potential to become a skilled player first.

Contracts

Despite the great emphasis placed on trust, some of our respondents reported being asked to sign or agree to a contract when entering a staking agreement. However, all of them pointed out that it is a contract with no legal value but based instead on reputation. Under the Romanian legal system, a contract must have a special form in order to be legally valid. According to our respondents, these contracts did not have the required form. Players who break the contracts risk losing their reputation in the poker community. Costin, who had a broad overview of staking in Romania, describes this as follows:

> There is a contract but is not official. It's just between the poker community. Only in the poker community…I mean, if you, if you are (…) if you have a reputation you know, you are never going to do something that is not in that contract, to do something bad to your reputation because you will never find another staker, and every poker community will just erase

> you and just tell you that you are a scammer or that you are a bad person, that you are a bad player and that's not something that…if you are doing it for a living, you are not gonna break that contract. (Costin)

We did not see any of those unofficial contracts but we learnt from our respondents that termination of a staking arrangement is one of the points that such a contract regulates. Some of the contracts fix the number of games the player needs to play before they can quit the agreement. For instance, Claudia, our female respondent, had bound herself to play 5000 games before she could terminate the staking agreement. It takes her approximately five months to play this number of games. Under other agreements, players must pay back the stake money if they want to leave. However, from the responses we received, we understand that the stakers can terminate a contract if they are not satisfied with a player's performance. Further research is needed on the nature of these contractual agreements.

Work Organisation and Control

Players who are involved in a more standardised form of staking all describe a very similar organisation of work processes. Three of our respondents were involved in this kind of arrangement as either a player or manager. In these arrangements, stakers have full access to players' online profiles, can monitor all the decisions they take, and have a complete overview of all their financial moves. This information is archived so that stakers can also access it retrospectively. In addition to this, players are obliged to report back on a weekly and in some cases a daily basis. This is known as 'hand review' and involves discussions about their past games. This type of reporting may also be discussed in a conference call in front of other players. Our respondents consider hand reviews both as educational and a way to improve their skills. Boris, a part-time professional poker player, describes his experience with regular reporting:

> We had sessions, Skype sessions where he [staker] reviewed my hands through this programme. I sent him my daily hands, sent him for…into analyse it like he puts you in the database, puts my name in and he sees everything, what I've done and he tells me that "You do this too often or

> you never do this. You should do this." And (…) basically he (…) yeah, that's it. He plays, sometimes he played to show me and told me his thought process while he was playing. (Boris)

Players we interviewed undertook work at their homes or in an office which is typically set up by a staker. There are a number of digital tools stakers use to monitor players' games such as tracking software, digital databases to archive information, or tools which allow remote access to players' computers. Skype is the main tool for communication and is used extensively. This type of workplace surveillance by using digital tools is not new and has already been discussed in the context of other online work activities such as call centre work or work on crowdsourcing platforms (Ball 2002; Caraway 2010). There is not enough evidence to suggest that this type of surveillance constitutes a new form of control in organisations (Thompson 2003). Thompson (2003) argues that with the introduction of digital technologies, only the 'scale and intensity' of workplace surveillance has increased but not the idea of it. Before the digital age, workers were monitored by their supervisors. However, what may be new is this particular combination of different forms of control as it appears in online poker. The coexistence of several forms of control itself is not new and has been observed in other work activities (Huws 2014: 117; Thompson and McHugh 2009: 120; Callaghan and Thompson 2001; Hodgson 2004). We also noticed that some activities which aim at controlling players' activities are hard to discover as such. For instance, our respondents described their stakers as being their mentors who care about their well-being and offer support if needed. Costin, our experienced player, explains:

> He [staker] contacts you and tell you where to send some money or ask you about how is life, how is everything, if you are ok, if everything is ok with you. Everyone is doing that. They are making sure that everything is ok in your life. So, if you have problems in your life, they will also try to see if they can help you with something. […] I don't know, let's say, money issue or I don't know problem issue like health issue, you know, family problems. They are always there. (Costin)

This help can even go as far as paying a player's rent and food. On the other hand, we learnt that there may be periods of time when a player

works for no income. What looks like help or mentoring is in reality necessary to keep the players 'alive' so that they can continue working for the staker and pay back their losses. If players lose the money a staker has invested in them, they often have to work/play poker until they can pay it back. During this period of time, they are not earning anything, as Costin explains the rules which are typical to these arrangements:

> I mean, you can have like a bad period of time like few months of losing and you don't have money for rent or for living and he [staker] has to send you money for living because you are playing for them and if you are losing like, I don't know, let's say you are losing like 50k. And basically if you are winning a tournament of fifty thousand, you give him all the money. So this is in his best interest to keep playing and to have everything sorted. So you don't have any issues with about rent or living or food or stuff like that because, yeah, sometimes it happens. (Costin)

What is surprising is the positive attitude of all the players interviewed towards these practices. It seemed that control may be disguised as 'doing something good' such as 'offering training' when in reality players may be told what they did wrong during these sessions. Similarly, 'being interested in their well-being' and mentoring may in reality be simple demonstrations that stakers are only making sure that the players have the capacity to pay back the money they invested in them. This makes the players work for free for several months. However, none of the players complained about being controlled or working for free. The rhetoric they used seemed to indicate satisfaction rather than exploitation. 'Camouflage' of control is not a new phenomenon and has also been observed in other work activities (see, for instance, Callaghan and Thompson 2001).

Staking arrangements which involved a group of people were also found. This is the case when players work together in a team. They all participate in online tournaments and only get paid when they win as a team. This type of team control puts a great pressure on each individual, as Andrei, the staker of this arrangement, explains:

> If they lose, they are going down, down, down… they will be 10 000 minus. I am the one who put the money and when they hit, they will play without anything till they win 10 000. (Andrei)

Reward Systems

Our interviews with professional poker players show that there is a complex profit-sharing system in place. There are 'gradual' and 'fixed' schemes. In fixed schemes, the share of profit a player gets is usually fixed in advance and depends on players' skills and experience. Experienced players can typically keep 50 % of their winnings. A less experienced player must settle for a smaller percentage such as 40 % or less. Only one player we interviewed received 60 % but he explained that this was an unusual deal thanks to his friendship with the staker. Experience and skills also determine the bargaining power players have. The rationale for this variation is that to train a player costs time and money as Claudia explains:

> Generally it's the same percentage for the players but if there are players that are very well prepared then the percentage is higher for these players. They get the higher profit because the coaches invest less hours in training them than in the other players. (Claudia)

In gradual schemes, the reward system changes depending, for instance, on the amount of money a staker gives to a player. In one case, the reward system was dependent on the amount of money stakers invested in the player and the type of games they played. When players play low-stake games, they can keep 70 % of their winnings and when they play high-stake games, they can only keep 50 % of what they win. The reasoning behind this is that high-stake games are riskier. Although it seems that stakers take the biggest financial risk by investing their money in players, there are many strategies in place to protect them from this risk. Typically, players need to pay back the stake money. However, this is particularly critical when a player is embedded in a team that is playing a tournament game. In this case, a player only earns money if the entire team wins the tournament. Sometimes, stakers are part of those teams acting as players. In these paradoxical situations, a staked player's earning is dependent on the performance of other team members including their stakers'. In addition, there is only a limited number of teams who can win a tournament. If the team lost, a staked player would still need to pay back the staking

money and may end up working for free for long periods of time or until he or she has recovered all the losses, including the losses of their staker.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored social relations present in staking arrangements in Romania. This allowed us to explore online poker as an emerging form of work and analyse recruitment, work organisation, control, and reward to provide a basis for comparing it with other forms of employment.

We encountered four different types of recruitment among our respondents ranging from agreements established through personal connections to standardised application processes through online platforms. Whether someone is hired as a 'staked player' or not depends largely on their experience, skills, and trustworthiness. The contracts between a staker and players are based on reputation in the poker community and cannot be enforced in the Romanian legal system. Players who are involved in staking are fully monitored by the people who provide them with money. However, this type of electronic surveillance is not new and has already been discussed in the context of other online work activities. Hybrid forms of control were also identified in staking and we observed that some of the activities which aim at controlling players' activities are hard to uncover. Just as the winnings are shared between a player and a staker, the potential financial risks are also shared. However, this can lead to situations where players work for free for an indefinite period of time where they have incurred gambling losses. The reward system is based on profit-sharing. It is a complex system with gradual and fixed schemes which depend on players' skills and experience.

We conclude that the professional poker players we interviewed were engaged in a form of work, but one which does not fit easily into the conventional categories of 'employment' or 'self-employment' but shares some characteristics of both. It is characterised by novel relations of dependency, lack of income security, hybrid forms of control and risk sharing, embedded in practices that are outside the scope of legal protection. On the positive side, staking arrangements can create work for people who are passionate about poker but do not have enough resources to train them-

selves and start a professional poker career on their own. Especially in countries with high levels of youth unemployment, staking as described in this chapter can be an alternative to unemployment. However, it can only be a viable option if it is included in the social security and tax system and the players and stakers enjoy legal protection. However, this poses new challenges for policymakers. In Romania, as in many other countries, poker is classified as gambling activity. Existing laws in Romania only focus on players' activities leaving untouched other arrangements or parties such as staking arrangements or stakers. A reassessment both of online poker as a work activity and of the gambling regulations would be necessary in order for players to benefit from staking arrangements as described in this chapter. To support this endeavour, more research is needed to understand the prevalence and characteristics of the phenomenon in Romania and in other countries. In addition, further research will be required to establish the extent to which such patterns are typical of broader trends in other emerging online occupations. Should this be found to be the case, then it would raise major challenges for scholarly, as well as for legal, definitions of what constitutes 'employment'.

Appendix 5.1

Sample of the study. Respondents quoted in the chapter are marked with nicknames

Nickname	Gender	Age	Role related to online poker	Involved in staking
Andrei	Male	33	Owner of a poker company/ full-time professional player in the past	Yes
Costin	Male	N/A	Full-time professional player	Yes
Boris	Male	25	Part-time professional player	Yes
Mario	Male	30	Full-time professional player	Yes
Claudia	Female	22	Full-time professional player	Yes
Adrian	Male	28	Part-time professional player in the past	No
001	Male	30	Recreational player	No
002	Male	22	Part-time professional player in the past	No

Nickname	Gender	Age	Role related to online poker	Involved in staking
003	Male	41	Full-time professional player	No
004	Male	N/A	Owner of a poker company	No
006	Male	42	Recreational player	No
007	Male	33	Part-time professional player	No
008	Male	33	Full-time professional player	No
012	Male	33	Full-time professional player	No
015	Male	20	Part-time professional player	No
016	Male	22	Recreational player	No

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6

Recruitment, Work, and Identity in Community Management: Passion, Precarity, and Play

Aphra Kerr

Introduction

This chapter explores the work of community managers in the digital games industry. This occupation has emerged in the past decade with the development of online games like *World of Warcraft* and *Minecraft* which have millions of players. These workers play an important intermediary role between game players and game developers, although in many cases this work is offshored[1] and largely invisible. Community management (CM) can be conceptualised as a new form of virtual work given that the workers are dependent on, and work through, networked digital technologies and support the creation and circulation of content by developers and users. This form of work also requires emotional labour (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008) and the performance of a self which

[1] Offshoring occurs when companies move elements of production outside the home country.

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while mediated, must be carefully displayed and performed. As such, community managers provide a useful case through which to explore new forms of virtual work and, in particular, the influence of material structures and practices on the virtual workplace and worker identities.

The chapter builds upon previous research by the author on the games industry and community managers (Kerr and Kelleher 2015; Kerr and Cawley 2012), and reflects on how four factors, namely: mobility, recruitment practices, working conditions, and working practices act to reinforce pre-existing gendered, raced, and heteronormative production cultures in the wider games industry. In what follows, I firstly introduce the games industry as a cultural industry and present information on occupational roles, salary, and working cultures throughout the industry. I then examine CM roles more specifically, including their geographical location; the qualifications, knowledge, and skills sought in job advertisements; and the precariousness and emotional challenges of the work as reported by interviewees. I conclude by reflecting on CM as a new form of virtual work that displays many similarities with other forms of virtual work, but demands very particular forms of informal knowledge and skills.

The Games Industry as a Cultural and Creative Industry

I regard game development companies as part of the cultural industries, and most of the industry fits within the widely used category of the creative industries. Digital game development combines occupational roles from the media, communications, software, and information technology industry to develop commodified forms of games and play. Since the first commercial games were released in the early 1970s, the industry has grown to become a multibillion-dollar industry with software sales largely in the most affluent western industrialised nations. Content production networks are largely located in the USA/Canada, Europe, China, and Japan, while hardware production networks are involved in shipping minerals and materials from some of the poorest locations in the world to the lowest-cost labour production sites (Nichols 2014). In the past

decade, digital distribution and networked forms of play have become common and the development of online games has created a need for new professional occupational roles such as community managers.

Game development can be considered as a subset of digital work and of those forms of work which are directly or indirectly concerned with symbol creation (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). The roles needed to develop games, from console games like *Call of Duty* to free-to-play games like *Candy Crush*, reflect other cultural workers—from artists, designers, and programmers to those working in marketing and quality assurance (Kerr 2006). In addition to these formal paid positions, game development often encourages significant user input—in everything from content development to CM. For most players, these roles have no financial recompense, and financial reward is usually forbidden by the game's legal documents. Nevertheless, some players sell services to other players, or create their own channels on YouTube or Twitch with associated revenue sharing deals. Finally, we have examples of player-workers like gold farmers who collect game rewards to sell on to other players (Nakamura 2013). These examples highlight the range of paid and unpaid labour, which contribute to the production of commercial games.

There is a hierarchy of professional occupations in this industry related to experience, skill set, location, and gender. A recent industry survey gives some insights into the North American industry and Table 6.1 summarises the findings in relation to salary and gender. The top three occupations by salary are business and management, audio, and programmers. However, the more technical roles of audio, programming,

Table 6.1 Games industry salary survey, 2014

	Average salary	Percentage
Occupational role	$ US	Male
Business and management	101,572	79 %
Audio	95,682	91 %
Programmers and engineers	93,251	95 %
Producers	82,286	78 %
Artists and animators	74,349	91 %
Designers	73,864	87 %
QA testers	54,833	88 %

Source: Gamasutra (2014)

and animation are the most dominated by men. Business and management, and production, saw the highest percentages of females employed, but these percentages remained low at below 20 %. When the data was analysed by location, those located in California were paid a premium. This salary survey did not include CMs as an occupational role. The key work challenges noted by respondents were 'long work hours, job instability, … and cultural issues such as sexism' (Gamasutra 2014:1).

Research conducted in the UK in 2014 found that £32,000 ($46,736.63) was the average developer salary in the UK, and £37,104 ($56,572.47) was the average globally (Chapple 2015). Salaries in, or near, London were the highest in the UK, and studio managers, producers, audio, and programmers topped the list with the highest salaries. Academic research in North America and Europe provide more context and suggest that the industry's working practices discourage or, in some cases, are hostile to females and minority workers (Consalvo 2011). This lack of diversity is supported by research on domestic game culture and public events (Thornham 2008; Taylor et al. 2009). Some online game cultures have been found to have highly masculine, white, and heteronormative cultures (Jenson and de Castell 2015; Gray 2012), although some of the more casual online games appear to attract more diverse players. It is within this context that we must understand the development of CM as an occupation.

Community Management and Mobility

CM is rarely mentioned in games industry reports or policy documents on the games industry. It is also not a recognised area of academic study in most higher education institutions. In many industry surveys, the role remains invisible and it only came to the attention of this author when conducting a survey of the games industry in Ireland in 2009 (Kerr and Cawley 2012). In that survey, we found that much of the employment in the games industry in Ireland was in CM and support functions, rather than in core content creation and programming roles. In addition, many of these jobs had been offshored from companies in North America or Asia. We found that while the employment of women in CM was low

(at below 15 %), it was higher than in other occupational areas in the Irish games industry. Further, this area employed a significant number of mobile migrant workers who were citizens of Germany, the UK, and countries in Southern and Eastern Europe. The key reasons identified by respondents for companies to locate in Ireland were a combination of local favourable financial and tax incentives, and European labour mobility.

Recently, the author has examined the language used in Seventy five international English language job advertisements for CMs in the top Fifteen game companies by revenue globally (Kerr and Kelleher 2015). The sample includes positions advertised by Activision-Blizzard, Riot, Electronic Arts, Bioware, Zenimax, Square Enix, Sony, and Webzen. In addition, interviews were conducted with fifteen games industry employees, including six CMs in Ireland. The CMs were recruited through local gatekeepers and to date three men and three women, aged from 20–39 years have been interviewed.

When the sample of CM job advertisements was analysed, a clear spatial pattern emerged. CM positions were available across Thirteen countries and located in major cities including San Francisco, Berlin, Helsinki, Dublin, Bucharest, Mosco, Seoul, and Taipei. This pattern of spatialisation deviates from commercial content moderation (CCM) work in other digital media industries which is often outsourced to low-cost labour locations like the Philippines and Morocco. In our sample, many of the locations had relatively high costs of living. The CM jobs in games were not locating purely on the basis of labour cost or cost of living, but rather a combination of state financial supports, proximity to market, and access to a suitably skilled labour force were combining to shape where they are locating.

The patterns that emerge in the digital games industry point to highly regionalised transnational game markets structured by geo-linguistic boundaries. English is the lingua franca of the industry, and in many multinational companies, the only language in common between workers. Companies like Activision-Blizzard advertise for positions in North America, Europe, and Asia, each location serving a different regional game market. Mobility is thus a key feature of this industry at a number of levels. Not only are CM jobs offshored or outsourced, but the workers

must also be mobile. Interviews confirmed that CMs often moved country to work with a particular company and on a particular game. Most of the CMs interviewed were in relationships, but only one had children or other caring responsibilities. As we will shortly see, the locational preferences of companies and the skills that they required, serve to reinforce the necessity for worker mobility.

The Recruitment of Community and Passion

> Blizzard Entertainment is seeking a manager passionate about the gaming industry, player communities, communication, and social media. They will oversee the design and execution of community engagement programs, manage a team focused on the player community, and lead the editorial direction of content to be published via our social media outlets, blogs, and forums. (Activision-Blizzard, California, USA)

The above excerpt gives an example of the language used in the CM advertisements and an analysis of our corpus revealed some clear patterns in language use. Firstly, the most prevalent term across all the ads was 'community'. This occurred 800 times, much more frequently than the next five most frequent terms including 'social' (263), 'player' (252), 'games' (243), 'team' (213), and 'experience' (203). While community is often co-located with management, advertisements also mentioned working with the player community, the game community, and community volunteers, as well as driving community engagement. Community brings with it a range of positive connotations about group identity and group knowledge. A game community provides a form of 'virtual togetherness' (Bakardjieva 2003) where players can build forms of social capital (Steinkuehler and Williams 2006). Figure 6.1 illustrates the frequency of words across all advertisements in our corpus.

In these advertisements, the term 'social' is often co-located with 'social media' pointing to the importance of digital tools. Both 'online communities' and 'social media' point to the commodification and mediation of social relationships and the appropriation of the positive values usually

Fig. 6.1 Tag Cloud based on frequency of words across all advertisements. (Kerr and Kelleher 2015:9)

associated with these terms. These also connect to the next most frequent term, 'team'. So sociability is deployed both through digital forms of communication as well as in face-to-face situations with fellow employees, and intermittently at conventions where CMs meet face-to-face with players. These advertisements appear to signal a much broader role than content moderation or customer support roles.

Analysing the skills required for these positions raised another clear pattern with both cultural and gaming knowledge emerging as core skills. When we analysed the core skills required for these positions, the most frequently used terms were 'passion' (66), 'gaming knowledge' (50), 'communication skills' (34), and 'English' (32). When we examined 'other skills', one term stood out—passion. Figure 6.2 illustrates that this term occurs with much greater frequency than communication skills or language skills. Recent research has noted that passion is used to signal emotional commitment to corporate values and in some cases to justify a range of problematic working conditions (McRobbie 2010). Passion

Fig. 6.2 Tag Cloud of 'other skills' by frequency. (Kerr and Kelleher 2015:10)

for particular games points to the blurred boundary between time and labour invested in leisure and new forms of work. In online games, highly skilled players and players with informal knowledge, reputation, and capital in particular games are valued by producers. In these advertisements, passion for games is presented as a core skill, a requirement to work in these positions, while important data about salary, benefits, and working conditions is often absent. Passion for games hails gamers and signifies a specific identity.

Passion can be deployed in work to demonstrate commitment to both game players and employers. Passion was discussed in our face-to-face interviews and interviewees talked about fostering the passion of game players and working in the games industry because they were passionate about games. Passion serves to exclude those who do not see themselves as passionate game players. What becomes clear therefore is that experience in CM in informal or formal settings, and domain knowledge of games generally, or of the particular game to be supported more specifically, is clearly signalled as important in these job advertisements. Informal qualifications, knowledge, and competencies are sought. This means that if a game community is gendered, or already hostile to diversity, this will limit the available pool

of passionate players available for recruitment and reinforce existing gendered cultures. Passionate players are also less likely to critique game culture.

Consalvo (2007) extended the conceptualisation of cultural capital to include gaming capital, and these advertisements seem to signal that they are offering an opportunity for game players to cash in their gaming capital. It is an opportunity for those who have been engaged in unpaid gaming labour, or playbour (Kücklich 2005), to become involved in waged emotional and creative labour. Time and financial investment in gameplay, game production, and game knowledge can thus yield paid employment. Interviewees explained that game fans, who were prolific posters of videos on YouTube with lots of followers, would be suitable for this type of work. Here we can draw upon the conceptualisation of different forms of capital by Bourdieu (1994), in particular his conceptualisation of cultural capital. Nohl et al. (2014) use the term 'cultural credit' to refer to the recognition given by employers to the cultural capital possessed by those on the threshold of employment, and which can then be turned into economic capital when recognised and/or rewarded in the labour market.

All our interviewees had third-level qualifications from their country of origin and were examples of well-educated migrants working in a high-tech industry. However, our analysis of job advertisements and our interviews found that this work did not rely upon formalised knowledge. Interviewees suggested that formal qualifications were becoming less important and that forms of tacit, informal, and domain specific knowledge were more important. Most of these competencies required cultural socialisation, and personal time and monetary investment in game playing. Interviewees explained that working in one's native language meant that they could exploit tacit knowledge to understand the cultural nuances of context-specific communications for particular language markets.

Precarity and Flexibility

Emerging from autonomist Marxist literature, the concept of precarity, or precariousness, is one way of conceptualising the conditions of labour under post-Fordist production regimes. The concept highlights new forms

of working relations across the economy more generally and new forms of flexibility in working arrangements including seasonal, temporary, subcontract, freelance, and flexible working arrangements. It serves to highlight the normalisation of a certain set of flexible working practices, and in addition, new forms of struggle and solidarity across sectors and classes (Gill and Pratt 2008). For O'Carroll (2015), there are three key aspects of flexibility in contemporary work: flexible working time/hours, the flexible organisation of working time, and flexible careers and contracts. For her, contemporary work in the high-tech industries is characterised by its unpredictability and uncertainty along these three dimensions.

Examples of flexibility are evident in our research to date, even if forms of collective solidarity are less evident. While interviewees spoke of working a normal working week, it became evident in our attempts to organise meetings and our eventual conversations that what constituted normal was very varied. We have found examples of flexibility in terms of working hours (working beyond the standard European or Irish working week, 'crunch' periods of extremely long working hours including pre- and post-product launches and during service updates) and the organisation of working time (working evenings, weekends, shifts, being on call). Many interviewees were working for publishers that were based either in North America or in Asia and staff in Ireland had to schedule key meetings around the working day in those countries—8 hours either ahead or behind Ireland. Christmas is a peak time for the games industry and for CMs. Crunch periods can last for months, in some cases up to six months. Working hours in pre and post launch can reach over 80 hours per week. Again, working hours tended to vary by company, time of year, and service life cycle.

> Usually at Christmas we don't get to spend our holidays, so the biggest time of the year for game developers is definitely the Christmas market. So from September on don't expect too much to be at home. (Int. 15, male, aged 39)

Interviewees were reluctant to discuss employment contracts but all were on permanent contracts. However, their employment biographies involved multiple projects, countries, and companies despite the relatively short duration of their careers. Some of their moves were by choice, but

many were due to buyouts, redundancy, or service closures. Interviewees spoke about company restructuring by project, region, and market; game community closures; and company closures. Thus, a permanent contract is no guarantee of stability. In the Irish context, these jobs are hailed by industrial development agencies as good jobs in a high-technology industry but little attention is paid to the quality and longevity of the jobs. Examples exist where game companies have terminated outsourced CM contracts with little notice (Cunningham 2014).

There are few international recruitment media for CM jobs and this proved a challenge methodologically for this project. It became clear in the face-to-face interviews that when employees lost a job, they often relied on informal social networks to seek further employment. Many interviewees were part of closed *LinkedIn* groups online and in some of the major cities like London, there were informal meetups and soccer games to connect with other CMs. This presupposes an ability to network in the evenings and a desire to play soccer. Only the male interviewees talked about these soccer meetups. None of my interviewees were part of a formal representative organisation, union, or group and thus virtual and informal networks were crucial to finding employment opportunities. They were not part of worker alliances either within their own sector or in other sectors. Thus, if new occupational roles like CM are recruiting from existing gaming subcultures, placing a premium on passion for games and gaming knowledge, and relying on informal socialisation and networking, it is likely that these will reinforce rather than challenge the social composition of the workforce.

Despite the flexibility demanded, financial remuneration for community managers and related positions is on the lower end of the industry scale. The latest UK-based industry survey in 2015 found that the average salary in its games industry had dropped to £29,000, although the average community manager salary had increased to £24,250. This survey also noted a salary gap between males and females of almost £6000. Only one of the 75 job advertisements analysed gave details on salary. Similarly, most interviewees were unwilling to talk about their salary. Those who were willing to discuss salary suggested that entry-level salaries in Ireland are relatively low at €20–25,000, despite the relatively high cost of living in Dublin. Four advertisements listed benefits. These benefits did not

include share capital or bonuses as other occupational categories in this industry can avail of, but rather health insurance, massages, and laundry.

Levels of pay would suggest that there is still competition for these positions and that there is a reserve pool of labour from across Europe. Indeed, some companies were known for their lengthy interview process. Online posts note that the interview process for CMs in Riot can take up to four weeks to recruit entry-level 'rioters'. Interviewees corroborated this saying the company had a brand of recruiting that was becoming famous in the industry. When pressed for more details, they said the company was looking for the right 'attitude' and that you had to love the particular game you would be working on (Int. 12, male, age 33). For other companies, one had to be a 'cool' person who could write and speak in the necessary languages and help to build a cool online social atmosphere. One's personality was key.

> A community manager is someone who nurtures collective passion, I think. So the way you do that is not by, say, having ego issues and thinking you're some kind of rock star. The way you do that is by being the kind of guy who is going to showcase other people and who's going to help build a social atmosphere that is really cool …. You are someone who is going to create an environment that is going to make people feel good about their passion…. So you need the right personality for this. (Int. 9, Male, aged 33)

These roles are poorly defined and rapidly changing. Performance management and progression is based on quantity of outputs but as some interviewees noted, this was not very satisfactory and said nothing of the quality of the outputs or the impact on the community. In some companies, CMs reported into a marketing manager, in other companies, it was direct to the CEO. Senior CMs were given more management responsibility, more meetings, and more reporting. Their salaries increased but again were on the lower end of the industry scale. Most could not talk about the projects, games, or scale of the communities they were working with for commercial reasons. Given the requirements for linguistic and cultural competencies, an organisation of production that requires mobility, the relatively low levels of pay, the atypical hours,

and the insecurity, one might ask, why do these workers choose to work in this industry?

Play and Emotional Labour

Despite the requirement for passion and the precarious nature of these positions, it is clear that for my interviewees, they mostly enjoyed working as a community manager and for some it was their 'dream' job. Most had been game players before they entered the industry and some described themselves as gamers who played games in the evenings after work. Dealing directly with players, solving problems, and writing meant that interviewees saw their work as creative. Much of their work involved written online interactions and CMs developed different writing styles. Most of this work is mediated by computer networks but sometimes companies organised conventions so that CMs meet players in person. While interviewees admitted their job could be stressful, they also felt it was much better than many other types of jobs, characterising it as a fun job where you could talk about games all day to other people who possessed the same gaming knowledge. For some, the more corporate and profit-driven companies appeared to lose this sense of fun.

> Q—Would you say that this is a good job?
>
> A—It's fantastic, are you kidding me? Do you know what people do for a living in general? They work in cafes and like restaurants and they work in, you know, banks and consulting firms where people make a serious face to make you feel unworthy because you don't have a tie.
>
> Q—What makes it a good job?
>
> A—Being paid to hang out with people!… It is a very social job. (Int, 9, male, aged 33)
>
> I get to work with videogames so that is a lot. That is something I really like. (Int. 14, male, aged 39)

Some companies tried to enforce socialising outside work by organising team bonding events and requiring staff to attend. Some interviewees resented this, but in other companies, more organic socialising took

place. Most CMs work in teams, and these teams include workers from different cultural backgrounds. As a result, interviewees spoke of cultural celebrations and informal socialising in the evenings. Given that many of these staff had moved country to work in these companies, it is hard to say to what degree having a social life depended on socialising with work colleagues. In addition, given that recruitment is relatively informal and often based on word of mouth, there may also be a degree of compulsion to network at work here.

> Our markets are operated mainly by native speakers. We have German CMs, Italian, French and so on. In relation to this, we all come from different backgrounds. I think it spices up our office life—cultural celebrations, traditional dishes, nights out and above all friendships. Not only do we work together, but also we spend our free time together. (Int. 13, female, aged 30)

At the same time, working as a CM means the performance of emotional labour. Defined by Hochschild (1983) as 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display', one can extend this to the performance of identity and personality online in the virtual workplace (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011:162). CMs frequently experienced both positive and negative emotions in their online workplace and a key aspect of the job is to manage their reactions and feelings. However, given that their role is mostly to engage with queries, complaints, and disruptive behaviour, most of this work involves directly engaging with negative emotions while managing one's own emotional distance.

When senior managers and job advertisements seek the 'right personality', it was initially unclear what they are talking about. When prompted to explain, interviewees noted that CMs must not take the behaviour and language of game players on forums or other social media channels too seriously. The most prevalent negative behaviours encountered online were racism, sexism, and homophobia but interviewees also spoke about the need to deal with paedophilia, gold farming, and technical exploits/hacking. Their role was to create a safe space for other game players and the language of policing came up on more than one occasion. If they could not manage 'toxic' behaviours through direct written communication, they then had to resort to temporary or permanent bans which

could lead to more unpleasant feedback. In such a context, performing a distinct online persona was important and part of this was both masking one's own identity and carefully choosing one's nickname, writing, and communication style.

> I think that personality matters a lot. As I said, there are people who prefer to be the bad cop or they prefer to be the friend. (Int. 10, female, age 28)
> I don't think … girls or boys are more fit for the job, they both can do it if they have a thick skin, again, they shouldn't take things personally. (Int. 11, male, age 30)

While this was a position where both men and women worked, interviews conducted to date would suggest that they experienced the game world differently. Only the female interviewees mentioned gender-related player feedback and hostility directed at them. This varied with the degree to which the game itself was a 'hard core' game or a more casual type game. Hard core in gaming refers to both particular genres of games, including first person shooters, and players who invest a lot of time and money in their hobby. Some hard core game cultures are known for their hostility to diversity. However, sometimes, players assist the CMs in the governance of the game world and managing hostility (Kerr et al. 2014). The interviewee below talked about performing their identity online.

> Q—Do you try to choose a non-gendered nickname?
> A—At the beginning I did, but now I'm using always the same nickname and no, I don't see the reason of doing it. If they don't respect me then there is an issue, and it's their issue, not mine. (Int. 10, female, age 28)

While my interviewees largely presented a positive picture of their job, they also had to manage the collective emotions of their player communities and their own emotions on a daily basis. Diverse identities, particularly those related to gender, sexuality, and race, were targets for hostility in some games and technical tools were insufficient to manage this aspect of their work. The 'right personality' is clearly a euphemism for an ability to deal with hostile and negative emotions without taking things too personally and an ability to perform an alternative self in these medi-

ated spaces. Workers also rely in many cases on commercial social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and so on, to perform their workplace personalities and thus their online presence is fractured and shaped by the design of these platforms.

Conclusion

CM is a new occupational role that is largely invisible but based on the research reported here can be classified as cultural/creative and emotional work. It can be conceptualised as a secondary form of creative production which is related to, but distinct from, digital marketing and customer support. It clearly plays an important function in the success of any online service.

Despite the optimistic claims of early Internet scholars that the Internet provided a space for playful and empowered engagement with, and performance of, identity, what we see emerging here is that both player and worker identities are being shaped by pre-existing gender structures and cultures and the designed choices that are embedded in the technical platforms they use. CM is a relatively chilly context for non-gamers and for non-gamers and for non-normative gamers. Given the gendered nature of public and private game cultures and the upstream gendered division of labour in core content roles, non-normative workers include female, non-white, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) CMs. In my research to date, I have identified both informal and more formalised mechanisms of exclusion at work in recruitment which act to reinforce these identity norms. These act, firstly, through the requirement for workers to be mobile; secondly, through the primacy given in recruitment practices to prior games experience and informal knowledge; thirdly, through the flexible contracts and largely invisible work conducted by these workers; and fourthly, in the requirement for workers to manage the emotions of their users and themselves in their online workplace. These factors operate to reinforce, replicate, and reproduce existing divisions of labour and norms in the wider games industry and in some game cultures.

Beyond the neo-liberal requirement for passionate commitment, there is real emotional labour at play here. While those employed in the area are largely positive about their role, they all give numerous instances of negative encounters and the need to control emotional engagement with players in the online environment. While people work in small language teams, it would appear that the work is challenging and the experiences largely individualised. Our female interviewees encountered direct harassment, but all interviewees discussed their involvement in developing procedures necessary to deal with online harassment. The work of community managers cannot be separated from the technical environment, the game players, and the in-game culture.

Even if these workers wanted to contest their offline and online workplace cultures, their position in the production chain is, in the main, relatively disempowered and individualised. They are among the lowest paid in the games industry and often this work is offshored to near-to-market locations at a remove from the production team. They work long hours, often on shift, to service a 24-hour player community. While they see this work as fun, social, and creative, they have often moved country to work in these jobs and are thus deprived of both formal and informal support. In the workplace, contractual conditions and the project-based nature of the industry mean that there is much instability, disruption, and uncertainty, and this, in turn, means that employees tended to be young, mobile, and without caring responsibilities. While there appears to be more women working in CM than in some other areas of the games industry, it is clear that mediation alone is not sufficient to protect them from the more negative emotional aspects of this role. Current recruitment and working practices in CM seem to reinforce a gendered gamer division of labour and the emotional labour of managing a game community is very real, despite its mediation via platforms and social media tools.

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Part III

The Conditions and Experiences of Virtual Work

7

Rhythms of Creativity and Power in Freelance Creative Work

Frederick H. Pitts

Introduction

Contemporary capitalism is risk-averse and, where possible, seeks to reduce unpredictable factors which might affect rates of profitability (Coggan 2009; Kunkel 2014; Piketty 2014; Boutang 2011; Hutton 2014). Individual firms are constantly faced with the challenge of ensuring that in the organisation of work and utilisation of labour they control all those variabilities which might undermine this objective. Yet contemporary firms are making significant use of working arrangements such as freelancing which facilitate greater flexibility and autonomy of workers over their working time. This throws up an apparent paradox: capitalist enterprises may use these working arrangements to increase their flexibility of operations and redistribute responsibility for them, but this is at the expense of predictability of labour supply and service provision. It generates risks that are otherwise avoided. Companies who hire freelancers

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must manage this contradiction, and find ways to overcome the loss of control created by arm's-length contractual relationships with freelancers.

Freelancers relate to their clients in the commercial realm of service provision, and unlike formal employees, they do not have contracts which enshrine in law their employers' control over them. Freelancers therefore enjoy more autonomy than formal employees, but this autonomy represents a risk that their clients must manage. This state of affairs is most apparent in creative agencies, where the use of freelancers' time must comply with processes of work measurement and evaluation. Information and online technologies provide virtual networks through which these clients may monitor the work of their freelancers, but more important in disciplining them is the real, spatial imperative of the workplace and the legal framework of the contract. In other words, the desk, the clock, and the contract provide a stronger form of control over freelance labour than digital technologies do. The traditional locus of capitalist domination and control is the workplace and, as this chapter shows, this still plays an important role in freelance work. The physical environment—the clock, the desk—is key. It helps structure the temporality and rhythm of the freelancer's creative activity. But, as this chapter shows, of equal importance are contractual relationships between freelancers and their clients. These relationships imply certain systems of billing that express the business imperatives of clients. In turn, they determine the use and experience of time by freelancers.

This chapter reports on a study of freelancers working in creative occupations in the Netherlands. The types of creative work they performed included illustration, graphic design, website programming, advertising, and branding. The more senior creatives in the study were performing oversight roles such as art director or digital director. These forms of freelance creative work can be regarded as 'virtual work' in three respects. First, these freelancers are virtual workers by virtue of their arm's-length contractual status. Legal distance is implied in the freelancer's status as a service provider. However, this distance is often bridged by a compulsion upon the freelancer to acquiesce to more traditional forms of work relationship, based around workplace attendance and time discipline. In this respect, there is a direct aspect to the work relationship which I shall explore in this chapter. Although the virtual basis of the freelancer–client

relationship benefits the client contractually, allowing a delegation of risk and responsibility that can be ended at will, the demands of project management and the control and measurement of labour frequently require that the client establish more direct relations with the freelancer. Thus, the status of freelance creative work is virtual, but, crucially, contested.

Second, the freelance creative work examined in this study is virtual with respect to the digital technologies used to manage the relationship between client and freelancer. At least ideally, freelance assignments are conducted at a remove from the client, and communication proceeds through email, Skype, specialised project management programmes, and shared online platforms. My findings, however, suggest that these digital technologies are less significant as a means of worker control than the traditional oversight of work-time through workplace observation and measurement. Here again, freelance creative work has a virtual quality, but this virtuality is qualified and subject to contestation and modification.

Third, the freelance creative work performed by participants in the study reported in this chapter involves virtual, digital activities, practices, and materials. Some participants were specifically digital designers, working mainly in Internet branding, website design, and programming. The product here ranges from a whole website to the creation of a broader design ethos across multiple platforms. Others, such as graphic designers or art directors, worked mainly on design projects for Internet or online sites, reflecting the significance of the Internet for contemporary business clients. However, as the chapter argues, the freelancers' creative activities are often performed in the context of more conventional and direct spatial and contractual relationships. In all three respects, then, virtual work is fluid, complex, and conducted within capitalist social relations of control, measurement, and abstraction in which ties are direct and physical.

The rest of this chapter sets out the theoretical and methodological approach which I have used to understand the tensions between the needs of companies to control their creative workers and processes, and the conditions within creative freelancers work best. Seeing creative work through the prism of John Holloway's theory of 'doing' (see Holloway 2002, 2010), I draw particularly on the notion of 'dissonance' developed by Nitzan and Bichler (2009), and analyse its expression in creative work by means of the 'rhythmanalytical method' of Lefebvre (2004). My analysis

of the rhythms of freelance creative work over dispersed sites of labour is based on interviews with Dutch freelance creatives in graphic design, advertising, and branding.

Understanding the Conflict Between Creativity and Capitalist Power

Nitzan and Bichler's theory of 'capital as power' (2009) centres on the tension between industry and business. They argue that business imperatives sabotage the potential creativity of industry. This produces a 'dissonance' between the two which is the productive driving force of capitalist accumulation. They also argue that this conflict is not a deficiency, but rather that capitalist production relies on dissonance between creative freedom and its management.

This argument rests upon a distinction derived from the work of Thorstein Veblen (2007) between business and power on the one hand, and industry and creativity on the other (Nitzan and Bichler 2009: 219). The former prospers by actively sabotaging the latter (2009; 223). If not kept within limits, uncontrolled creativity overskills workers and causes employers problems of work measurement, undermining the potential for profitability. Creative work requires the constraints placed upon it by capitalist management.

The imperatives of clients and their creative freelancers are necessarily at odds with each other, therefore. They each work to conflicting agendas, with different temporalities and working rhythms. A fragile balance between creative freedom and control therefore has to be established. Borrowing from Nitzan and Bichler, in this chapter I will argue that this balance guarantees profit, but that this depends upon the channelling of creative potential so that creative activity is rendered predictable and quantifiable. The creative autonomy of freelancers is paramount to the achievement of profit, and vice versa. The freelancer's creative product often requires a profitable market in which to be traded, but the dependence of profit upon creative autonomy, and creative autonomy upon the pursuit of profit, is inherently contradictory.

Nitzan and Bichler contend that harmony and resonance are antithetical to the capitalist pursuit of power (2009: 226), which is inclined to undermine and disrupt existing social relations. For Nitzan and Bichler, capitalist society is a dissonant society, and must be so as to reproduce itself. Competitive advantage does not derive from companies' propensity to beat in time with others, but rather derives from deviation from others' rhythms or from the disruption of rhythm by stifling competition. Business power not only relies on antagonism between competitors and peers but also depends upon the maintenance of antagonistic relationships of control over workforces. This usually involves limiting and managing their autonomy and creativity (see Edwards 1980 and Burawoy 1979 for classic contributions to the study of control in the labour process).

I use the term creativity here in a critical sense rather than in the positive sense of writers like Florida (2002). I mean it as something that takes on a contradictory and antagonistic status in capitalist society. In this account, I draw upon John Holloway's juxtaposition of 'doing' or 'power-to' with the rule of abstract labour or 'power-over' (Holloway 2002). This maps onto Nitzan and Bichler's distinction between creativity and power, and fleshes out what the two terms represent. For Holloway, human 'doing', autonomous collective and individual activity geared towards some useful or pleasurable end precedes the distorted activity of capitalist production. In the latter, 'doing' appears in the mode of being 'denied'. 'Power-to' (i.e. the power to create) is subverted by 'power-over', the dominion of abstract economic imperatives of value and profit (Holloway 2002: 45). The creativity in human doing struggles against its subversion in abstract labour, the homogeneous, undifferentiated time of capitalist production (Marx 1990, and see Saad-Filho 1997 for an overview). Holloway shows that creativity—'doing' or 'power-to'—is something suppressed, denied, and struggled for (2002: 47). Creativity, then, is treated here as a potential quality that exists but only in the mode of being denied. It can only ever be partly present, what Holloway calls 'not yet' (2002: 13).

This differs from a perspective that celebrates creativity as something achievable and enjoyable in capitalist society, and which takes no account of the antagonistic and contradictory relationship between human beings and their 'doing' in capitalist society. Whereas Florida sees creative labour

as the fulfilment of creativity, this chapter shows that the power to create is always in conflict with the abstract economic compulsions of capitalist valorisation and profitability. My use of the term creativity is critical in that it adopts the standpoint of its possible realisation in a world without the constraints placed upon it by capitalist social relations, a standpoint which leaves room for a critique of the conditions of exploitation and precarity to which cultural workers are subject (see Gill and Pratt 2008 and Ross 2008).

Analysing Dissonance of Capitalism and Creativity Through 'Rhythmanalysis'

Sergio Tischler (2005) applies the understanding of human doing and its suppression and denial in abstract labour to a theorisation of the dual temporality of capitalist existence. He distinguishes between the 'time of reification' and the 'time of insubordination'. The former is the general 'uniform and continuous time' of capitalist valorisation (2005: 131–132). Labour must be, as far as possible, emptied of its specific content and divorced from its specific context in order to become measurable. This is abstract labour which entails the abstract time of identical hours passing.

Within this abstract time, however, there persists a latent time of 'struggle over the reduction of human creativity into profit' (Tischler 2005: 132). On the one hand, this human creativity 'can be realised only within the framework of a form of power that is alien to it' (2005: 133). This is because human activity in capitalist society is worthwhile and recognisable only via the process of monetary valorisation. On the other, human creativity resists its 'negation' in capitalist production (2005: 135). Even in its denial, this creativity manifests as what Tischler calls the 'time of insubordination' (2005: 135). This human time of doing and creativity renders capitalist power unstable and precarious. As Tischler writes, 'human creativity is a scandal because its potential for dysfunctionality inserts uncertainty into the "well-oiled" machinery of accumulation' (2005: 135). At the same time, capital relies upon it. This reliance upon human creativity, however, 'negat[es] its purpose'. '[A]bstract temporality', Tischler writes, 'tends to annihilate creativity' (2005: 135).

Thus, the capitalist negation of human creativity as abstract labour conducted in the 'time of reification' is marked by conflict and contradiction (2005: 131). The conflict centres upon the distinction between two times of reification and insubordination. This distinction allows us to consider the implications of Nitsan and Bichler's concept of the dissonance between creativity or industry, here synonymous with Holloway and Tischler's 'doing' or 'power-to', and power or business, here synonymous with abstract labour and 'power-over', with their opposing time, temporality, and rhythm.

Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalytical method (2004) provides a template for the study of this dissonance between, broadly defined, capitalism and human creativity. Rhythmanalysis is the study of the rhythms and repetitions of everyday life (2004: 73). It examines the different rhythms created when different social principles and practices meet. They produce either eurhythmy or arrhythmia depending on the success with which they interrelate. Creativity and power approximate to two such rhythmic poles. This chapter explores the various eurhythmy and arrhythmia that they generate (2004: 20).

My rhythmanalysis proceeds by means of the testimonies collected through 11 interviews with creative freelancers working as designers and strategists in graphic design, branding, and advertising. I have used Lefebvre's method to examine the conflicting rhythms attached to the demands of, on the one hand, creativity, and, on the other, power. Clients grant autonomy to their freelancers, but must constrain this autonomy within manageable, measurable limits.

This chapter discusses the interviewees' personal testimonies and lived experiences of the conflicting rhythms of creativity and power. The interviews focused on two aspects of their experiences. First, it reviews the patterns and recurring themes of freelance creative work. Second, it explores the tensions, struggles, and conflicts that ensue. This is in line with Lefebvre's recommendation that one assesses rhythm from two standpoints, repetition, on the one hand, and difference or disjuncture on the other.

The interviews invited the interviewees' reflection on where the rhythms of their work jarred with those of their clients, and so explored

their experiences of rhythmic conflict, repetition, and difference. It was in their sense of these differences that the dissonance described by Nitzan and Bichler became apparent. According to Lefebvre, disjuncture is something sensed and experienced, in either a bodily, physical or social, psychological way (2004: 10, 15, 77).

Creative Freelancing: Outsourcing Risk, Losing Control

Creative work is characterised by ephemerality and unknowability. The potential success of a creative good or service is uncertain (Caves 2002), and it is not always possible to observe or measure creative work in progress, for its immateriality makes it hard to quantify (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011: 83–84). Thus, creative organisations can rationalise their work only to a limited extent and must use other means to overcome the inherent risk and uncertainty of their endeavours. Flexible, decentralised working arrangements and contracts allow them to delegate some of this risk to employees. On the one hand, these arrangements remove some of the certainties and control of the formal employment relationship. On the other, they eliminate some of the risks usually borne by the employer. Freelancers exemplify the paradox of the simultaneous outsourcing of risk and loss of control.

Graphic design, branding, and advertising are industries which rely strongly on the use of freelance workers. In fluctuating, fast-moving markets, the use of freelancers helps them to respond rapidly to events. These industries typically serve consumer goods manufacturers and distributors, but these are highly volatile markets. A potentially unlimited flexible roster of freelancers, available when needed, at short notice, helps them respond to the unpredictability of market demand. Outsourcing this creative work to freelancers also outsources the risks associated with creative production.

Outsourcing creative work shifts the location of the employer–employee relation. In formal employment arrangements, the employers assume much of the financial burden of the relationship, by providing

health insurance schemes, pensions, sick pay, and redundancy pay. Employed workers sell their labour power in exchange for their subsistence, plus these and other protections. The employer's assumption of risk involves the assumption of some responsibility towards the employee. At the same time, employees forgo their own self-direction in exchange for their wages. This is the model on which the capitalist labour market functions (Boutang 2011: 142, p. 153).

Freelancers, however, transact using commercial contracts rather than conventional contracts of employment. This involves no assumption of risk by the employer. In the commercial market, freelancers assume responsibility and the capacity for decision-making, but enjoy no security or regularity of pay (Boutang 2011: 142, 153).

The advantage of this arrangement is that freelancers have more autonomy over their own working lives. The disadvantage is that this autonomy brings with it risks. Freelancers conduct their work in a business and project context that requires flexibility and responsiveness, but this also presents them with 'opportunities to deviate from the overall plan' (Legault 2013: 88).

As Legault points out, project-based work demands that freelancers adapt to discontinuous and contingent business rhythms. Freelancers are part of the toolkit of project-based working, but they must be controlled through 'work breakdown structures' meetings, waypoints, targets, indicators, and other measures (Legault 2013: 87). Digital technologies allow for this control to be decentralised and exerted at a distance. Project-based working derives its efficacy from 'digital networking', according to Boutang (2011: 63), which can unite and control 'high-trust but ephemeral teams' (Smith and McKinlay, quoted in Hodgson and Briand 2013: 312). Digital technologies therefore establish virtual connections linking freelancers more closely to their client managers. This relationship, however, crucially involves more traditional systems of power. Technologies are not the main instruments used in the enforcement of control and discipline over freelancers. Rather, time discipline, work measurement, and workplace-based control bind freelancers into the rhythms of business power, as we see in the next section.

The Rhythmic Experiences of Freelance Creatives

The rhythms of freelance creative work are set mainly by the client. Three main types of client relationship emerged from the interviews conducted for the research described here. In the first, creative agencies recruit freelancers to work on projects. The end user of the work done is the agency's corporate or government client. The freelancer's client is therefore the agency, not the end user of the creative work.

In the second arrangement, third-party agencies hire freelancers to creative agencies. They do this by employing the freelancers and selling their labour power onto the highest bidder for an hourly fee, and pay the freelancers a proportion (e.g. 75 %) of this fee. Alternatively, the freelancers pay a percentage of their fees to the agencies (say, 30 %). Both arrangements place a contractual barrier between freelancers and both agency and end users. In both arrangements, the freelancers work, de facto, for the agencies.

In a third arrangement, freelancers are recruited by corporations or public bodies directly, without the use of a third party. Sometimes the freelancers contractually resemble a creative agency, working alone or with other freelancers to meet their briefs. They may even delegate work to other freelancers, though this is a rare practice.

In the context of these arrangements, freelancers have a variety of daily working patterns and relationships. Some work at their clients' premises, particularly in the case of agency clients. Where corporate clients are involved, freelancers generally work in their own studios or in shared workspaces. Some freelancers prefer to maintain control of their schedule by always working independently and so tend to work from home or in co-working spaces shared with other freelancers.

Freelance contracts cover the provision of a service rather than being employment related. As one participant said, 'it is more of a supplier's contract, providing a service' (Freelance digital designer, male, 20s). Some freelancers provide this service on a day rate, which is generally suited to bigger projects, whilst others work for an hourly rate, which is better suited to smaller projects. Many freelancers use a mixture of

pay and pricing structures over the course of their professional lives. As the majority of their jobs were small, most of the freelancers whom I interviewed worked on hourly rate contracts, delivered over the course of days, weeks, or months.

Hour-based contracts are particularly appropriate for work with agency clients, because agencies structure their projects based on billable hours—an allocation of hours covering the amount charged out to clients. Freelancers employed on an hourly basis fall under this billing convention and are incorporated into a project's accounting. Agency contracts tend to require a close proximity of freelancer and firm, and freelancers face a subtle compulsion to work from agency premises. This is designed to give agencies a sense of the freelance hours they are paying for, since they can directly monitor their freelancers' effort in relation to their billable hours.

In working arrangements involving day rates, it is assumed that a set number of hours—usually eight—are worked, but the actual number of hours worked may deviate above or below this amount. One interviewee claimed that day-rate agency jobs make for longer working hours, often exceeding the amount contracted and paid for. When working on-site at the agency, this interviewee reported working 'nine or ten hours a day' (Freelance graphic designer/art director, male, 30s).

Other freelancers seek contracts that pay for the project as a single piece of work, pricing the job on the basis of its anticipated duration. The client is not billed on this basis but, rather, on the basis of the quality of finished product. This contractual arrangement involves a freer relationship between freelancer and client. The freelancer's time and space are freed from the temporal and spatial strictures of company life and the freelancer works independently. Such contracts appeal more to corporate clients because the costs of the work are contained and fixed. For the freelancer, there is less clock-punching and desk-based working than with agency working and they can enjoy working at a greater distance from the client's offices. In creative freelancing, such contracts, however, are rarer than those mediated by creative agencies.

These permutations—of contractual arrangement, client relationship, and work location and contractual basis—produce rhythmic variations in freelance work. Freelancers working on-site for corporate clients usually

have shorter, more standard working hours. Freelancers working on-site for agencies, by contrast, find themselves sucked into long working hours and intense working routines. In the corporate world, in the Netherlands at least, the pace of work is slower and more relaxed than in creative agencies.

Amsterdam creative studios are known by some as expat agencies because they rely on a young international workforce which arrives in the Netherlands with no established social or family networks, but well accustomed to the intense working schedules of London and New York and ready to be totally immersed in work. Dutch nationals prefer work–life balance and family time, so young foreign creatives offer agencies the possibility to extend and intensify work patterns.

> '[Whereas] the Dutch have got it much better in terms of work-life balance, younger graphic designers […] brought over specifically to work at agencies are being abused (Freelance digital designer, male, 20s).

Dutch creative agencies have adopted a long-hours culture more associated with Anglo-Saxon economies, and freelancers who find themselves based in these agencies tend to get drawn into this culture. They have some freedom from these arrangements, however. For one thing, they are free to leave when their permanent colleagues cannot. The freelancers whom I interviewed agreed that the longer a job goes on, however, the less freedom they enjoy. As one participant commented, 'you stay longer than six months, you become part of the company, of the corporate world' (Freelance digital director, male, 40s). After six months, their working rhythms are those of the agencies which they once left. Moreover, with each month, the hours spent on-site increase and the expectations of the agency reach a point where freelancers may be disciplined for arriving late for work. One recounted being told by a manager: 'you cannot come in at eleven anymore because we have interns you have to set an example to' (Freelance designer/developer, male, 20s).

Often whole networks of freelancers, formerly employees of an agency, are used for assignments. They then return to the workplaces they once left and may even be re-inducted into the rhythms of company life, having left with the express intention of distancing themselves from these

rhythms. Tax breaks for the self-employed are all that separate freelancers from employees in these situations. They must arrive at and leave work when everyone else does, and work the same long hours. As one freelancer observed, the 'only difference is that I can get a tax deduction for the lunch I buy' (Freelance graphic designer and illustrator, male, 20s).

Many freelancers have more than one job at any one time, and rush from one job to the other, working on a mixture of longer and shorter jobs simultaneously, though these often conflict with one another. The details of shorter jobs frequently disrupt the time and space that the freelancers need to devote to the longer one. Their attention is constantly distracted by emails from and meetings with multiple clients, sudden changes of mind and last-minute requested adjustments to work. These freelancers therefore find it hard to establish a satisfactory creative rhythm of work.

Freelancers field the problems of many clients in many corporate sectors. They react to sudden changes in their clients' market position, target audiences, and company focus. They fix issues of presentation and image accompanying the contingent rhythm of consumer markets. The clients are at the mercy of these rhythms. One freelance graphic designer claimed that the small retail firms are 'more reactive than proactive', so decisions are taken on the spur of the moment (Freelance Graphic Designer, male, 30s). The precariousness of freelancers' work puts them in a weak position. Since they rely on a steady stream of work to survive, they must respond to their clients' every request, no matter if doing so disrupts their work and personal schedules. One interviewee had to reduce his hourly rate to keep his clients, despite their tendency to ask for more work than he was able to deliver. This shows that time is a poor measure of freelance creative work, and that the billing and accounting convention of hourly rates inadequately reflects the rhythms of corporate and creative life.

As noted above, the freelancers involved in the study reported here tended to work very long hours, sometimes 65 hours a week or 12 hours a day, at considerable human cost including, in one case, a very serious car accident which was subsequently attributed to the freelancer's overwork. Rather than freeing people from corporate work demands, freelancing seems to exacerbate their enslavement to the job.

Digital media play a key role in this subjugation to the demands of 24-hour working. Email accessed through mobile devices, for example, constitutes a virtual rope perpetually connecting the freelancer to the job. In this context, freelancers have to manage their online presence so that their clients do not assume that they are working and contactable. They do this by, for instance, avoiding sending emails at weekends even when they are working. This policy merely manages client expectations and keeps freelancers' rhythms separate from those of their clients. To do otherwise tends to drag freelancers into the slipstream of client routines and work patterns.

The billing of a job based on an hourly rate intensifies the temporal and spatial command of client over freelancer. This is because client companies—specifically agencies—have a stronger wish to see the hours for which they are paying pass in a productive manner. The hourly structure encourages a stronger focus on the time that a freelancer works. This puts pressure on the freelancer to conform to the rhythms of formal employment and to enter the spatial infrastructure of a traditional workplace setting. This often conflicts with their own creative rhythms which, in the case of the young creatives covered in this research, pertain less to desks and offices than to showers, surfboards, and sofas. Freelancers often prize their ability to work on projects in their own time, for instance, at weekends, evenings, or in the early hours of the morning, whenever their inspiration and focus is at its sharpest. This also gives them the freedom to stop work when they are not creative or productive, and return to it another time. One interviewee noted that 'the best insights come when you're outside the workplace' (Freelance design director, male, 40s). The organisation of one's life and work in this way is impossible within a formal employment setting and in an office. Agencies, in particular, require their freelancers to be physically present in their premises which set their own rhythms of work, running counter to creativity.

The emphasis placed by creative agencies on presenteeism results in struggles by freelancers for the freedom to work remotely. Information technologies are used to support this bid for remote working: remote access computing, virtual private networks, Skype, and email may all be harnessed by freelancers so that they can work at a distance. Their clients, however, need to have a clear sense of time elapsed as planned and work

performed as costed. Remote working conflicts with the system of billable hours by which agencies price work to their external clients. Their need to check and monitor the work of their creatives compromises the very creativity they have engaged.

Particular problems occur when freelancers stay with agencies for longer than six months. The outsider perspective that they bring with them and that is valued by their clients is undermined as they become part of the organisation, in effect, permanent employees. In these ways, the demands of agency life subordinate freelancers to the detriment of creativity itself.

There are consequently irreconcilable differences of perspective between client agencies and freelancers. Agencies simply see their freelancers working for a certain number of hours. Freelancers experience these hours as varied and diverse. When they work from home, their billing hours take in dealing with unrelated emails, phone calls, and other activities. Their real rhythms of work do not conform to an even pattern of uninterrupted recorded and billed time—the abstract, standardised time of business. However, it is this standardised time which is used to structure freelance contracts and work, since payment is usually based on the time spent on the job and not necessarily on the quality of the end result.

For many freelancers, flexible work rhythms facilitate creative inspiration. Corporate clients have very different perspectives on the flexible delivery of the work they contract. They like to be able to contact freelancers with demands for last-minute changes, or sudden deadline shifts, in response to the realities of their business requirements, and particularly in response to the requirements of profitability and their market position. Creatives find it difficult to activate their creativity at will in response to these imperatives, to switch from other work or from domestic activities in response to the demands of their corporate clients. In this respect, the requirements of business clients clash with the rhythms of creative work. The outsourcing of the employment relationship to the commercial sphere does not eliminate conflict, merely redefine it.

Agency rhythms are structured by the system of billable hours described above. Hours are recorded in line with budgets of time allocated to certain projects, and agencies need freelancers on hourly contracts so that

they have the currency with which to bill clients. However, the hours recorded by employees and freelancers seldom match the reality of the time spent on a job. For example, an agency might contract a freelancer for eight hours for a job, but the freelancer may do it in three. The freelancer then has to sit and do nothing, giving the impression they are working, to pass the remaining five hours. Agency clients want to see freelancers working, and so they require them to come to their premises and monitor their work once there. Ironically, therefore, freelance work can be both less free and more intense than regular employment.

Agencies seek to secure the maximum value from the hourly rate they pay their freelancers, but this is difficult to achieve since paying by the hour rather than, say, the product or the end result, undermines this objective. The hour's value, abstracted from what is done within it, becomes the focus of attention and this seldom assists creative endeavour. In this way, too, agency management practices are incompatible with creativity. Many of the freelancers interviewed for the research reported here were greatly in favour of efficiency and effective work organisation, which they saw as the best way to manage their time and balance their paid work with activities beyond this sphere. For them, the billable hours system militated against effective time management, wasting time which could be spent otherwise. The opposite problem for freelancers also occurs when they work longer than the number of hours billed, which happens frequently. Hourly based billing is seen by freelancers as effective in the sense that it reassures their clients who feel that they are paying a fair price if they have some idea of how much time is spent on the work. Freelancers who work for companies in traditional, non-creative sectors, which have little idea of the conceptual work that supports the design and production of, say, a poster or a flyer, find it hard to justify the time spent on these jobs to their clients.

Clients often pay freelancers for the hours they work rather than the quality of what they do, and freelancers dislike this. Some seek out contracts based on a total fee for a deliverable service or product. This frees them from the system of billable hours and allows them to work at rhythms more suited to their creative needs.

Reflections on the Management of Creative Freelancers

Creative work is an uncertain endeavour, as we have seen. Employing freelancers to complete creative projects successfully depends upon the careful harnessing and control of their labour. As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) have noted, creative management always 'struggl[es] against the relative autonomy given to creative workers' (2011: 83–84), but at the same time, it relies on this autonomy for the delivery of innovative work. There is a fine balance between, on the one hand, the 'freedom to be creative', and on the other, the ability to keep 'creativity within manageable and productive bounds' (Townley and Beech, quoted in Hodgson and Briand 2013: 311). Creative projects are successful not in spite of this tension, but because of it.

This chapter has shown creative agencies themselves to be the keenest controllers of creative freelance endeavours, because of their commitment to the system of billable hours. In this respect, they try to make creative work more amenable to measurement and less uncertain in its conduct and outcomes.

Creative autonomy is generally necessary to the effective performance of creative work, according to a romantic conception of creativity as an unconstrained and independent work process. In this conception, creatives use their imaginations in careful, loving undertakings. The creativity essential to many forms of cultural production therefore depends upon the devolution of control over their work to the creatives. In creative companies, however, the creative process is much more controlled, and, crucially, limited.

The risks attendant upon devolving control to creatives must be minimised through the careful management of their creative energies. Checks and monitoring arrangements are put in place in order to contain these seemingly autonomous activities. The workplace is the locus of this control, and despite the dispersed and virtual nature of much freelance work, technical control is less significant.

Conclusion

In many ways, freelance creatives appear to inhabit a world of work that is decentralised, relatively autonomous, tech savvy, digitally wired, and nourishing of individual creative freedom. This chapter has shown, however, that the apparently independent contractual status of freelancers, and the dispersed nature of their work, does not undermine management's attempts to control the temporal and spatial dimensions of freelance creative labour. It suggests that, contrary to contemporary approaches to new ways of working, most notably that of the 'immaterial labour' thesis (see Lazzarato 1996; Hardt and Negri 2001; and Pitts 2015a: 5–6, 20–23 for a critique), freelance creative work is not exempt from the processes of measurement, abstraction, time discipline, and worker control to which labour under capitalism has traditionally been subject. Rather, it makes these processes more transparent.

The relative autonomy to which freelancers are contractually entitled means that their employers cannot legally exercise complete control over their working arrangements, time, and activities. Freelancers operate, in theory, independently from the daily control of their employers. This chapter has revealed the ways in which they frequently end up very much under this control. Consequently, the ways in which abstract, quantitative systems of time measurement structure the working rhythms of labour may be more obvious in freelance work than in formal employment. We should not be so optimistic as to think that a society based on the control of workers' time in the pursuit of profit is in decline. Nor should we disregard the material and contractual confines within which labour is performed and which, in the process, makes such a society possible.

The potential of some forms of virtual work—for example, open source and peer-to-peer forms of production—to serve as the harbingers of a new type of society free of the compulsion to work for pay is sometimes extolled (see Mason 2015 and Pitts 2015b for a critique). However, the technological context within which the labour is situated matters far less than the social relations from which it springs. The virtual nature of work performed by freelance creatives simply expresses these social relations, rather than being somehow exempt from them. In fact, it allows

employing agencies and clients to withdraw from any obligations or duties towards those they hire. The study of freelance creatives reported here shows that the degree to which work is virtual or not is determined not simply by its digital quality but also by the way in which value is created and control over the process exercised by capital.

This chapter has shown how client agencies undermine the very creativity they promote and depend on, weaving freelancers into webs of billable hours. The creativity of freelancers thereby becomes reduced to the performance of an abstract 'hour', based on their temporal and physical presence in the client's workplace. The lifestyle imagined by creatives is often one of 'cool' and egalitarian independence (Gill 2002). The work they must perform, however, is often the opposite of this. How then can they organise to defend their creativity in this context?

Holloway, whose understanding of human 'doing' and 'creativity' has informed the central argument of this chapter, contends that 'doing' is inherently social and collective (2002, 41). While freelancers may outwardly appear individualistic and entrepreneurial, the evidence collected for the research underlying this chapter suggests that, when they seek a richer and more stable basis for their creative activity, they tend to do so collectively. Around half of the freelancers involved in the study were based in a co-working space, working alongside other freelancers all working on their own assignments. Co-working spaces have become spaces for freelancers to collaborate, socialise, share feedback and advice, and eat and drink together. They provide working environments free from the constant monitoring of work and recording of billable working hours. In these spaces, activities are carried out to a different rhythm, set by the creatives' own working pace and creative requirements. Co-working spaces are imbued with a sense of productivity which is totally different from that found in agency or company workplaces. Equally, these are not freelance factories where independent creatives assemble to discipline themselves into the productive rhythms of business.

One participant compared them unfavourably to agencies, which have 'big offices' where 'everyone is on the hour', and there is no other motivation for the freelancers than 'the money that they need' (freelance graphic designer/illustrator, female, 40s). Co-working spaces, for this participant, are radically different and they allow creatives to focus more on creative

production and to temporarily forget their commitment to the billing hours system. In these spaces, perhaps, creativity may be expressed free of the imperatives of business. 'Doing' may overcome its negation in abstract labour, and 'power-to' may withstand 'power-over', suggesting that spatial and material relations of control are decisive in the domination of creative labour, against which freelancers struggle for creative freedom.

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8

Towards More Insecurity? Virtual Work and the Sustainability of Creative Labour

Jaka Primorac

While online production, distribution, and prosumption activities have been shaping the daily (and nightly) working practices of creative workers for some time, many types of creative and knowledge labour are still often not recognised as 'proper work'. What is more, the way we label employment is still embedded in the normative principle of the standard/non-standard employment dichotomy of the Fordist era, though in the UK, this failure to acknowledge cultural employment as meaningful can be dated back to the Victorian period, when the socialist Ruskin argued that 'cultural work is actually not work' (Huws 2001: 3). Although this view has predominately changed in a UK context, it can be said that it is still present in other social and historical contexts. For example, in countries from Southeastern Europe (SEE) that some authors (Domazet and Marinović Jerolimov 2014) define as the European semi-periphery, the notion that creative labour is not considered as proper work still holds strong in parts (Primorac 2008: 37).

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Research on creative labour has only recently begun to investigate the impact that virtual work, that is, online production, distribution, and prosumption activities, has on the shaping of the daily (and nightly) working practices of creative cultural workers (Banks 2007). The role of virtual work has scarcely been addressed, with the exceptions of, for example, Terranova (2000) who concentrates on creative workers dealing with digital content, and the interest in digital labour in the volumes edited by Burston et al. (2010), Scholz (2013), and Huws (2014).

In this chapter, I propose to explore the implications virtual work has for creative labour, where everyday work is entwined in a complex network of online and offline working practices. This is particularly evident when talking about 'work-life balance', where it can be observed that work (the public sphere) implodes more and more into the 'life-leisure' (private) sphere (Barada and Primorac 2014). From this perspective, taking into account changes in work and employment practices—where non-paid or underpaid work (Seibert and Wilson 2013; Morgan and Wood 2013) and self-exploitative work practices are increasingly present (Ross 2008: 34)—I will outline key issues that virtual work suggests for sustainable and equitable creative labour practices. In this context, sustainability 'concerns the management of cultural capital, and the allocation of resources to culture in a manner that will produce economic, social and cultural benefits in the long term' (Cvjetičanin and Katunarić 1999: 23). I begin by situating virtual work within research on creative labour in relation to the insecurity of work and employment in the cultural and creative industries. I then go on to outline the need for a new research paradigm that goes beyond the standard/non-standard employment thesis, which I argue is inadequate in the context of virtual work and creative labour. Finally, I relate this to the concept of 'work-life balance' and to the rise of precarious labour in the wider context of insecure labour within global capitalism. In concluding, I ask whether virtual work can contribute to the emergence of new types of connectivity and collectivism that are necessary precursors for solidarity among creative workers on a transnational stage.

Setting the Scene: Creative Labour in the Cultural and Creative Industries

Globalisation and the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and, in turn, digitalisation have had a major impact on the processes of transnationalisation of labour that produce culture and communication (Mosco 2008). Creative labour is in flux and furthermore is connected and influenced by forms of labour in other sectors. There are many different definitions and traditions of creative labour (McKinley and Smith 2009; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Lee 2013). In this chapter, I am taking the definition of creative labour as employed by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011). In their work, these authors apply an inclusive definition of creative labour that takes into account that there is a division of labour in cultural production. Creative labour in this sense refers to the work of all these groups including creative, craft and technical workers, managers, executives, and unskilled labour 'as part of an organisational division of labour, while recognizing that the input of different groups of workers into "creative" outputs varies, and that this variety can be the source of important hierarchies and distinctions in cultural production' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011: 9). Previous research on cultural and creative industries has stressed the importance that ICTs have for the growth of these industries (Hesmondhalgh 2002). At the outset of research in this area, the influence that ICTs exert on creative labour was more or less ignored (Flew 2005). That is, less attention has been given to the impact of virtual work, where the interplay of online production, distribution, and prosumption activities shape the working and life practices of creative workers. What also needs to be taken into account is that the level and intensity of virtual work varies according to specific cultural and creative sectors; for example, it is an integral part of the gaming industry, while in the film industry, it is not present to such an extent. Equally, specific occupations within these sectors employ virtual work to a greater or lesser extent.

The increase in research on work and employment in the cultural and creative industries and thus on creative labour in general (McRobbie 2002; Pratt 2004, 2008; Ross, 2004, 2007, 2008; Banks 2007; Banks

and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Randle et al. 2015; Leung et al. 2015) is a welcome counterbalance to earlier research on media, culture, and communication, which focused more on the audience, while the working conditions and labour in media and communication in general were neglected (Mosco and McKercher 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Banks et al. 2013). The relatively recent proliferation of research on this topic and its subsequent outcomes have focused, to a large extent, on the intricacies of the labour processes in cultural and creative industries (McKinley and Smith 2009) and on the changes to labour in media and communication in general (Deuze 2007). The works of authors such as Huws (2001, 2013), and those presented in the edited volume by Scholz (2013), have in turn led to further research on the impact of digital labour, virtual work, and on the general position of labour in the global digital economy.

The increased interest in research on this topic can be partly credited to the erosion of the euphoria generated by reports of the positive impacts of policy interventions in the cultural and creative industries in the pre-recession period. For example, the 'Cool Britannia' project in UK incorporated the range of activities carried out by the British Council in promotion of the global cultural and creative industries (Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia and Convenio Andrés Bello 2003; Hui 2003; Ratzenböck et al. 2004; Jovičić and Mikić 2006). After the first wave of positive acclamations of the policy outcomes, a range of negative consequences became evident, including the instrumentalisation of arts and culture for economic ends, towards gentrification. The negative impacts of this on work and employment in the cultural and creative industries became evident, and resulted in a particular focus on the vulnerable, insecure, and, as some authors note, precarious position of cultural workers (Gill and Pratt 2008; Neilson and Rossiter 2008; Ross, 2004, 2007, 2008) within a context of the precariousness of labour more generally in global (neo-liberal) capitalism.

Different conceptualisations of the relationship between precariousness and creative labour are evident, with some authors suggesting that the insecure positions of cultural workers are indicative of the precursors of precariousness in general (Virno 2002), where their mode of work has always been insecure and flexible. Furthermore, there are those who

see precariousness as a crucial trait of the 'specialness' of creative labour and who argue that, unlike some other fields, cultural work and creative labour have been fragile, insecure, and precarious throughout history (as noted in Gill and Pratt (2008) and Luckman (2013)). Authors have suggested that some creative workers have developed strategies for dealing with the precariousness of work in these sectors, resulting in a 'precarious stability' (Blair 2001) or 'structured uncertainty' (Randle and Culkin 2009). Others have located this insecurity in the project-based work dominant in the cultural and creative industries (Blair, et al. 2001; Eikhof and Warhurst 2013). However, they stress that this is not specific to creative labour and similar working practices can be found in other fields where work is composed of a series of projects. The 'patchwork career' (Lutz in Deuze 2007: 259) that this produces alongside a weakening of traditional unionized labour (Lee 2013: 6) appears to have contributed to the rise of precarious labour in the cultural and creative industries. However, as Ross (2004) notes, the fragility and insecurity or precariousness of creative labour are not unique developments but stem from the overall conditions of labour in the context of its general transformation in the twenty-first century. Huws (2014: 18) goes further to argue that employment stability has never been the norm, but merely a recent feature while flexibility and instability of employment have been more customary historically.

Over the last five years, the concepts of 'precarity' and 'precariousness' have attracted attention, as well as some controversy (cf the concept of the 'precariat' by Standing (2011)), be it on the difficulty of applying these terms in particular socio-cultural contexts, or the question of whether the concepts themselves bring something new to the analysis of work and labour. Nevertheless, their introduction has furthered the questioning of what labour is in contemporary societies and consequently sought to expose the inequalities and insecurities produced by such labour conditions within particular socio-cultural settings. This particularity is central to some analyses with Barbier (2011: 3) arguing that any analysis of labour insecurity has to be embedded in the wider perspective of social protection systems and political cultures and that therefore 'there is no such thing as "precariousness", "a-typicality" or "non-standard" per se'. He further argues that the concept of precarity has been misinterpreted and

that it has been inadequately translated from French into other languages (Barbier 2011). It has become an umbrella term for various 'irregularities' in work and employment in a range of socio-economic contexts. In considering creative labour, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 160–179)[1] question the adequacy of the concept of 'precarity'/'precariousness' as a conceptual tool for research because of the specificity of culture, or of cultural production, in general. The 'virtual' elements of creative labour have been identified as major contributors to the development of 'precariousness', as they contribute to blurring the boundaries between 'work and play' (Huws 2014: 150). Precariousness therefore entails dimensions of insecurity, vulnerability, and unpredictability reflected in insecure work positions due to inadequate working conditions, weak work contracts, and poor remuneration for the work executed. Notwithstanding their own critique, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 161) nevertheless regard the concept of precariousness as an adequate synonym 'for the insecurity and exploitation recognized and analyzed in other theoretical and activist traditions'. I would concur with its use in research on creative labour in contemporary global capitalism and acknowledge De Peuter and Cohen's (2015) argument for the importance of developing a new terminology in the context of emerging creative labour practices where precarity can be seen as a mobilising tool for creative labour activists.

New Standards, New Inequalities? Creative Labour and Virtual Work

The evolving global digital economy has fostered a growing impetus to question existing understandings of work and employment standards in the context of changes in the global labour market. In particular, the decomposition of 'standard' work and of employment arrangements in

[1] As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 179) write, although they find evidence to support the autonomists and critical sociologists claims about precariousness and insecurity, they are wary of some of the concepts elaborated by them. 'In particular, […] the generality of their concepts fails to capture the specifically symbolic nature of cultural products, or the fact that the core institutions of symbolic production in modern societies are the media, with their own distinctive power dynamics.'

general has implications for creative labour and labour rights protection. 'Decomposition' here refers to the Fordist 'employment standard' and the simultaneous expansion of non-standard employment (Fritz and Koch 2013). It can be attributed to three main socio-economic trends identified in social science literature. These are as Fritz and Koch (2013: 3) note: (1) the interplay between increasing global competition and technological processes, (2) the continued hegemony of neoclassic reasoning in policymaking, and (3) demographic changes in Western societies. Thus, the question of the decomposition of the Fordist employment standard can also be looked at from an angle that takes into account the inadequacy of the previously elaborated and adopted concepts. Evoking Ulrich Beck's (2000) concept of 'zombie categories', 'Lehdonvirta and Mezier (2013: 25) ask: 'To what extent are the prevailing structures of western working life, such as corporations, occupations and roles, just shells maintained for the purposes of appearances, while actual work is already being organized in other ways?' The number of people working in non-standard employment is increasing rapidly; as data by Cranford et al. (in Mosco and McKercher 2008: 155) show 'one in three Canadian workers are employed in so-called non-standard arrangements, such as part-time work, self-employment, contract work, temporary work, on-call work, homework, telecommuting, etc.—a proportion so large that it raises the possibility that "nonstandard" is becoming the new standard'. These non-standard flexible arrangements are often not covered by the standard labour rights agreements that put these workers into fragile positions and ask for new models of security of labour in such fluid conditions. The question therefore arises, if the typical is not typical anymore, and the non-standard has set itself up as the new standard, what are we talking about when we speak of 'a-typical' and 'non-standard' work and employment in relation to creative labour? What kind of new employment 'standard' has to be proposed? In such a 'destandardized', liquid global context (Bauman 2006), how are we to exercise the labour rights of creative workers on the global scale, and what new ways of unionisation are possible in such flexible conditions?

To respond to some of these issues, one needs to outline what these 'new standards' would entail. Creative cultural workers are involved in virtual work in many forms and outlets, producing online, creating

content, and (providing) services that are available through different forms of online distribution, or are connected to and/or enacting a variety of online prosumption activities that entail parallel production and consumption of content online (Deuze 2007: 77). Most of these forms of work change rapidly, and are not adequately and regularly researched and analysed; they originate in different online collaborations and communications and find expression in diverse web productions and distributions, different crowdsourcing platforms, and piecemeal work actions, through various gaming work models, including gold farming (Holts 2013). Previous research has shown how the nature of creative work demands long-term temporal and financial investment in various skills and expertise (McRobbie 2002). Maintaining a successful career demands that at the beginning of a career different forms of non-paid work and underemployment (as voluntary work, temp work, and so on) are expected (Randle and Culkin 2009; Ross 2013). This has consequences for gender, class, and ethnic diversity in labour in the cultural and creative industries (Conor et al. 2015; Randle 2015). However, these 'non-standard employment types' and thus the nature of the work reflect the reproduction of the already present class, gender, racial, and ethnic inequalities in contemporary capitalist societies (Hesmondhalgh 2002: 5–6; Randle, et al. 2015) that hinder the sustainability and durability of creative careers. In this sense, cultural and creative industries are sometimes described as 'a closed shop' and various actions are necessary to bring about the much-needed diversity in this sector, as is already outlined in numerous research reports, such as The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) report (Straw and Warner 2014).

Other research has charted the furthering of gender inequalities (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), and has shown how women in this sector are in an inferior position to their male counterparts (McRobbie 2002; Barada 2012; Leung et al. 2015). This comes about as a result of the fact that there are gender inequalities in work and employment (e.g. the inequalities hiding behind poetic terms such as 'glass ceilings' or 'boy's clubs'), that are ingrained in the creative labour setting. It can thus be said that careers in creative labour are oriented more towards young male white workers of more privileged class backgrounds as shown, among others, in the study on the creative industries in Vienna (Eichmann et al.

2006: 12) and in the UK film and television context (Randle et al. 2015). It can further be contended that it was only when the status and positions held by these 'young white male middle class workers' (Randle 2015) started to be endangered, that is, when they became insecure, precarious, and vulnerable, that the talk about precariousness, fragility in creative labour in general started to be vocalised more strongly (Vishmidt in Lee 2013). In parallel, a whole plethora of virtual work practices in creative labour that were and are still being carried out by women in cultural and creative industries continue to be unacknowledged (cf Wen 2014; Taylor and McNeil 2014).

Research on work and employment in the cultural and creative industries presents a challenge as they deal with the communication of experiences through symbolic production. This creates a dynamic contradiction between artistic autonomy and creativity on the one hand, and the market and necessity for an income on the other (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). This contradiction is inscribed in the production type as well as in the organisational contexts of cultural and creative industries. The outcome of this is that creative workers find themselves in a conflict with both external organisational pressures and internal control mechanisms that contribute to both limiting their autonomy and the rise in, and the habituation of, self-exploitation (Ross 2008: 34). Through the dictum of non-stop online availability and networking, continuous developing and distribution of online content, and so on, virtual work contributes to shifting of the borders between work time and leisure time and thus impact on public–private work–life relations. Furthermore, the blurring of the boundary between the public and private spheres has different consequences for female creative cultural workers (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; McRobbie 2002; Conor et al. 2015) that can lead to the re-domestication of female creative workers (Barada and Primorac 2014).

The inequalities in creative labour stem also from the different types of virtual work that contributes to the development of cultural and creative industries but is seldom recognised. One can point to the example of those workers who produce the tools with which creative labourers work or through which they distribute their own products and services, as was explored in Maxwell and Miller's (2013) article. In addition, some authors have highlighted the necessity of raising awareness and of

solidarity between all creative workers, that is, of the global interconnectedness of all actors participating in the production of creative products whether these entail virtual work or not; for example, computer assemblers in Shenzhen in China and (computer) designers in Cupertino, California (Mosco 2013). The question arises of how actions towards solidarity could be achieved between these diverse creative workers and whether and when these actions of solidarity might happen, when all of lifetime becomes working time.

Playground/Factory/Living Room: Work–Life Balance and Virtuality

> 'There has been "a convergence of work and personal life," she said. "People are never really off so we have to address the whole person. And if we can help people, it helps employee retention. Anything that helps people personally has benefits that apply to the whole company."'
>
> (Head of Human Resources, quoted in Cadwallard 2014)

This quote relates to the new trend of mindfulness meditation training techniques that are increasingly being provided to workers in various tech businesses and other companies in the creative and business sectors.[2] The notion that mindfulness training and other types of self-help will benefit employees gives the impression that the employer 'really cares' about the workers. However, the underlying thinking behind these free meditation sessions during and after work shows itself to be purely functional—it is self-actualisation in your free time for the benefit of the company. This is just one example of an instrument that contributes to the blurring of the border between work time and leisure time that is ever more present in the lives of the creative workers. This shifting of boundaries contributes to the new forms of work that are created and to the new value

[2] For example, companies including Google Inc. and General Mills Inc. are including mindfulness in their company schedules. This growing fad for development of mindfulness and conciousness in Silicon Valley is also evident through conferences such as 'Wisdom 2.0' (see at: http://www.wisdom2summit.com/).

patterns that emerge. Florida (2002, 2007) examined this work–leisure dynamic in the context of creative industries, but only acknowledged the positive aspects and these arguments were soon refuted (Lovink and Rossiter 2007; Ross, 2008, 2013). The negative aspects of the shifting of these borders and the processes that they set in motion were quickly highlighted by authors—for example, Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009) and Gill and Pratt (2008) have shown the complexity of the external and internal constraints to creative workers that blur the borders between work and leisure.

ICTs foster considerable complexity in work–life dynamics, and they have been shown to be a 'double-edged sword' from a work–life balance perspective. This is especially relevant in relation to the gender inequality issues: 'Working from home or in multiple work-stations, in the continuum of constant labour, consumes not only all of the living time, but also influences the self-perception and identity (Sennett 1998) of the always available creative workers. Such a never-ending stream of activities is a characteristic of female everyday life (Smith 1987) and, as such, it is amplified in the life of female 'creative workers' (Barada and Primorac 2014: 147). Thus, the development of any new models for sustainable creative labour need, in particular, to take into account gender-related specificities.

The implosion of the public part of the day into the private part of the day is ever more present and contributes to the deepening of not only exploitation but also self-exploitation practices (Ross 2008) that consume the whole of the day time as well as the night (Smith 1987). This contributes to further changes in the structure of work, and the experience of work. As previously noted, this structure of work needs constant 'updating' and skills development, and it requires flexibility that leads to temporary, part-time, and self-employment. Work becomes project based, liquid (Bauman 2006: 5), and it promotes a flexible portfolio career, as all these new forms of organising emphasise fluidity over structure. In an industry where one is 'only as good as your last job', as the saying goes (Blair 2001), one continually needs to work on self-marketing and networking (Randle and Culkin 2009), throughout the day and even night—online as well as offline in order to stay connected to the exclusionary networks of contacts important for the building up of

a sustainable career (Christopherson 2008). Deuze similarly notes: 'The liquidity of contemporary media work is exemplified by the patchwork career (Lutz 2000) of a portfolio worklife (Handy 1998[1989]), or rather work-style (Deuze 2007), signalling a continuous blurring between the boundaries of work, life and play, as well as between production and consumption' (Deuze 2007: 259). Consequenly, this discourse of 'enterprising self' (Storey et al. 2005) leads to the breaking down of the previous feelings of solidarity, and leaves workers isolated.

Some of these strategies of 'unstructured work', Apitzsch (2013), can be seen to have contributed to the formalisation of informal (coping) strategies such as already noted networking, and thus to the formalisation of one's own leisure time. Such strategies are developed in order that these workers are better able to address the uncertainty and insecurity of work in the cultural and creative industries (Blair 2001). They can be sufficient for a certain period of time and for selected workers, even if they also impinge on their work–life balance. However, notwithstanding the different tactics and strategies developed by workers themselves, the structural problem of overall insecurity still remains, and, what is more, it is present on the global level. Such a global perspective of the insecurity of creative labour opens questions on the new models of labour rights protection. There are limited attempts to use virtual work in order to instigate solidarity in creative labour and to organise and connect on the global level such as EuroMayDay, Freelancers Union, or the Union Network International (Mosco and McKercher 2008: 209). One of the most notable projects that maps and promotes such initiatives is the 'Cultural Workers Organize' project, which also shows there are attempts to formulate new types of collective actions and organisations that would function differently from the already existing trade unions and associations. Some of these are created around particular occupational identities, while others attempt to connect workers in different sectors and occupations as De Peuter and Cohen (2015) show.

Concluding Remarks

It is difficult to discern the impact that online production, distribution, and prosumption activities have on the changing patterns of working practices of creative workers, as their online and offline practices are

largely intertwined. However, in this chapter, I have tried to outline the key issues connected to virtual work and its contribution to the development of workers' solidarity and to the new types of labour organisation, and networking among workers that could consequently contribute to sustainable creative labour. This is especially important in the context of putting the creative labour rights issues to the centre stage where the problems related to the so-called non-standard employment such as insecurity, vulnerability, and thus inequality are taken to the transnational level. The question of the precariousness of creative labour has to be seen to be embedded in the context of the overall insecurity of labour in global capitalism, which has resulted in changing patterns in the public sphere of work as well as in the private sphere.

Different actors employed in the diverse sectors of cultural and creative industries see the possibility of a joint framework and common ground for working on establishing alliances for labour rights protection (Mosco and McKercher 2008; De Peuter and Cohen 2015). However, whether these alliances can be created in practice is questionable due to the diverse range and sometimes conflicting interests of the actors that operate under the creative labour umbrella, where wider patterns of inequality are already evident at the level of gender, class, race, and ethnicity (Banks et al. 2013; Randle and Culkin 2009; Randle 2015; Conor et al. 2015). These conflicting interests can derive from either different hierarchical positions *within* particular sectors or *in between* diverse sectors of cultural and creative industries. Some of these developments where virtual work contributes to building up new collaborations and alliances are already happening, as is most evident through the examples given by the 'Cultural Workers Organize' project. In this stance, in order that these initiatives become stronger, more (offline and online) work in building up of the policy instruments needs to be done on several levels; in addition to the bottom up initiatives and 'policy from below' by cultural workers themselves (De Peuter and Cohen 2015), a top-down policy approach also needs to be developed whether we are talking about already established unions in the field or other institutions relevant for creative labour. Therefore, for such widespread non-standard employment practices in cultural and creative industries, a more 'standard' approach needs to be developed that would contribute

towards better quality of jobs and more sustainable and equitable creative labour.

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9

The Fragile Professional Identities of Digital Journalists in Romania

Romina Surugiu

Introduction

From 1 January 2014, the minimum wage per hour in Romania was set at five Romanian Lei (ROL/RON), about 1.10 Euros, the precise sum that one freelancer asked for his editorial services on tocmai.ro, a Romanian online platform for service offers. His offer to potential customers (editors/managers of online publications) is not unusual. Other digital journalists, interviewed for this chapter, said that articles delivered by piece are paid at a rate of one or two Euros each. Bestjobs.ro, a Romanian work aggregator platform, also hosts job offers for editorial pieceworking for the same amount. Nevertheless, many young people still aspire to enter the 'glamorous' world of journalism. They are competing (sometimes eight or ten to one) for a place at the departments of Journalism from Romanian public universities.

The aim of the chapter is to investigate the challenges and opportunities for digital labour, from the perspective of journalists and their

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professional identity. I argue that journalism as a profession has not been changed particularly by the offline to online transition. Rather, journalism is being shaped by the rapid changes in the working conditions of journalists (Deuze 2005, 2007; Deuze and Lewis 2013; IFJ 2011; Holmes and Nice 2012), presumed by all parties involved (employers, employees, advertising clients, and the public) to be necessary for the digital transition. I will demonstrate that economic factors affect the media in the same way as other factors (technological or social) by creating a work environment that impacts upon journalism.

The ideology of freelancing or of entrepreneurship (Cohen 2012) and the growing tendency to use microwork or piecework (Lehdonvirta and Mezier 2013; Holts 2013; Huws 2013) in many contexts including the media have strongly influenced the way (especially digital) journalists carry out their work. These latest developments in the cultural industries (see research by Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011) have implications for the professional identities of journalists. Journalists experience self-exploitation, low autonomy, powerlessness, boredom, self-doubt, and social insecurity.

This chapter will focus on digital journalists in contemporary Romania in order to understand their working conditions, pressures, and (dis) satisfactions. It starts with the assertion that understanding journalists' working conditions is of major importance in grasping developments in the media landscape and the effects of neo-liberalism on the decline of journalism in Romania as demonstrated by the extreme commodification of media content and the lack of criticism in media stories. The following questions are posed: (1) What are the working conditions of online journalists? (2) How do these conditions shape the identity of digital journalists and their view of the profession?

Journalists: Fluid Identities in Not-So-Fluid Media Systems

An overview of the academic literature on the identity of journalists would be likely to conclude that journalists have always had a fragile professional identity. The term 'journalist' began to be used in France,

at the time of the French Revolution and, in England, around the year 1830. Nevertheless, many professional practices had been in place for longer (Agnès 2011; Conboy 2004). Starting with the debates in France on who is entitled to work as a journalist (the debate over the press card)[1] and continuing with the research on the field/fields of journalism in the academic literature, there was always a problem with finding an agreed definition for 'journalist'. One of the pioneers of academic research on journalism, Jeremy Tunstall, explained, in the 1970s, that 'in journalism there is no single clear "core activity"' (Tunstall 1971: 10), however there was a tendency to rate journalists on the basis of their level of criticism: the national journalists were vocal and critical while the specialized journalists had low professional prestige and were less critical.

Research conducted in France, during the 1990s, demonstrated the same definitional difficulty:

> In fact, by not rigorously specifying its missions, this fluidity places journalism in an ill-defined position, on the borders of multiple and interdependent and (partially) closed fields: scientific research, philosophy, social control, politics, literary art, entertainment, show business, etc: an enriching and influential position, where it benefits from the credit of each genre without the restrictions of specialisation. (Ruellan 1993: 242)

Moreover, 'contrary to everything we might think of, no one had any idea how to define journalism and journalists' (LeBohec 2000: 192). Other research (Conboy 2004; McQuail 1987; McNair 1998; Splichal and Sparks 1994; Van Zoonen 1998; Zelizer 2004 *inter al.*) has suggested that journalism is a fluid occupation, with many genres, technical, and practical skills involved. The profession of journalism, which is non-routine and non-conventional, has also been connected with the idea of artistic creativity (Holmes and Nice 2012: 58). The question 'It is a craft or a

[1] The press law from 1935 to 1936 introduced the press card in France. The press card was given to every person that worked as journalist and earned from practising journalism at least the equivalent of the minimum wage (Agnès, 2011; Ruellan, 1993). In Romania, this definition was included in the first journalism textbook, published in the 1930s (Samoilă, 1932, p. 38).

profession?' remained after the new technologies of online communication erupted in the 1990s.

Today, there is evidence that a growing volume of media content is produced by journalists working in 'non-standard' employment situations (Gollmitzer 2014). Many of these do not qualify for the established definition of journalist as found in the textbooks on journalism and they work under atypical, non-standard conditions.

Journalists are presented as timid professionals, with a low self-esteem, subject to changes in their terms and conditions of work which include: insecurity of employment, an increase of short-term contracts, temporary and freelance work, decreasing wages, problems related to media concentration in global companies, and a decline in ethical reporting (Cushion 2007). Online developments have had many unanticipated consequences for journalists: they have to teach themselves the tools of the trade, to produce multiple versions of a story for multimedia platform and to produce three times more journalistic content than 20 years ago (Holmes and Nice 2012). At the same time, there is also a developing market for digital piecework, 'where mental labour such as research, translation, and design are broken into small tasks and farmed out to people working remotely for alarmingly low pay on websites like Mechanical Turk, ODesk, and Microtask' (Cohen 2012: 147).

Alongside difficulties in defining journalists and their work, media systems have proved to be stable and profitable in many global contexts. Over the last 50 years, cultural industries have become an important sector for business investment, and transnational corporations have gained huge power over the developed world (Hesmondhalgh 2013). As Fuchs (2011) observes, the information industry belongs to one of the most economically concentrated sectors, with important profits. The growing power of media companies has led to structural changes in the industry such as the introduction of Taylorized work organization or the casualization and outsourcing of labour as a management strategy (Deuze 2007). Of importance in Taylorizing work organization seems to be the new content management systems (CMS).[2]

[2] According to specialists, the CMS 'offer "all-in-one" tools that can be used to combine various technologies, and can assure cross-platform and cross-channel compatibilities (…). CMS allow

The core of the economic model of traditional media involved the consumer paying for a certain percentage of the content, as much as 100 % in some cases. As the digital media companies have generally not managed to persuade readers/users to pay for editorial content, they have to rely on advertising companies and other sources for income. The rise of the Internet has made possible a new economic model, in which third parties such as search engines, social networking sites, and content aggregators intervene in the relationship between the media companies and the audience. As a result, publishers lose money because they pay journalists for producing the content and are not always able to obtain money from advertising. The intermediaries simply distribute the media content, without having any production costs, and they manage to 'monetise' and sell it better than the producers (media companies) do (Doyle 2013: 158).

The traditional linear value chain was composed of three parties: media companies, distributors (e.g. cable companies), and advertising clients. It has been replaced by an 'ecosystem' with many different parties involved and changes in the power relations. The intermediaries (search engines, social networking sites, and content aggregators) modified the structure of the traditional model, which was 'oligopolistic' and 'vertically integrated', with the industry moving to a new value chain with new participants and roles (De Prato et al. 2014: 2–3; see also, Sonnac and Gabszewicz 2013). However, although the media industry has evolving relationships with technologies, strong technological determinism is rejected by the studies on media economy, as no direct causal relationship was established between the process of digitization, the development of the new media, and the decline of legacy media (De Prato et al. 2014: 4).

In Romania, the concentration of media ownership has been a reality for more than ten years with one of the consequences being a growing tendency to invest in soft journalism and entertainment (Preoteasa 2011; Roșca 2012). Foreign editorial models (such as print media and television formats) were also imposed on news desks, at the beginning of the 2000s (Comănescu 2009; Roșca 2012). They changed the image of

unlimited content publishing, allow users to actively participate and collaborate and offer usable interfaces' (Drulă, 2014).

media production, in the sense of obtaining a glamorous, Western-like look, but alienated an important part of the public (Roșca 2012). In terms of digitization, the country report on digital media (Preoteasa et al. 2010) and National Statistics Institute data (INS 2014) show that mobile and computer technologies have experienced a rapid growth in the last year and digitization has had a major impact on readership, with over 83 % of Internet users reading news online on a daily basis.

Research on Journalists: Interviewing the Interviewers

The research that informs this chapter has adopted qualitative methods as it is my understanding that the media industry cannot be grasped without taking a close look at journalists as practitioners. One of the pioneers of research on labour in communication, Mosco and McKercher (2008), underlined the necessity to explore and study the real working conditions and social security concerns among journalists of any age or type of employment.

In Romania, academic research on journalists has focussed mainly on professionals working for national newspapers, radio, and TV chains. For non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a special point of interest was the situation of journalists working for local media outlets, who have been the subject of harsh political pressures (FreeEx 2014). Over the last years, the online integration of mainstream media and its consequences on journalists as a professional body have been the topic of several research projects (Surugiu and Radu 2009; Drulă 2011). However, studies on the profile of media professionals have been largely based on quantitative data, obtained through questionnaires (see e.g. Coman 2004).

The chapter is based on data from three previous research projects (Surugiu and Radu 2009; Surugiu 2012; Surugiu 2013), adding new information and evidence from semi-structured interviews with Romanian digital journalists (11) and former digital journalists (3) about the nature of their work and its consequences on building a professional identity.

The semi-structured interview protocol was designed after reviewing relevant research on Romanian journalists (Balaban et al. 2010; Bădău 2010; Coman 2004; Drulă 2011; Lazăr 2014; Petcu 2005; Petre 2012; Surugiu and Radu 2009). In addition, I have drawn on my experience as a part-time journalist for print and online media, as a journalism teacher (Department of Journalism, University of Bucharest), and as a member of the Board of Romanian Public Television. Information on blogs and Internet portals such as carieremedia.ro, reportervirtual.ro, zoso.ro, bestjobs.ro, or paginademedia.ro was taken into consideration when designing the research. I compare my results to the evidence collected in the report 'Starea sectorului mass-media din România în 2014: Vulnerabilități și posibile soluții' ('The status of the mass-media system in Romania in 2014: Weaknesses and possible solutions', published in May 2015 by a leading NGO in Romania: The Centre for Independent Journalism. The findings of the research reported here show significant similarities with this work.

Digital journalism is difficult to define as a domain, as Dahlgren (2013, 160) argues, comprising 'mainstream online media, alternative journalism sites, the blogosphere, social media, individual and group productions, including efforts by social movements and other activists and groups of every imaginable persuasion—political, religious, and lifestyle advocates, hobbyists and much more'. Therefore, I have focussed my attention on mainstream online media which I argue is closer to the traditional editorial model and journalistic practice than these other types of media outlets.

The 14 digital journalists interviewed work (or have recently worked) for a range of Romanian online publications: three newspapers, three magazines, four specialized publications (financial, lifestyle, and communication and advertising industry), and four news websites run by national television channels. All graduated in Communication Studies (Journalism, PR and Advertising) or related fields (Faculty of Letters, Political Sciences, Information Management). They were selected from a larger group of possible respondents in order to cover the major types of media companies established (with national or foreign capital) in Romania. The interviews were conducted in Romanian between January

2014 and January 2015. The respondents asked for anonymity and this has been respected.

Five Narratives of Digital Journalists

The interviewees, ten women and four men, were all under 29 years old and had worked only in a digital environment and for between one and five years. They had no experience with traditional media. All of them spent at least three to six months as interns in media companies. When hired, they received a salary near the minimum wage in Romania (900 Romanian Lei in 2014, approx. 200 Euros). Some of them had experienced freelancing when being 'between jobs'.

The three journalists that left media companies had spent approximately five years as digital journalists. They considered the journalist job as an entry to the wider world of work, although when hired they had all hoped for a long career in media.

The stories of journalists can be placed under the umbrella of five narratives: (1) the paradox of a normative approach to journalism, (2) the illusion of editorial freedom, (3) the promise of creativity as a main feature of journalism, (4) the loneliness of teamwork, and (5) the ambiguity of crisis. Each narrative is considered here in turn.

The Paradox of a Normative Approach to Journalism

'Being a journalist is a privilege', explained one young Romanian journalist interviewed during previous research (Surugiu 2013). Digital journalists generally use a normative approach when explaining their role in society. Most of them describe journalists as being opinion makers, gatekeepers, mediators between information and the public, or as educators.

They also acknowledge the existence of new journalistic practices, but they do not try to establish the causes of the latest development in the editorial practice. According to them, reporters do not chase

news, they gather news from press releases, Facebook posts, blogs, and television political debates or talk shows. Several digital journalists explained that they work in shifts, in order to collectively provide continuous cover. During the night, they monitor the late political shows/debates, and they write short stories on the most important political declarations.

> It is a job as any other kind of job, only people that do not practice it think it is shiny… I discovered that field work is practically inexistent. We are supposed to stay all day long in the office. The news, practically come to us, in the press releases, and from telephones that we get from sources, from Facebook. (Interview 1)

Journalists are expected by management to work at the desk and at home, depending on the task. They are usually in the situation of performing tasks late at night or early in the morning (like updating the publication's wall on Facebook, Google+, Twitter, and also by documenting stories using the Internet and transcribing parts of interviews).

Digital journalists do desk journalism and some also carry out fieldwork. They mostly write news (seldom they engage in feature writing), take photos and short films, even design the visual materials such as maps or infographics. When speaking about their daily tasks, the journalists mentioned the difference between the 'ideal' world of journalism and their own experience. 'We practise a sort of journalism, or a version of it. Sometimes we could name it journalism' (Interview 2) explained one journalist who described the textbooks on journalism as works of science fiction. While defining journalists as textbooks do, respondents see themselves as content providers rather than journalists per se, as their main aim is to provide non-fictional content and to be paid for it by a media company. 'Journalists could save lives, but that rarely happens', concluded one interviewee who felt sorry for not better informing readers on the economy while working for a financial online publication, 'I could have documented the stories more accurately, but I didn't have the time to do it properly' (Interview 2).

The Illusion of Editorial Freedom

Many young journalists praise the notion of editorial freedom. However, they explain that in practice it is non-existent, especially in their actual workplace. 'When I was undergoing an internship in an online magazine, I felt that I could write whatever I wanted, and this was super cool, especially because I had no experience as a journalist', explained one respondent, but added that she enjoyed the editorial freedom while she worked for free. When she started paid work, she felt constrained by a strict editorial policy, and her strategy to deal with this was to choose the easy way: 'We choose what it is simpler to do, not what it is valuable for the reader' (Interview 14).

Journalists complained about the pressure of search engine optimization (SEO), readers' clicks, unique visitors, and the tendency to commodify every piece of news or film; all being related to the permanent control/surveillance from the part of their managers: 'Our manager has this big screen where he checks all the time how many visitors clicked on our articles. Forget leads and good quotations and staff, learn SEO!' (Interview 1).

Journalists who had experience of freelancing explained that only articles that had a good SEO were accepted for pay. Journalists from specialized publications expressed anger against the pressure from PR and advertising and these concerns can be argued to support the idea of the pre-eminence of economic factors, over technology in media today:

> For example, many times, the PR of a company asks the text you want to publish about the company or the CEO. Then they call and say they do not like the declaration you have chosen. And you explain that the declaration was made verbatim by the CEO. And they ask you to change the declaration. If you refuse, you have problems: they refuse to settle down other interviews, and you are not invited to the press conferences (…). About advertising. One example—the client buys advertising in our publication. The advertising department offers the client a package that includes a promotional interview. They say that I can ask whatever questions I want, but the PR department of the company wants to see the text before being published. (Interview 2)

The Promise of Creativity as a Main Feature of Journalism

The advertisements for internships in media companies put a strong emphasis on the interns' opportunity to express their creativity at the workplace. The job offers also promise a non-standard occupation, with challenging activities every day. One example is relevant as it has all the ingredients for a successful story in professional terms (talent, creativity, passion, flexibility, and sociability) except for one—the payment for editorial work:

> The portal FemeiaStie.ro wants new additions to its team—talented, creative and enthusiastic people. (…) You can write, you can express your opinions in the field you are interested in and where you plan to develop personally. You can work from home, in a flexible manner—all you need is a computer and an Internet connexion. (…) At the editorial meetings, you will have the chance to meet new and interesting people, to whom you can relate on a friendship or professional basis. (…) This activity is NOT paid, but we try to offer our contributors small gifts. (Job advertisement, January 2015, femeia.ro)

In practice, accounts of the day-to-day activity of digital journalists are a description of routine activity, with many boring, repetitive tasks.

> I liked my job at the very beginning, when I remember that I wanted so much to go to the office on Monday to find out what were the subjects for articles. Then, I felt overwhelmed by the quantity of work and its routine. (Interview 14)

Others mentioned the CMS and the internal editorial rules that practically banned any type of creativity from the daily work.

> You see at every moment of time how many persons accessed the content you produced, and what are the comments they made. The readers' preference for a certain type of subject leads us to a subject or another. And, yes, we are creative when designing tabloid titles or captions such as: you won't believe when you read this. (Interview 12)

The Loneliness of Teamwork

All the journalists interviewed enjoyed teamwork but mentioned that the volume of work does not give them time to socialize with colleagues or friends. As one explained: 'I had the opportunity to work from home, but it was very lonely and I wanted to stay with my colleagues in the desk. I used to stay there all day long.' (Interview 6). At the same time, journalists explained that they acted as individual practitioners. On these grounds, they explicitly rejected the idea of a union or of a professional organization, and they believed that success was obtained only through personal struggle and personal qualities. It is not a characteristic of digital journalists. Previous research (Ghinea and Mungiu-Pippidi 2010: 326) explained that:

> Journalists in Romania remain generally sceptical of joining a trade union. MediaSind union started as a marginal voice, became more vocal during the economic crisis, but still was unable to do anything about the layoffs and salary cuts. Few journalists belong to the union, which is mostly based in the public outlets.

The Ambiguity of Crisis

The journalists interviewed acknowledged and internalized the economic crisis of the media companies they worked for.

> I think that because of the limited budget of publications the profession of journalist has suffered major changes in the last years. Field work is replaced by desk work, telephone/e-mail interview replace face-to-face interviews, all the information is collected using the Internet, and the pressure of traffic figures force journalists to make many compromises regarding the quality of articles. I do not think that we are unable to produce quality journalism… Quality journalism takes time and money, and these two resources are scarcely limited. (Interview 4)

The economic crisis was seen as an external factor that had to be taken into consideration when discussing wages/salaries and other working conditions. However, they complained about having to produce more and more articles every year, largely because the number of employees had decreased in recent years. Moreover, they talk about the consequences of scarce financial resources on editorial content. The sponsored content that brings value to advertising clients is favoured over an informative one that could bring value to the reader. The readers lose on the long run, as one journalist explains:

> Because the company earns a small amount of money from online journalism, the manager discriminates the topics that contribute to the cash-flow of the company (advertorials, promotional articles) over the ones that bring editorial value. We had so many internal conflicts because the manager prioritized the promotional articles, and decided what it got published or not, and the angle of the stories, depending on the actual or potential business clients. (Interview 14)

The media crisis has dominated since 2008, but the financial crisis of media companies is still a debatable issue. In 2011, one of the peak years of economic crisis in Romania, for example, mobile communications companies invested 42 million Euro (net) in media advertising in Romania, cosmetics companies—40 million Euro and the medical services/products companies—25 million Euro. Moreover, in the same year, cosmetics companies increased their advertising budget by 10 % and medical companies by 20 %, according to the figures delivered by the Romanian media industry (Media Fact Book 2012, pp. 10–12). It is also true that important international advertising clients decreased their advertising budget because of low circulation/audience figures, determining media companies to cut production costs. They favoured the companies that chose to produce versions of titles for mobile devices and to extend the target. They put important pressure on media companies to be 'creative' and 'flexible', which meant mainly reducing advertising rates (Media Fact Book 2012, p. 37).

'Juggling with Many Dishes'

The research aimed to answer questions related to the working conditions and professional identity of online journalists. The interviews and other data collected through the literature review helped identify the main elements of what I argue is a 'fragile' professional identity, these are: (1) an internalized normative approach to the profession, (2) the positive image of the ideal journalist, (3) disappointment related to the present situation of Romanian media, (4) the internalization by journalists of the official discourse on the crisis of journalism and the media, and (5) uncertain future.

Working conditions are precarious. Digital journalists start working for the minimum wage, and are not offered a firm work contract, at least not in the first year. An internship in a media company is mandatory. After undergoing internship, some are offered work paid per piece, or by a so-called 'copyright agreement'. Such an agreement is not a work contract, but a contract for services, between a person who creates a product and a company which buys the right to reproduce the product (see also CJI 2015; Surugiu 2013). A copyright agreement offers no pension, health insurance, maternity leave, or holiday benefits. Sometimes, journalists have a work contract for the minimum wage and a copyright agreement in addition (for extra pay). Through these agreements, media companies are granted the right to use and sell the journalistic content for an unlimited period of time, on all platforms, without the obligation to pay or even to inform the journalist.

The commonly understood definition of journalism, which seems to have been taken verbatim from academic textbooks, is contradicted by the realities of daily work. While stating their ideal of a journalist (or idea of a journalist) as an opinion maker or a gatekeeper, in practice this clashes with their day-to-day experience: scarce editorial freedom and constant pressure from advertising and PR companies. Political pressures are also mentioned in the case of journalists covering domestic institutions.

The profession's ideal image is being deconstructed in the discourse of digital journalists. They have come to see journalism as a way into the world of work rather than a lifetime career. They hope to find better jobs

in related fields, such as PR and advertising. Some digital journalists do not define themselves as journalists at all, but employees, doing a clerk-like job. As few as 10–15 years ago, accounts of doing journalism usually started with the phrase 'lucky happening'/'hasards heureux' and continued with the accomplishment of a life dream (Petre 2012). A decline in the social prestige of journalism is obvious from the accounts of the interviewed journalists.

Initially, the possibility of working in a creative environment represented an attraction for digital journalists. Young people in Romania revealed during sociological surveys their openness to working for low pay doing a non-routine and creative job (Frunzaru and Ivan 2011). Creativity has become worldwide a doctrine (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011) or even an ideology (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999; Markham 2012).

Creativity is presented as an editorial imperative, but, in fact, it is rarely present in the daily activities of digital journalists. Their activity has a strict routine, with small tasks that have to be accomplished by a certain hour or period of the day. It is mainly desk journalism, with little fieldwork. The tasks are so numerous that journalists complain of fatigue and they admit that they are not interested in critical and investigative reporting. They feel insecure and at the disposal of managers. An account from a female journalist, a former editor for an online publication, is typical for all the interviews I performed:

> I know that at a certain moment of time, I thought that if I were to put my feelings in a drawing, then I would picture someone juggling with many dishes in the hands, and although overwhelmed, with drops of sweat coming on the face, the person gets more dishes… I left (journalism) for many reasons. (…) I would have wanted an editorial mission: to know why I write, and what is the purpose of my writing, to dedicate time to each story, while they were asking me only "quantities" and promotion for company's projects… somehow my mission was to make money and this left no room for higher purposes. (Interview 14)

Despite these negative feelings about the direction in which the profession seemed to be heading, Romanian digital journalists expressed no

interest in joining a union or a professional organization that could defend their rights. Some stressed the importance of individualism in personal success/accomplishments. They live the antagonism between co-operation and competition, that in communication critique 'shapes the modern society and limits self-determination and participation' (Fuchs 2011, p. 101). The antagonism is translated in the world of journalism in the tension between teamwork and the desire to gain recognition as a journalist and (hopefully) become a 'star'.

Digital journalists nevertheless use several strategies to resist what they view as inadequate working conditions and extreme institutional pressures. Young journalists have started crowdfunded online publications in which they speak out on important topics in Romanian society (casajurnalistului.ro). Others anonymously share on blogs or independent websites 'inside' information about difficult working conditions in media companies. Activist online platforms have interviews with journalists and other media employees that criticize: low wages, political pressures, lack of editorial freedom, and PR and advertising constraints. Also, they question the working contracts offered *tale quale* by media companies, without any opportunity to negotiate the terms and conditions. In many cases, leaving journalism very quickly is the only form of resistance. This is the strategy that three of the interviewees adopted, and another four hoped for. It is an exit strategy that deserves more attention in the future.

Conclusions

Evidence collected over several years of research on the condition of journalists, especially journalists working at the grass roots, display similarities to research conducted in different political contexts (see Cushion 2007: 127). This suggests that conclusions presented here may have currency beyond Romania. If technological determinism and political involvement are put to one side, and we look closer at the economic factors that are changing the profession, we can identify the impact of neo-liberalism on media organization globally in reducing the critical and investigative elements of journalism. This chapter has identified a fragile identity and a difficult work life that are the result of harsh economic pressures on journalists. We argue

that any kind of actors' agency is discouraged. At the same time, idealism is used by young journalists, as a way of balancing the negative feelings over the profession.

Gollmitzer (2014) argues that one of the most interesting results of her research on freelancers and interns in German media is that they hesitated to get involved in unions in order to fight collectively for better working conditions. They rejected the idea of belonging to either a general union or a journalists union, favouring limited initiatives such as posting anonymous comments on blogs. Interviewing Romanian young journalists on the problem of joining a union produced similar finding. No one was a member of a union, although there are unions of journalists in Romania. The discourse of the young journalists was impregnated by the elements of the contemporary ideology of work: long internships are mandatory for a career, individualism is the key factor of personal success, it is worth being underpaid as long as you work in an interesting and creative environment (such as media), and unions are unnecessary. The forms of resistance are individual. Some of the journalists mentioned work contracts with strong regulations regarding the dissemination of information on the work condition inside and outside the media institution and even fines for distributing information that could prejudice the media institution.

We can perhaps conclude that if working conditions of journalists are similar in a range of different geographical, economic, and political contexts and their professional identities equally fragile, then we should look more closely at the organization of the media industry, and focus future research on the ways in which the economic context of these industries determines the nature of journalism as a profession.

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10

Presence and Absence in Global Virtual Team Meetings: Physical, Virtual, and Social Dimensions

Anu Sivunen

Introduction

Global virtual work, defined as interdependent work conducted in different geographical locations with the help of communication technologies (Martins et al. 2004), is often organised around virtual meetings. Members of global work groups may carry out some of their tasks independently, but several tasks such as brainstorming, co-designing, and decision-making are often performed together, either in co-located subgroup meetings or in virtual meetings. As global team members often belong to multiple groups in their work (see e.g. O'Leary and Mortensen 2010), scheduling global team meetings and being physically or virtually present, but also socially attentive and engaged in them, may be challenging due to competing individual priorities, roles, and routines, as well as different work and leisure time-related cycles, time zones, and schedules (Ballard et al. 2008; Pendharkar 2013; Swigger et al. 2012). Therefore, the question of presence and absence in global virtual team

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meetings plays a central role and affects the quality of collaboration in global work groups. It is one of the team leader's responsibilities to ensure that team members can be present and available in virtual team meetings, but it is also important to the team members themselves as well as to the accomplishment of their teamwork in general, that they and other team members are present and available in virtual team meetings. Presence or absence in virtual meetings plays a role in accomplishing the work as well as impacting other members' presence and availability in these meetings (Panteli 2004).

Presence is a well-studied concept especially in terms of virtual collaboration. Short et al. (1976) were the first to study telecommunication and used the term 'social presence' to describe the phenomena that occurs between interlocutors that are not physically present but share a sense of presence by having a conversation via technology. However, the concept of social presence became more equivocal after it was applied to mediated settings. As Biocca et al. (2003) suggest, a more correct term for such phenomena could have been 'mediated social presence'. Still, from the introduction of a theory of social presence (Short et al. 1976), the theory has been developed around distanced and mediated settings, even though the definition and measures used when studying social presence could well be applied also to co-located context.

In this chapter, I define presence as a phenomenon which may be physical, virtual, or social in nature and which may occur in both co-located and virtual settings. I use the terms physical, virtual, and social presence to clarify the different settings where presence exists in global team meetings. Rather than the definition sometimes used for physical presence as 'being in the virtual place' (Biocca et al. 2003), the term physical presence in this chapter implies that a global team member is co-located at a work site or meeting room with another subgroup member who is also attending the global virtual team meeting. Virtual presence, on the other hand, refers to a team member's availability for online collaboration during the meeting even though s/he is physically remote from the other participants. Social presence refers to the engaged and involved participation in the meeting that can happen both in co-located and virtual settings. These concepts need further exploration and are relevant especially in the framework

of global virtual team meetings where team members collaborate in both face-to-face and mediated settings.

In contrast to the theories of presence, absence is something that has been much less studied in the context of global work. Absence is usually regarded as a physical leave or time away from work, meetings, or other activities. Studies have focused on the predictors of sickness absence (Engström and Jansson 2009) as well as work–family balance and its effect on absence (Barthe et al. 2010), but this paradigm has led organisational studies scholars to overlook absence as a psychological and social phenomenon. However, absence can also be seen in this way as 'social absence' (see also Kahn 1990, 1992). From this perspective, social presence and social absence are at opposite ends of a continuum. A team member may participate in a team meeting in a physical meeting room or in a virtual workspace, and be physically or virtually present, but more or less socially absent. There, I argue, social presence and social absence can also be intermittent in global team meetings, and they can be described as fluctuating and ongoing phenomena (see also Sivunen and Nordbäck 2015), whereas physical and virtual presence and absence are more static and dichotomous in nature.

In the next sections, I review the literature on physical, virtual, and social dimensions of presence and absence at work especially with regards to global virtual team meetings. I then focus on the perceived presence and absence of team members in global virtual team meetings and propose a model of the factors that predict and are caused by the perceptions of team members' presence and absence in those meetings. Finally, I present conclusions and discuss managerial implications related to the model presented.

Physical, Virtual, and Social Presence

Presence is not only a theoretical but also empirically studied concept that has interested scholars in many fields, its roots lying in the early days of sociology and social psychology (see Biocca et al. 2003 for a review). Goffman (1963) refers to presence as something that can be accessed through sensory means when another participant is 'within range' to be

seen and heard (1963: 17), and this awareness can vary from minimal to intense.

For some time, social psychologists have tested the effects that the physical presence of others has on the performance of individuals (see e.g. Bond and Titus 1983 for review). This stream of research has also been applied to work contexts, and studies exist, for example, on how the presence of experts and non-experts affects the performance of individuals in certain tasks (Henchy and Glass 1968) as well as on the effects of monitoring systems on employee performance (Aiello and Kolb 1995; Stanton and Barnes-Farrell 1996). There is also another, distinct stream of research related to physical presence at work, referred to as 'presenteeism' (e.g. Halbesleben et al. 2014; Johns 2010). Presenteeism refers to the condition in which employees feel unable to take time off from work when ill come to the office to be physically present at the workplace when they should be on a sick leave (see a review of definitions of presenteeism by Johns 2010). Reasons for presenteeism have been found to emerge, for example, from perceived pressures from supervisors or coworkers (Grinyer and Singleton 2000) and job insecurity (MacGregor et al. 2008). Hence, one can argue that the physical presence of others at work, or in a virtual team meeting, could occur for a number of reasons and has an impact on collaboration.

Research on virtual presence (as defined in this chapter) is extensive. In one of the widely used classifications (Lombard and Ditton 1997), three dimensions of (virtual) presence are presented that are relevant to the discussion in this chapter: (1) presence as social richness, (2) presence as transportation, and (3) presence as psychological immersion. Virtual presence as social richness focuses on the characteristics of the medium used in collaboration and how well they can transmit feelings of intimacy, sociability, and warmth between the collaborators. Virtual presence as transportation emphasises the idea that either the user is transported to another place ('being there'), another place and its objects are transported to the user ('it is here'), or the user is transported to the same place with his or her interlocutor ('we are here'). Virtual presence as psychological immersion refers to how strongly the users themselves feel engaged, involved, or absorbed in the virtual space or with the media they are using (Lombard and Ditton 1997).

Later research has merged the dimensions of (virtual) presence defined by Lombard and Ditton (1997) and separated social presence as an independent concept. In this tradition, social presence is defined as the psychological sense of being together with others in the mediated environment (see e.g. Shen and Khalifa 2008). In contrast to this, I take a wider approach and see social presence as something that can also occur in physical settings. As social presence can also have important implications on collaboration in co-located settings, it should not be seen merely as a technology-mediated phenomenon. Others have also argued that a more correct term for the widely adopted concept 'social presence' would be 'mediated social presence' (Biocca et al. 2003). Hence, I follow the theoretical approach of Biocca and his co-authors (Biocca et al. 2001, 2003) and its later applications (Shen and Khalifa 2008; Sivunen and Nordbäck 2015) and redefine social presence as the sense of being with another in a mediated or co-located setting that can be manifested via co-presence (as an embodied physical or virtual agent), psychological involvement, and behavioural engagement.

Physical, Virtual, and Social Absence

Absence is a construct that has been studied mostly as a physical state related to work. Research exists on employees' sickness absence (Barmby et al. 2002; Irvine 2011) as well as on employees' leave from work due to other reasons, such as balancing of the work and family life (Barthe et al. 2010). Absence, which is related specifically to global work, is an area of study that needs further exploration. To distinguish between the different contexts and dimensions of absence, I use the terms physical, virtual and social absence, which refer to the different settings found in global work and especially in global virtual team meetings.

In contemporary global work settings where multiple team memberships exist, the employee faces simultaneous demands from several sources. Structural factors, or discontinuities, such as the geographical dispersion and time-zone differences between global team members (Chudoba et al. 2005), may lead to coordination challenges that cause team members' physical absence from global team meetings. Furthermore, these

structural factors may become stressors to global team members (see e.g. Nurmi 2010), which can in turn increase physical absence from global team meetings.

Virtual absence in global teamwork is in many ways similar to physical absence but there may be additional reasons for it. I define virtual absence in global team context as 'unavailability and non-attendance during global team meetings in a virtual workspace'. A global team member may be present at his or her work site with co-located subgroup members who are attending the meeting but cannot for whatever reason access the technology and be online with the global virtual team members. For example, the local infrastructure and network connections at team members' sites may cause difficulties in accessing the common virtual workspaces or meeting tools of global teams (Pauleen and Yoong 2001). Global team members may also find some of the technologies challenging to use or they may have different preferences for the use of these tools (Sivunen and Valo 2006). As virtual absence is often caused by the technology, it is also closely related to team member's skills and attitudes towards the collaboration media used in the meetings. Studies on collaboration technology used in organisations have covered issues such as employees' acceptance of the technology (Venkatesh et al. 2003) and attitudes towards it (Fulk et al. 1987). These factors, in addition to reasons causing physical absence (e.g. illness), may explain the reasons behind global team members' virtual absence from their team meetings.

Social absence at work can result from factors other than physical and virtual absence. Social absence in global team meetings could also be described as 'disengagement' (Kahn 1990). In work settings, disengagement can be defined as behaviours in which people leave out their personal selves during work role performances; they are not 'fully there' (Kahn 1990, 1992). According to the definition of disengagement by Kahn (1990), socially absent team members withdraw themselves cognitively and emotionally from their role performances in global meetings. They become inattentive and emotionally disconnected, and hide their feelings and opinions from other participants. Socially absent team members refrain from investing ideas, encouraging other team members or sharing visions and excitement of the work at hand.

However, studies of absence, especially as a psychological and social phenomenon at work, are scarce (Kahn 1990). Although studies exist that explore social absence, for example, as a symptom of a disease or grieving (Baxter et al. 2002; Betz and Thorngren 2006), the term social absence or absent-mindedness (see e.g. Fisher and Hood 1987) is not commonly used in organisational literature. However, I argue that social absence and social presence present different ends of a continuum; this axis can be seen as a range of states varying from full social absence through medium levels of attention and engagement to full social presence.

Predictors of Presence and Absence in Global Meetings

To be able to predict what might cause presence and absence in global team meetings and to anticipate their consequences for global virtual work, I propose a model based on literature from various disciplines related to different dimensions of presence and absence in global virtual meetings (Fig. 10.1). Based on this model, I present the predictors of physical, virtual, and social presence and absence as well as discuss the outcomes of physical, virtual, and social presence and absence for global work.

When global team members' presence in and absence from global virtual meetings are viewed as phenomena at opposite ends of a continuum, the predictors of presence and absence have the same basis. First, the structural factors or discontinuities of global teams (see e.g. Chudoba et al. 2005; Gibson and Gibbs 2006) are the key causes for physical presence and absence in global meetings. The geographical location of team members can vary extensively and time-zone differences affect the team members' ability to take part in virtual meetings. In many global organisations, occasional travel restrictions may limit the team members' potential to be physically present during virtual team's face-to-face meetings even though the importance of site visits for global teams is often mentioned in literature (e.g. Hinds and Weisband 2003; Hinds and Cramton 2014). Furthermore, different individual-level factors, such

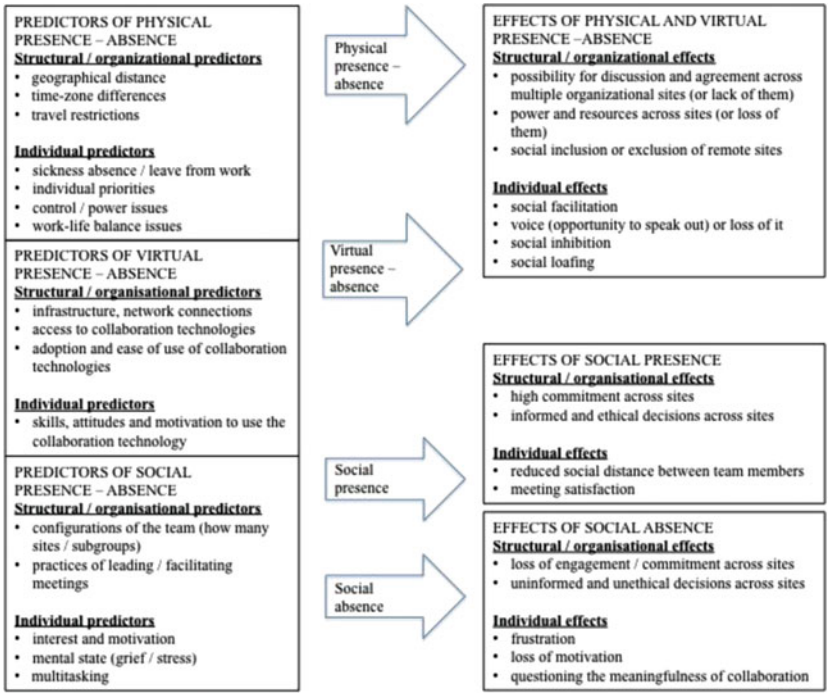

Fig. 10.1 Propositional model of the predictors and outcomes of physical, virtual, and social dimensions of presence and absence

as sickness or other leave, individual preferences, or power and resource issues, may prevent team members' physical presence from global team meetings. The local team leader may not see the presence of his/her team member in a global team meeting as being as crucial as the global team leader may see it, or s/he may not want the local member to spend his/her resources in attending the meeting (see Nurmi et al. 2009 on different power contests in global teams). However, if the technology for global meetings is easily available and accessible, at least some of the structural predictors of physical absence can be overcome and members can be virtually present in the meetings.

Second, some of the structural predictors of virtual presence and virtual absence are somewhat similar to the physical presence and absence

in global meetings. If a global meeting is taking place, for example, late at night in team member's location, it might be challenging for the team member to be present in the meeting either physically at a local site or virtually via communication technology (see e.g. Ruppel et al. 2013). Virtual absence may be caused also by other structural or organisational predictors related to technology, such as problems in network infrastructure, team members' difficulties in accessing different collaboration technologies, and their abilities to use them. However, in many cases, the virtual tools provide possibilities for virtual presence when physical presence is not an option and the question of virtual presence or absence is more related to individual-level predictors, such as the team member's attitudes and abilities to use the tools and fix possible technical problems that may occur during the meeting (see Fig. 10.1).

Third, a great deal of research has focused on the enablers of social presence in virtual settings. The focus has been on the characteristics of the technology, such as their capacity to transmit information about participants' facial expressions and vocal cues (Short et al. 1976) and these characteristics have been found to be related to the experiences of social presence via virtual tools. However, in global meetings, it is also common that a part of the group is physically present at the same location while attending the global meeting. In such situation, non-verbal communication may play a critical role in enhancing the social presence of the co-located subgroup participants, but these cues may not transmit adequately to the remote members due to technological limitations (see e.g. Sivunen and Nordbäck 2015). Hence, structural and organisational factors predicting social presence and absence are related to configurations of the group and to how many sites and subgroups they are located in (Fig. 10.1). These configurations matter in global virtual meetings in terms of across the number of sites other members' involvement (or lack of it) needs to be conveyed (see review on gaze effects on involvement, Ellsworth and Ludwig 2008). Furthermore, the structure of the interaction and leading practices of global team meetings are also a part of the structural and organisational predictors of social presence in global meetings. If team members cannot participate equally and the team leader or only a few of the members dominate discussions, other participants' attention may decrease. This can happen both in co-located

and in virtual meetings, but the structure and leading practices can be more important predictors of social presence in virtual meetings where non-verbal communication and illustrative material could be more difficult to transfer to keep everyone's presence at a high level (Sivunen and Nordbäck 2015).

Finally, the individual predictors for social presence and social absence among team members during global team meetings may arise from individual members' own levels of interest and motivation regarding the meeting and its topics, as well as from their psychological state, such as emotional exhaustion (Reb et al. 2015). Moreover, individuals can also be more or less socially present in the meeting depending on their focus of attention, and whether they share it between multiple simultaneous tasks. Multitasking is often related to the technology and applications that are permanently open even during meetings. These types of software such as instant messaging, social network sites, and text messages have a tendency to evoke multitasking by catching participants' attention anywhere and anytime as messages pop up on the screens of laptops or mobile phones (see e.g. Dennis et al. 2010). This type of technological invasiveness may increase social absence as participant's focus spreads out to other things than the topics of the meeting (Benbunan-Fich and Truman 2009). While virtual collaboration tools have enabled participation in meetings from afar, visual access to other participants is often diminished. This in turn lowers the social pressure not to multitask while attending to meetings. (Wasson 2004.) In addition to multitasking, multiple communication channels in global meeting tools, such as one-on-one text chat, group chat, and audio or video connections can be related to social absence. The attention to the team discussion is not always possible if there is, for example, a simultaneous one-on-one text chat going on within the team members during the global team meeting (see e.g. Sivunen and Nordbäck 2015). Therefore, not only several structural- and organisation-related factors, but also individual-level factors, such as team members' motivation, psychological state, and multitasking behaviours, may predict social presence or social absence in global virtual meetings (see Fig. 10.1).

Outcomes of Presence and Absence in Global Meetings

Following the model suggesting predictors of presence and absence in global virtual meetings (Fig. 10.1), I propose a list of structural/organisational and individual outcomes that may be caused by global team members' presence in and absence from global virtual meetings. As the literature shows, many of the effects of physical and virtual presence are similar, and therefore these effects are grouped together in the model (see Fig. 10.1).

Structural/organisational effects related to team members' physical and virtual presence can also be related to opportunities for discussion and agreement in organisation, power, and resources across the company and social inclusion across sites. On the other hand, structural/organisational effects related to physical and virtual absence can be related to lack of discussion and agreement across organisational sites, loss of power and resources across organisation (Nurmi et al. 2009), and social exclusion across sites. Furthermore, even though a team member might be physically present with his or her subgroup at a local site, but was unable for some reason to use the virtual collaboration technology chosen for the team meetings, s/he would not, therefore, be present for the whole team and this often leads to an 'out of sight', out-of-mind phenomenon (Armstrong and Cole 2002). The effects of physical and virtual presence and absence may also accumulate into bigger organisation-level benefits or challenges related to knowledge symmetry or asymmetry across various sites.

Individual effects related to physical and virtual presence are manifold. The effects of physical presence of others on individuals' performance have been studied over a long period. As early as in the nineteenth century, Triplett (1898) published his seminal findings on the presence of other competitors on individual racers' better performance. Subsequently, social psychologists became interested in the effects of present others on individual performance, phenomena called social facilitation and social inhibition (Aiello and Douthitt 2001). Zajonc (1965) reviews these studies and defines social facilitation as something in which the physi-

cal presence of others facilitates individual's performance, whereas social inhibition is the opposite process of performance decline due to the presence of an audience. The results show that physical presence of others in well-learned tasks enhances performance but may affect the performance negatively on novel tasks (see e.g. Zajonc 1965, for a review). Virtual presence has been found to have the same kinds of effects, as a study by Hoyt et al. (2003) shows. In their study, the perception alone of present, virtual agents in a virtual 3D environment impaired the performance of the individuals. Hence, the physical or virtual presence of others in global team meetings can have effects on individual-level performance in these meetings. Physical and virtual presence may also give voice to individuals, enabling them to voice their opinions and be heard as organisational members.

At the same time, physical and virtual absence can have individual-level effects on those global team members who are physically or virtually absent from global team meetings. These members do not have the possibility to speak out and present their opinions, and they may lose power and resources in the global team. Moreover, physical and virtual absence in global meetings can enable 'social loafing' in the global team. As the team members are more isolated and hence less immediate to one another, their contributions to group activities decrease (see e.g. Chidambaram and Tung 2005).

When turning to the last two categories of the model, effects of social presence and social absence in global team meetings (Fig. 10.1), it is worth noting that even though many of the current studies on social presence effects have been studied in mediated settings, these effects apply also to physical settings. The global team members sitting face-to-face around the same table during a site visit could experience absent-mindedness and lack of engagement, at least at some point during the meeting, and be socially present and attentive at other times. Likewise, global team members attending to a virtual team meeting from distant sites could be socially engaged or disengaged, at least intermittently, during the global virtual meeting.

The model proposes that structural/organisational effects of social presence are related to the overall commitment to group discussions in global virtual team meetings across organisational sites. Organisational-level

effects of social presence could also include more informed and ethical decisions (Ruedy and Schweitzer 2011) and better knowledge sharing throughout the different sites. On an individual level, the predecessors of social presence studies, such as the studies of immediacy by Wiener and Mehrabian (1968), have suggested that certain communicative and language behaviours reduce the psychological distance between the communicators. Thus, global virtual meetings, which have members who participate actively in discussion and respond empathetically to the states of others (i.e. behavioural engagement and psychological involvement in social presence terms), might reduce the psychological distance between the global team members. Later findings have also been mainly positive, showing that social presence is an important element that affects, for example, students' satisfaction and enjoyment in online learning situations (see Bulu 2012 for review). Based on this literature, I propose in the model that the individual-level effects of social presence include reduced psychological distance between the participants and increased meeting satisfaction (see Fig. 10.1).

The individual-level effects of social absence on teamwork are different in nature from the impacts of physical and virtual absence. If a team member is physically or virtually present in a global team meeting but socially absent, it may cause frustration with the other team members. As inattentiveness and unawareness are general attributes of lack of motivation, other team members may challenge the meaningfulness of collaboration with the socially absent team member and question whether s/he should belong to the team at all (Fig. 10.1). The individual-level effects of social absence might also have crucial consequences to the future collaboration of the participants and their relationships.

Next, I will draw conclusions from the model of physical, virtual, and social dimensions of presence and absence and discuss their implications for leaders and members of global virtual teams.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified different dimensions of presence and absence in global virtual work and presented a model of the structural-/organisation-level as well as individual-level predictors and effects of these

phenomena on virtual team collaboration. The three dimensions of presence and absence in global virtual meetings discussed in this chapter were (1) physical, (2) virtual, and (3) social. Physical presence and absence refer to whether global collaborators share the same physical place or not, and virtual presence and absence relate to their availability in the global meeting via different communication technologies. These two dimensions are more dichotomous than the third level, the social presence/social absence continuum.

The model contributes to the studies of global work and virtual team meetings by expanding the views of presence and absence as a physical or virtual state to psychological phenomenon that is fluctuating and can occur in both co-located and mediated settings. By identifying the different dimensions of presence and absence in global virtual meetings, the managers of global teams can better select the type of communication technology appropriate to their purpose and ensure that physically absent team members can access the tools and be virtually present in team meetings. Furthermore, by realising the contextual factors related to social presence and social absence and by understanding the predictors and effects of these phenomena on the team's collaboration, the team leader can better guide the team to achieve an ideal level of social presence within the group during global meetings.

Contrary to some of the theories, which mainly see presence as a more or less static state (e.g. Short et al. 1976), the propositional model and perspective I have presented in this chapter suggest that participants' presence and absence are ongoing and fluctuating phenomena, and that the level of social presence and absence, in particular, varies during the global virtual meetings (Sivunen and Nordbäck 2015). Hence, many of the practical and managerial implications of the propositional model are related to enhancing social presence and diminishing the social absence of participants in global virtual meetings. My propositional model suggests that the consequences of social presence are beneficial both for the global collaborators and their teamwork and for the global organisation, whereas social absence might cause negative effects on individuals, their collaboration, and the global organisation as a whole. Thus, leaders of global virtual meetings should be aware of the predictors and effects of social presence and absence in virtual work and

try to enhance participants' social presence in different ways. Scheduling the global meetings in a way that the timing rotates according to the participants' time zones may help in reducing the temporal challenges the collaborators may face when participating in the meeting. If the participants have to call in to the global virtual meeting always from their homes in the evenings due to time-zone differences, the meeting may overlap with their leisure time activities and optimal presence may not be guaranteed. Therefore, leaders of the meetings may want to schedule them so that they are at optimal times for each of the participants. Furthermore, leaders of global virtual meetings may want to consider how to structure the meetings in a way that social presence is possible for all participants, regardless of whether they are physically or virtually present in the meeting. Sharing speech turns equally, supporting the meetings with illustrative materials, helping the virtual collaborators to access the used online tools, and showing one's own availability and presence in the meeting are ways through which leaders of global virtual meetings can support and enhance participants' social presence (see also Sivunen and Nordbäck 2015).

The model presented in this chapter also has implications related to virtual meeting technology. Some collaboration tools already contain technical signals that try to demonstrate participants' social presence during the meeting. Signals indicating participants' presence or absence include various automatic status signs (online, away, offline) that are being displayed on, for example, users' instant messaging programmes, depending on the online activities or based on participant's schedule in his/her electronic calendar. In 3D virtual environments, there are virtual representations of the participants, avatars, which automatically react to their users' online behaviour (e.g. avatar's head bobs as a sign of falling asleep if the user does not move his/her mouse for a while), and they can provide approximate awareness of other members' virtual presence. Nevertheless, these technical signals cannot provide accurate information on the participants' psychological involvement and behavioural engagement, that is, social presence, at that particular moment. Therefore, managerial as well as participants' attentiveness to and awareness of their own and others' social presence in global virtual meetings play an important role in how well these meetings succeed.

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11

The Presentation of Self in a Virtual World: Working in Second Life

Stina Bengtsson

New virtual environments are appearing all the time. In the last decade, we have seen a vast number of new web applications, social networking sites (SNSs), and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) emerge, only to later fade away. Nowadays, the question is no longer whether we will see public institutions and organisations in commercially organised online environments but rather how they will cope in these new environments.

One online environment that received considerable media and other attention in the mid-2000s is the virtual world, Second Life. Second Life is an online virtual environment that was launched in 2003 and which still hosts more than a million active users. It is owned and published by the American company Linden Lab, and features 3D-based user-generated content. In the mid-2000s, in the midst of the ongoing media hype about Second Life, many commercial companies, public institutions, educational organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) entered this virtual environment to experiment technologically and

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find new opportunities to interact and communicate (Kücklich 2009; Bengtsson 2011, 2012, 2013). Second Life has survived unaffected by the (positive and negative) media attention it received in the late 2000s, although the number of professionals using Second Life has decreased considerably. Although there still is some ongoing commercial and institutional activity, most professional organisations left the environment after a couple of years and moved to newer online environments. Nevertheless, examples of professional activity in Second Life illustrate what happens when a community of play (Pearce 2009) and offline culture meet in an environment such as this.

This chapter explores the challenges of conducting professional activity in such an environment, from the professionals' point of view. While others have mainly analysed the relationship between leisure, labour, and 'playbour' in gaming cultures from a political economy perspective (see e.g. Kücklich 2005), the analysis here focuses on different kinds of virtual workers from a micro-level perspective, in order to understand how they experienced working professionally in this environment. It reveals how work can be conducted in unfamiliar contexts and what it means for those who do it. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, this means understanding how the culture developed in this (professional) environment and what it meant to those who conducted their work there. Accordingly, the specific research questions guiding this analysis are the following. Firstly, how did the virtual workers present themselves as working professionals in the virtual world? Secondly, how did they perceive their interaction with others? Thirdly, what different interaction orders can be identified in the interviewees' stories about their time as virtual professionals?

Studying Second Life: A Virtual World of Private Property Owners

Users of Second Life participate in the virtual world as avatars, and they interact with other avatars, places, and objects. Second Life has its own virtual currency, Linden Dollars, which are exchangeable for real-world currency and which users can use to build, create, shop, and trade

virtual goods and services with one another. Subscribers have the right to own the results of their own production (Linden Lab 2003, quoted in Kücklich 2005), although few have actually managed to make fortunes of any substantial value outside the virtual world. Many commercial organisations that experimented with business models and ways of making a profit in Second Life left the environment after a few years, heading for more promising environments such as social media platforms.

This chapter provides an inside perspective on why work in a virtual world like Second Life was complicated and came to an end. It draws on interviews with people who worked in Second Life from 2006 to 2012 (some of whom are still there). Some of the respondents worked in public institutions that were active in Second Life during this period: the Swedish Embassy in Second Life (formal name, the *Second House of Sweden* 2007–2012); the *Estonian Embassy in Second Life* (2007–2011); and the virtual city, *Malmo in Second Life* (2009–2010) (Bengtsson 2011–2013). Others were involved in a commercial initiative, the *Second Sweden* community platform, and there was also an example of 'playbour' (Kücklich 2005): an online magazine that covered the Swedish Second Life community and was published regularly between 2007 and 2010. These cases provide a wide-ranging picture of the diverse kinds of work that were conducted in the virtual world during this time (although this study does not cover the great variety of work opportunities in Second Life as a whole). What the interviewees have in common, however, is the experience of performing as a professional in an 'ideology of play' (Kücklich 2009).

The analysis on which this chapter draws consists of online and offline qualitative interviews with people who worked at the above-mentioned institutions and workplaces, plus online and offline documentation. The interviewees were involved in different parts of the work process; some initiated the virtual projects, others built them, administered them, staffed them, promoted them, and, in some cases, they also closed them down. In an analysis of gamers' activities as play, Taylor et al. (2015) concluded that since many of the players in their study conducted a large portion of their involvement in the game in spaces and through practices outside the actual game environment, the activity should be regarded as 'multi-sited play' (Marcus 1995). In this analysis, I use symbolic interactionism to

understand the kind of multi-sited work activities that the people analysed in this study were involved in; this entails taking into account both the online and offline experiences of the respondents.

Virtual Work and the Interaction Order

There has been intense debate about work and virtual environments in recent decades. Castronova (2005) and Yee (2006) argue that massively multiple online games, like Second Life, blur the boundaries between work and leisure, as they lead to instrumental activities for users, who become deeply embedded in commercial activities such as the sale of virtual goods. Others have taken this argument even further, arguing that the distinction between work and leisure in contemporary culture is not meaningful as capitalism today is seeping into all spheres of our lives (Hardt and Negri 2005). Likewise, Lazzarato (1996) has argued that an important dimension of immaterial labour (besides the production of non-material commodities) is the increasing subordination of lived experiences to capital accumulation.

According to Hardt and Negri (2005), immaterial labour includes all activities that generate immaterial products: knowledge, information, communication, relationships, and emotional labour. Virtual work, on the other hand, has been defined as an activity that generates wealth within and for a broader economic order that is itself increasingly virtual (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009; Hardt and Negri 2005; Taylor et al. 2015).

The academic debate about immaterial labour has often revolved around the empowerment versus exploitation axis (Zhang and Fung 2014; Terranova 2004). Considerable attention has been paid to the unpaid or free labour provided to the media industry by media consumers (Terranova 2004; Miller 2004; Yee 2006; Postigo 2007; Kücklich 2009; Baym and Burnett 2009; Milner 2009; Postigo 2009). Less attention was initially given to those who conduct paid labour online, although we see a growing interest in this subject (see e.g. Plesner and Horst 2012). In particular, Zhang and Fung (2014) have put forward MMORPGs as sites for the cultivation and deployment of neo-liberal subjectivities that

prioritise entrepreneurialism, self-sufficiency, a willingness to work anytime and anywhere, and instrumental relationships towards institutions and other human beings.

To explore the cultural dimension of virtual work in terms of what it meant to be professional in a virtual environment like Second Life at the height of the media interest in it (between 2006 and 2010), I analyse individual experiences of various kinds of work, both paid labour and activities connected to 'playbour' (Kücklich 2005). The cultural dimension is addressed from a perspective of symbolic interactionism, in line with Erwing Goffman's analyses of human behaviour in different social settings (Goffman 1959, 1974).

Goffman's theories build on analyses of individual performances in different social and cultural contexts where the environment, its surroundings, and the social understanding of place construct settings and frame performances. Goffman dealt mainly with social roles and social behaviour in face-to-face situations, and others have pointed out that new (and old) media technologies add new dimensions to social interaction (Meyrowitz 1985; Lundby and Herzberg 2009; Jenkins 2010). Social and digital media such as SNSs, virtual worlds, and mobile phones may also be regarded as relevant to these emerging forms of social interaction (Boellstorff 2008; Ling 2004). Jenkins (2010) has argued that, besides the increased possibility to act on different stages simultaneously, social interaction works in roughly the same way in digital media environments as it did in the 1950s micro settings of everyday life. He has however suggested the avatar as the most advanced kind of impression control (see also Goffman 1959), which offers users opportunities to develop their everyday performances in new ways. For most people, avatars of the kind used in Second Life and specific game environments provide many opportunities to experiment with and choose their own persona, as appearances and looks can be freely chosen. In the context analysed here, however, the avatars represented employers, in some cases highly prestigious ones, so that kind of choice was not appropriate. There was a big difference between those who were paid for their work and those who were not, in terms of their performance in the virtual environment.

In his later work, *The Interaction Order* (1983), Goffman implied a Foucauldian perspective in his ideas about how frames and norms

structure behaviour. Thus, he linked social norms to societal power structures as 'the workings of the interaction order can easily be viewed as the consequences of systems of enabling, in the sense of the ground rules for a game, the provisions for a traffic code or the rules or syntax of a language' (Ibid: 5). Accordingly, how a person behaves when interacting with others, or when within visual or auditory range of them, depends on who is in control of the socially situated space (Goffman 1959). Work always frames the situations that professionals are involved in, although work in an 'ideology of play' (Kücklich 2009), such as a virtual world, is naturally framed differently to other work situations.

Second Life Work and the Interaction Order

This chapter analyses the interaction order of the professionals interviewed and of their work. It analyses the ways in which they discussed their avatars as ways of presenting themselves as professionals, and how they related emotionally and professionally to their professional avatars. It also analyses the interviewees' reflections on their interactions with others—those with whom they were interacting and their experiences of doing so. In multi-sited environments like the professional environments addressed here, with porous boundaries between online and offline contexts, it is not possible to talk about a single interaction order. Depending on the kind of work the respondents did, and their relationships to the virtual world more generally, their engagement with different cultural contexts online and offline strongly affected the kind of interaction orders to which they related in their professional performances and in their encounters with others. The interviewees' presentations of self and interaction in the online spaces are linked here to the question of control over the normative conventions of the spaces they related to in their professional lives in the virtual world (see also Schroeder 2011:146). The chapter analyses the interaction orders to which the interviewees related to in their multi-sited everyday work, and shows how that framed their experiences of working in the virtual world.

Four types of professionals can be identified among the paid workers: *initiators*, *entrepreneurs*, *celebrities,* and *office staff*. The *initiators* were early adopters of Second Life who had a private background in this world and

who, because of their professional positions offline, had initiated projects in Second Life. They entered Second Life out of personal curiosity but later on, once these virtual projects had been established, also acted as employed professionals in the virtual world.

Later, some of them became *entrepreneurs*, executives of the virtual organisations in their early phases. They were part of the intensive building and inauguration phase and later left for new entrepreneurial assignments elsewhere. The founder of the in-world magazine was also a kind of entrepreneur, although unpaid.

Users who were occasionally involved in the virtual institutions were the *celebrities*. These people were well known outside Second Life and lent the virtual institutions a celebrity glow. The most significant example were the Swedish and Estonian Ministers for Foreign Affairs who were both involved in their respective countries' virtual embassies, but there were other examples, such as the Director of the Swedish Institute, Olle Wästberg, formerly Swedish Cultural Attaché in the USA, and a well-known figure in Sweden. In Second Life, these users and their celebrity avatars acted as officials in the state administration and worked mainly to attract the media's interest in the virtual institutions, though Olle Wästberg was often seen at the Second House of Sweden.

The fourth category of professionals was the office staff working to administer the virtual institutions. Some were hired temporarily based on their skills as well-known and experienced participants in the Swedish community in Second Life, while others took care of the virtual institutions as part of their permanent work duties.

There was also a fifth category of virtual workers here, the playbourers who organised their own unpaid work and, thus, had greater control of their working conditions. These people did not make any money from their activities and had very low expectations of doing so.

Frames and Orders of Interaction at Work

In this section, I discuss issues that the interviewees raised as essential for their work performance and their experiences of work life in the virtual world. I distinguish between two dimensions of 'focus of attention',

which Ralph Schroeder (2011) has identified as the most important factor in understanding the experience of being immersed in an online culture. This discussion includes the interviewees' presentations of themselves as professionals (Goffman 1959) and their experiences of social interaction and their interacting partners in the virtual world.

Presentations of Self

There is an important body of research that has examined the meaning of the use of avatars in virtual environments, where an avatar's appearance has a dominant position. Many researchers have highlighted the influence of an avatar's appearance not only on virtual interaction and communication generally but also specifically on the user's and others' behaviour (Taylor 2002; Blascovich 2002; Slater and Steed 2002; Cheng et al. 2002; Bailenson and Beall 2006; Garau 2006; Schroeder 2011). As Jenkins (2010) has pointed out, Goffman's concept of presentation of self is truly radicalised in an environment where users can freely choose their looks, from height, hair colour, body shape, and even whether they should assume a human or an animal character.

The professional Second Life users analysed here were introduced to their avatars in very different ways, and also related to Second Life as a cultural context very differently. Unlike the majority of Second Life users, these inhabitants, for various reasons, had little control over their own virtual personas. Three dimensions to this lack of control were evident. Firstly, as professionals they needed to be recognisable to the people they met in the virtual world. Secondly, they lacked the skills to control and adjust the way their avatars looked. Thirdly, for organisational reasons, they used collective avatars that were shared by several employees at their workplaces. The first dimension of recognisability has two aspects. The first aspect regards the rules and regulations of the public institutions that employed many of the interviewees. Much of the work conducted by the people analysed here was organised by public institutions in countries with high standards and national legislation, regarding openness and transparency. There were strict policies regarding the insti-

tutions' transparency and their clients' right to identify the officials they interacted with. Even though Second Life is a global digital environment headquartered in the USA, the public institutions using it represented national and regional administrations in northern European countries—Sweden and Estonia. Consequently, they had to conform to regulations and legislation constructed offline.

There are several examples of how the national regulations of public (and private) organisations affected how the workers presented themselves online. In Second Life, using one's offline name is not possible, so the professionals had to make sure they were identifiable by other means—by the way they looked, by presenting information about themselves as officials in their avatar profiles, for example. Regardless of how they did this, they had to make sure that the people they met could identify them as publicly employed officials.

The second aspect of this requirement to be identifiable concerned a specific kind of avatar, the celebrity avatar. Celebrity avatars usually visited the virtual institutions on special occasions, such as inaugural or other special events. They were supposed to bring their glow of fame to the virtual institutions but, as they could not use their own names in the virtual world, they needed avatars that would be recognised by the people they met, so that they would receive the appropriate attention. When the Director General of the Swedish Institute, Olle Wästberg, needed a new avatar for this purpose, the Institute used its blog to call for a skilled creator in Second Life who could remake the avatar so that he was recognisable to those he met.

Olle's avatar needs a makeover

Talking about identity, Olle Ivory, the avatar of the Swedish Institute's Director General Olle Wästberg, is looking for a makeover. He'd like to look a lot more like himself, and get a really impressive-looking outfit, suitable for virtual embassy openings and such.

If you, or somebody you know, are interested in designing a new skin and clothing for Olle Ivory, drop me a line in-world (Belmeloro DiPrima) or else email me. If you can show some previous work, that would be great.

(www.secondhouseofsweden, March 21, 2007).

The Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Carl Bildt, who inaugurated the Swedish Embassy in Second Life, similarly, had an avatar made for him, which made him immediately recognisable as the minister.

The second dimension of lack of control over virtual personas relates to the technological skills of the virtual workers. The majority of the paid workers, apart from those who were initiators of the Second Life institutions, began working in the organisations when the process had already started and work had begun. Few had any previous experience of Second Life or of the kind of immersive technology used there. They were thus rather inexperienced when it came to this particular technological environment and some admitted that they lacked the skills to construct their own avatars. As with the celebrity avatars, these people had their avatars constructed for them by someone else in the organisation. One woman in her late 50s who worked in the virtual city Malmo in Second Life described her avatar with some embarrassment, but said she lacked the skills to change it.

> I, myself, have made myself an avatar that looks great, a 25-year old, slim girl with long, blonde hair, the way I looked a couple of years ago (laughs). But it wasn't really to hot something up, one of our consultants made the avatar for me. Oh, yes [smiles] (Grethe Linde, employee, Malmo Virtual City).

The third dimension of lack of control over professional avatars concerns the organisational structure of the participating institutions. The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, restructured their staff and changed the responsibility for the Estonian virtual embassy several times. They had one official avatar that was used by those handling embassy matters. This avatar was considered a means of communication when online in the embassy, not a personal guise. The information specialist at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs inherited the official avatar originally made for one of her colleagues and never bothered to change its appearance, arguing that the people she interacted in Second Life were really interacting with her offline person and not her virtual character:

> Well, the people, the Estonians who volunteer, who see me, they already know what I'm like. And they know that it's me, usually. You see, because I only go there for work, and I talk like an official or an officer there and I don't feel that I'm kind of cheating or anything (Maria Belovas, information specialist, Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

These professionals constantly had to relate to their roles as state officials and their employers' legal regulations and cultural policies and considerations when using their avatars. As a consequence, they adjusted their social behaviour online to the norms of their offline role as a state or city official because the virtual world never in fact offered them an alternative stage on which to perform. Instead, it provided a parallel stage for the same kind of role they always performed when at work. Avatars have often been seen as a means for their users to experiment with their identity and take advantage of this freedom in interaction with others (Turkle 1984, 1995; also Castronova 2007; Wolfendale 2007; Williams et al. 2011; Kafai et al. 2010). But the workers described above had to avoid this dimension of the virtual world, so the avatar and the virtual world worked mainly as an extension of their work life offline rather than as a new stage, and their avatars simply offered an extension of their ordinary professional role. It is apparent, however, that the different dimensions of having a professional avatar restrict the immersive dimensions of technology.

Precarious Interaction

A further dimension of the interaction order of the work situations concerns the interviewees' experiences of interacting with others in the virtual world and, more specifically, their perceptions of who they interacted with in their roles as professionals. Many of the professionals related to two different audiences at once, the online and the offline. The virtual embassies of Sweden and Estonia were primarily branding projects with the media, both domestic and foreign, as their key audience. (Johan Hedberg, the former Chief Executive Officer of the Swedish virtual embassy public relations bureau claimed that if the Swedish virtual

embassy had been closed down the day after its inauguration it would still have been a huge success because of its 'press value' and the large amount of attention that Sweden received in the international news). Mattias Svensson, who worked with communicating 'Swedishness' in the Second House of Sweden, described how they imagined the embassy's audiences, inside as well as outside Second Life:

> Twofold really. I believe that we understood from the start that this was a pure PR project, although our focus was on those who were supposed to visit the sim, I mean the place, the embassy. But perhaps even more so, not the people inside Second Life, I mean the geeks or whatever you call them. But perhaps, I think we thought even more, 'Now a lot of people will come into Second Life, what if they can enter it by way of Sweden'. I mean, I almost think they were our primary target group, really, come to think of it…we put quite a lot of effort into education and we had an entire island for newcomers who had never been in Second Life before. Kind of a training ground, really. (Mattias Svensson is Creative Director at PR bureau Söderhavet. Second House of Sweden).

Those working on institutional projects constantly related to several different audiences at the same time: not only people they met in Second Life but also different groups offline, though they did not know with whom they were interacting at any given moment. Anonymous visitors, for example, subsequently revealed themselves as mass media reporters, sometimes writing very critically about the virtual institutions.

Reporters from the magazine adhered strictly to the same rules as other journalistic organisations in Sweden, complying with legislation such as the Freedom of Press Act and with profession-based regulations such as the ethical rules of journalism whilst working in Second Life. For a couple of years, the journal systematically covered events and matters concerning Second Life and its Swedish community, acting both inside and outside Second Life. Nevertheless, staff kept a strict boundary between the virtual world and the physical world, for example, when relating to their professional selves. They did not want to reveal their offline identities, using their avatar names and characters when acting in their roles as online journalists. They were effective at developing serious journalistic

activities, questioning politicians about their Second Life initiatives, and even getting some nationally important scoops.

Signing a contract or getting paid for these kinds of activities was, however, more problematic. Experienced Second Life users and creators who offered Malmö City help in arranging events in the city's virtual land could not secure paid employment, because the city was unable to do business with anonymous avatars. The users, however, did not want to renounce their anonymity, which for them was a necessary prerequisite of participation in Second Life and other similar virtual environments. For this reason, this collaboration between Malmö city and the local community never took place.

Power and the Interaction Orders of Work in a Virtual World

Virtual worlds have often been claimed to be ideologies of play (Kücklich 2009; Pearce and Artemesia 2009), framed by the creativity (Boellstorff 2008) of their users. Malaby (2010) has referred to the 'anti-institutional' character of Second Life, pointing to the fact that there are no governing institutions, except for the publisher and its organisation. This absence of fixed structures often provides a wide range of possibilities for the users, who can quite easily change roles and perform in many different settings and personas. In the virtual environments discussed in this chapter, however, these possibilities were quite different from those identified in other research.

The employees of public institutions with offices in the virtual world had, for several reasons, comparatively little control over their Second Life personas. Firstly, as noted above, many of them lacked the skill to change their avatars to look the way they wanted, and not enough time in their working day to learn how to manage the technology well enough to do so. Secondly, they had to adapt their performances to their professional functions. For the celebrities involved in the institutional work, this meant attracting attention to the virtual projects and, in other cases, it meant sharing an avatar with colleagues. This made them relate to their

avatars as empty vessels, or as means of communication, rather than as something they could regard as extensions of themselves. Thirdly, as other studies on symbolic interactionism in work situations have also shown (Goffman 1959; Hochschild 1997), they had to adjust to their formal roles, which inevitably restricted the range of possibilities to perform and interact that Second Life normally offers its visitors.

These kinds of freedom and control were, however, much more available to the staff of the online journal, who quite independently organised their working conditions, although they voluntarily adapted their professional roles to comply with national rules and regulations. For them, it was important to keep their right to be anonymous and stay in the character of their avatars when extending their journalistic coverage beyond the boundaries of the virtual world. They were treated and acted like any journalist, regardless of whether they were covering online or offline stories. They had considerable control over how they presented themselves even though their performances were, of course, adapted to meet the expectations of journalistic professionalism.

The employees claimed that they performed for two different audiences simultaneously, and this strongly affected their experiences of professional interaction online. They expressed uncertainty as to how they should relate to the people they met online, as it was difficult to know who these people were or to trust them not to write anonymous and critical reviews of their organisations. On the other hand, those not in formal employments could easily interact in their professional roles with others both within the virtual environment and outside it. The journalists, for example, managed to merge the playful culture of the online world with the serious approach of a journalist. The limitations to their professional activities came when issues such as being paid a formal salary were involved; they were turned down as serious work partners when such issues were brought up, so they could only interact with others in the online environment as long as no formal salary agreements were involved.

Performances to two different audiences are performances adapted to two different interaction orders; that of the online world and that of the offline world. The differences between these two worlds were apparent not only in the employees' compliance with the rules and regulations of their workplaces and of the nations they represented but also in their

need to relate to different potential audiences when performing in work situations. For the volunteer journalists and other people in the Second Life community, crossing the boundary between online and offline work using their avatar personas and keeping their offline identities secret clarified these two interaction orders. Being working professionals in their professional practices and in encounters with others was feasible, they could never achieve formal acknowledgement as working professionals as long as they prioritised their avatar identities and let their offline identities remain anonymous.

Some of the professional users of Second Life in this study used the virtual world as part of their already established work in an already established public institution offline. As a result, no strict boundaries between online and offline spheres of activity were ever laid down. Second Life never provided a region in its own right, with its own rules of conduct. Analysing the different interaction orders that the workers related to in their professional lives reveals how different diverse logics were involved in the different work activities and how their connections to online and offline cultures were in many ways incompatible. Goffman's approach uncovers the clash between the formally organised work and the 'community of play' (Pearce 2009), and the obstacles it created for both of them. The empowering dimensions of virtual environments like Second Life were obviously, and perhaps also naturally, turned upside down when different kinds of work activities were introduced. The formally employed individuals among the interviewees were severely restricted by their employment in relation to the possibilities of technology, while the 'playbourers' among them could benefit freely from the technology and the limitless character of the online culture as long as they did not ask for formal acknowledgement of their work.

What, then, can we learn from this in terms of relationships in work situations framed by digital media? The Second Life work environments which are the subject matter of this chapter have all been closed down, and the public institutions discussed here, along with many others, have left this virtual environment and moved their activities to newer and more popular digital environments, such as SNSs. This is partly due to the bad reputation that Second Life developed at the end of the first

decade of this century, and also to the fact that SNSs have a much larger user base and thus potential audience. Moreover, SNSs do not create the same kind of boundaries between online and offline life, and thus do not impose a 'second life' on their users in the same sense. Instead, their value proposition is to encourage their users to give away as much information as possible about their lives and preferences. Rather than having second lives online as these workers did, users of social media now find that their real personas are the raw material of their virtual work, the boundaries between different areas of their lives online and offline increasingly dismantled.

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12

Cyberbullying at Work: Experiences of Indian Employees

Premilla D'Cruz

Introduction

Cyberbullying refers to inappropriate, unwanted, hostile and aggressive behaviour, sometimes public, conducted via online technologies, intimidating and harming the victims (Piotrowski 2012; Privitera and Campbell 2009). The phenomenon is receiving increasing attention due to its growing presence and grave consequences (Campbell 2005). There are signs of its incidence and effects in people's everyday interactions on social media, in online games and in virtual worlds. This evidence often concerns children and young people, believed to be the largest users of digital media, and also highlights dangers posed by strangers and impersonators (Duffy and Sperry 2012; Rivers et al. 2011). Scant scholarly attention has been paid to cyberbullying at work (Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy 2012; Privitera and Campbell 2009), despite its widely acknowledged growth as organisations become increasingly reliant on digital technologies (Piotrowski

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2012; Privitera and Campbell 2009). These media confer on workplace bullying some distinctive features, summarised elsewhere as boundarylessness, invisibility, anonymity, concreteness and permanence (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013a). Understanding workplace cyberbullying is important for several reasons. Workforce participation, being mandatory for the fulfilment of basic adult obligations, is a universal role (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006). Workers sharing a common employer generally know, or can potentially know, each other, and so workplace-based bullying does not usually involve strangers or impersonators. Moreover, misconduct at work, if identified, reported and verified, can be sanctioned to the point of dismissal.

This chapter seeks to advance our understanding of workplace cyberbullying, which is vital if effective measures to address the phenomenon are to be developed. It is concerned with different manifestations of the problem, in particular, bullying by managers of their workers, bullying by workers of their colleagues, and bullying by customers of frontline service workers in offshored call centres. Sexual harassment and racial and region-based discrimination can be conflated with bullying in some instances. All these types of misbehaviour are perpetrated via online media, either within the same organisation or from outside. The material presented here therefore draws on the concepts of internal or intra-organisational and external or extra-organisational bullying, and brings out the similarities and differences between them in terms of their manifestations, aetiology, intent, temporality and outcomes. The empirical data are drawn from D'Cruz and Noronha's studies (2013a, 2014, 2015) of Indian software, call centre and back office employees, which examine the lived experiences of the targets of bullying through van Manen's (1998) hermeneutic phenomenology.

A power perspective is important in advancing our understanding of cyberbullying at work. We know from research into conventional face-to-face workplace bullying that power is central to the phenomenon (Hutchinson et al. 2010). How is power wielded in cyberbullying at work? Power in traditional workplace bullying is generally seen as a zero-sum game between two unequally matched protagonists, though recent research questions this over-simplified view, highlighting the coping strategies of targets of bullying, which indicate the dialectical nature of the

relationship (Noronha and D'Cruz 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik 2006). Which of these perspectives is true of workplace cyberbullying and why? The relationship between online aggression and the autonomy, agency, mastery and resistance of its targets is significant, since these dynamics shape the outcomes of cyberbullying and the nature of the interventions that can be made. The chapter highlights the powerlessness experienced by victims of cyberbullying at work and their attempts to reclaim agency. In the conclusion, the dynamics of power and resistance in cyberbullying are set in the context of the increasingly global organisation of service provision.

In this chapter, I differentiate between 'internal' and 'external' workplace bullying on the basis of the source of the abuse. Employees can be bullied by superiors, peers or subordinates within their organisations, and I refer to this as 'internal bullying'. The study in which this type of cyberbullying was investigated was conducted among employees in Indian software, call centre and back office organisations. I undertook in-depth telephone interviews with seven female and nine male workers from different organisations who were physically co-located in the same geographical and temporal space as their perpetrators. Direct and technologically mediated interactions took place between victims and bullies in the course of their work: they used a mixture of face-to-face interaction, landline and mobile phone conversations, texts and instant messages, emails and web-based posts and conversations to communicate with each other.

Another type of cyberbullying is that perpetrated by customers, clients, contractors and dealers outside their targets' organisations, and I have labelled this 'external bullying'. The study of external cyberbullying was carried out among employees of Indian call centres serving international clients and customers.[1] My co-researcher and I conducted joint in-depth face-to-face interviews with 59 call centre agents across various organisations. 25 of these agents were in Bangalore, 34 were in Mumbai. We interviewed 30 men and 29 women. Call centre technology consists of automatic and predictive dialling with integral monitoring and surveillance of employees, and recording and archiving of calls.

[1] Clients are entities procuring services from Indian or India-based service providers. Customers are the clients' service recipients who, by virtue of being served by the agents or employees of the service provider, are also referred to by the latter as customers.

Call centre employees experience disembedded interactions—one-off and discrete encounters that are not socially anchored (Gutek 1995)—with customers. The services that they deliver involve episodic interactions, over digital media, with physically distant, geographically dispersed and temporally separated customers. Two other important considerations arise from the offshore location of these call centres. First, the customers' attitudes and behaviour often have racist overtones, and second, the triadic employment relationships between employer, employee and customer (Korczynski 2003) acquire an additional dimension because of the inclusion of clients, so that employees must interact not only with employers and customers, but are also accountable to the clients whom the customers represent in the interaction. These types of offshored call centres are often characterised by working environments which foster depersonalised bullying (bullying linked principally to the performance of management in the pursuit of organisational effectiveness), because the organisation of work is driven by service-level agreements (SLAs) between clients and employers which in turn have been developed to secure both parties' competitive advantage in the contemporary global economy (D'Cruz and Noronha 2009).

Power and Resistance in Workplace Bullying

Though power dynamics are critical to understanding workplace bullying, this theme has largely been ignored in academic research on the subject (Hutchinson et al. 2010). To date, discussions on power have focused on its importance in internal bullying, with the issue of external bullying being recognised only recently (D'Cruz 2015). Furthermore, in the literature on internal bullying, power is portrayed as unidimensional and functional, allowing the powerful to straightforwardly oppress the powerless (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006) and reflecting asymmetries between bullies and their targets (Einarsen et al. 2011). This simplistic representation—a powerful-versus-powerless duality—normalises the unequal dynamic, thereby obscuring the complex nature of power in organisational life and overlooking resistance and agency on the part of targets of bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006).

'Interpersonal bullying' is 'socio-relational', meaning that it describes the personal interactions of the parties involved, and may include bullying by superiors, subordinates and peers. These types of internal bullying are designated 'downward', 'upward', 'horizontal' (Einarsen et al. 2011) and 'cross-level co-bullying' which is a combination of downward/upward and horizontal bullying (D'Cruz 2012). Interpersonal bullying generates a growing sense of powerlessness among its victims, who over time perceive themselves as having little or no recourse (Branch et al. 2013; Einarsen et al. 2011). While downward bullying may arise where the authority of organisational seniority is exercised, upward or horizontal bullying is a consequence of the possession of expert power, victim dependence or inadequacy, or work group dynamics (Branch et al. 2013). Liefooghe and Mackenzie-Davey (2001) hold that, regardless of the formal workplace relationship, the perpetrator's personal power is illegitimate, being located in his or her aggressive nature. 'Depersonalised bullying', by contrast, is 'socio-structural', meaning that it is linked to the exercise of power at the organisation level, and abuse is perpetrated by superiors upon their subordinates. Aggression is embedded in the organisational design and linked to the pursuit of competitive advantage (D'Cruz 2015). The behaviour of superiors is legitimated by their formal authority (D'Cruz 2015), such that depersonalised bullying arises 'not so much from abusive or illegitimate use of power as from power which is considered legitimate, and tightly related to the labour process and managerial prerogative to manage' (Hoel and Salin 2003: 205). This state of affairs further skews the inherently and inevitably imbalanced power relationship in favour of employers and against employees (Beale and Hoel 2011; Ironside and Seifert 2003). Indeed, depersonalised bullying blurs the lines between the legitimate and illegitimate exercise of power (Liefooghe and Mackenzie-Davey 2001).

The view of bullying as a zero-sum game—an interaction between two unequally matched protagonists—has been challenged by recent research which highlights the dialectical character of power as demonstrated by victims' coping strategies (Noronha and D'Cruz 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik 2006). That is to say, while targets of bullying feel and describe their impotence, they simultaneously resist their bullies. Their resistance promotes their sense of autonomy and capability, even if these attempts have

limited and sometimes belated outcomes (Noronha and D'Cruz 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik 2006).

Lutgen-Sandvik's (2006) research on victims' and witnesses' resistance to interpersonal bullying confirms that they fight back while concomitantly expressing their inability to stop the abuse. She describes five main strategies of resistance which they may pursue simultaneously or sequentially, or both: exodus (leaving, transferring or expressing the intention to do so), collective voice (mutual advocacy by witnesses and targets of bullying, encouraging others to speak) reverse discourse (embracing pejorative labels, building allies, filing grievances), subversive (dis)obedience (withdrawing labour, working to rule, retaliating), and direct confrontation with the bully. These forms of resistance may bring about change in some instances: bullies may be sanctioned and the bullying might abate, but the considerable time involved between actions and outcomes triggers feelings of powerlessness in victims. Lutgen-Sandvik highlights the sense of control and empowerment which targets and witnesses of bullying acts may seize.

Noronha and D'Cruz's (2013) study of resistance to depersonalised bullying finds that workers acquire agency through 'disorganised coaction' (fragmented and dispersed acts of resistance in which several individuals are doing similar things independently—Martin and Meyerson 1998), 'collegial coping' (the active and/or passive sharing of difficult experiences with colleagues in order to reduce stress and gain support) and 'concertive (quasi)supervision' (initiatives made by those with even temporary supervisory roles to protect the interests of employees). These tactics are largely individualised, covert and informal as well as sporadic, fragmented and representative of routine resistance (Prasad and Prasad 1998). However, formal resistance is also possible (D'Cruz 2015). Employees find ways to assert themselves in spite of the subjugation and abuse that depersonalised bullying entails, because organisational control systems are contested relations of power where resistance and opposition play crucial roles (Prasad and Prasad 1998; Spicer and Bohm 2007).

Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) and Noronha and D'Cruz (2013), drawing on Foucault and Giddens, argue that power in workplace bullying is therefore better framed as a polymorphous and multifaceted entity, in which all actors have access to certain rules and resources of control to a greater or lesser degree. The powerless may be able to influence the activities of

those who appear to hold complete sway over them. These relationships of power and resistance, and the dialectics of control, are mutually constitutive: power and resistance provide permanent limits for each other, and workers with knowledgeable agency mobilise resources and carve out spaces of autonomy for themselves.

The Onset of Powerlessness

Research into cyberbullying in Indian workplaces (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013a, 2014, 2015) shows that employees have a feeling of vulnerability when they are so targeted. They describe aggressive behaviour, displayed directly and overtly, indirectly and subtly, or both. When the bullying is internal, its victims describe being shouted at, criticised, intimidated, maligned and ignored, having to meet unreasonable deadlines or handle unmanageable workloads, having their work constantly monitored, and receiving distorted appraisals and misattributed feedback. These abusive behaviours attack both the workers and their work. Targets of external cyberbullying report mainly person-related bullying, that is, being attacked on aspects of their self through sarcastic or caustic comments, through expletives from impolite to threatening and with raised voices. The research identifies three intersecting forms of cyberbullying and harassment: sexual, racial, and regional harassment. Female victims of both internal and external cyberbullying sometimes experience sexual harassment. Workers of both sexes at times describe regional harassment, in which they are bullied on the basis of cultural differences within India, and those in offshored operations often report racial harassment from overseas customers, whose behaviour is legitimated by customer sovereignty, and further buttressed by their greater economic strength in the global value chain.

Internal and external workplace cyberbullying victims quite often know or are able to establish their bullies' identities, though technology offers the latter some cover by mediating the bullies' interactions with their targets. Digital communications can serve to make bullies less visible, invoking in them a sense of anonymity. This allows them to dissociate and detach themselves from their own actions, reducing their inhibitions and their sense of responsibility for what they do. Equally, since they cannot

directly observe the impact of their actions on their victims, bullies can become indifferent to these and are encouraged to take their behaviour further. In this context, bullies have no qualms about increasing the overtness, frequency, severity, and audience of their bullying behaviour, even if this involves leaving discernible, permanent and incriminating traces of their actions.

> Maybe they can't see us, they don't realise [the] impact on us, they don't care…they enjoy it. They are far away, how does it matter? (Victim of external cyberbullying).

Internal cyberbullying can cross spatial, temporal and relational boundaries, and can vary in reach and impact. With digital media, internal victims can be bullied at anytime and anywhere, beyond work hours and office premises. This is also possible because employees are expected to be available on a constant basis in today's competitive environment, so that overall, physical and temporal boundaries around work are becoming less significant. Family members of bullied workers may also be included as targets of this type of misbehaviour, or at least drawn into its ambit, breaching the boundaries of workplace relations, and extending the reach of the abuse. The outward spiralling of bullying actions aggravates their effects for all concerned.

> [My boss] began to call my parents…sometimes early in the morning, sometimes when my dad was at work…to discuss me and my performance with them (Victim of internal cyberbullying).

External cyberbullying is geographically boundaryless. In connecting, across space and time, culturally diverse people who would otherwise have no links, communications technologies spread the potential for abuse.

The Causes of Cyberbullying

Internal and external workplace cyberbullying have different aetiologies. External cyberbullying is, as noted above, sometimes prompted by the ideology of customer sovereignty which colours service

interactions. Call centre technologies contribute in two ways: on the one hand, automated dialling systems determine the pace of work and call handling time is an evaluation criterion, but hurried calls can appear brusque and provoke customers' ire; on the other hand, predictive dialling of outbound calls can be perceived as intrusive by some customers who displace their anger on call centre employees. Internal bullying tends, rather, to be a function of the bully's personal traits and tendency towards politicking behaviour. The organisational structure and culture, its leadership style, organisation of work and job design, and the dynamics of organisational change all create a climate in which internal bullying may be bolstered.

Why do people bully workers? At the interpersonal level, internal cyberbullying is directed at a target worker or workers, and the victims' sense of vulnerability is heightened when they realise that they are being singled out for abuse. Depersonalised bullying, by contrast, tends to be conducted in pursuit of organisational objectives, devoid of a personal target (D'Cruz 2015). Where the bully's identity is unknown, the motives of bullying usually remain a mystery. When the bullying is done externally, in disembedded interactions such as those conducted in offshored call centres, it is sometimes difficult to know what motives underlie it, other than an obvious sense of customer prerogative. Further research to establish the role of intent in this type of cyberbullying is required, particularly in repeated and long-term service encounters.

All types of cyberbullying—persistent (repeated and long-term) or one-off (discrete and disembedded)—can cause severe harm to their victims. Targeted employees may undergo numerous (closely) successive abusive encounters over single and discontinuous interactions and can relive these experiences through concreteness, permanence and boundarylessness. In this way, the consequences of bullying endure well beyond its actual frequency and length. Abusive episodes can, depending on how the bullying is conducted (through emails, text messages, posts), be replayed, stored, reproduced and publicly viewed by wider audiences. Victims can be reminded of their bullying experiences by others in the know, who may provide appropriate or inappropriate support, or share the information with their own networks—to positive or negative effect. In addition, having implications for persistence, even of a one-off abusive

incident, and expanding the witness base, negative experiences acquire concrete, permanent and boundaryless manifestations.

In call centres, recording and archiving systems mean that service interactions, including abusive calls, can be saved, retrieved and accessed by employees, employers and clients. Thus, the concreteness and permanence of the external bullying experience for the worker are crystallised in the technology, and these unwelcome recurrences may be exacerbated by customer feedback emails.

> When you take many irate calls in a shift, you get fully down. It plays on you—sometimes, you cannot do the next call well but you have to. Customer is king, right? Then quality will call you, replay (it), you hear the abuse again…feel upset (Victim of external cyberbullying).

Employers and clients can access these data for evaluation processes, becoming both witnesses and extended audience to the bullying. Although these interactions are usually saved for learning and appraisal purposes and available to employees, employers and clients only, victims of external bullying can be exposed to long-lasting reminders of even a single incident of abuse.

The Consequences of Cyberbullying

Victims of workplace cyberbullying suffer physical and emotional strain. They develop a host of physical and psychological disorders: headaches, sleep problems, blood pressure, diabetes, gastrointestinal problems, weight loss, physical tiredness, fear, anxiety, shock, humiliation, anger, depression and emotional exhaustion.

Targets of internal cyberbullying undergo stress which is accentuated by the boundarylessness associated with embedded workplace relationships, leading them to feel haunted and hemmed in. In other words, through digital media, colleagues can contact them anytime and anywhere, making the experience of abuse pervasive and relentless. As work–life boundaries become increasingly blurred, spatially, temporally, and relationally, their ability to recover from the abuse, and to replenish

their physical and emotional strength, is diminished. These victims are often greatly disturbed to realise that bullies can identify and contact them, track their movements and activities, reach them anytime and anywhere, get in touch with their significant others and spread false or malicious information about them, with varying degrees of public exposure, and all of this anonymously at least temporarily.

> He sent me (an) instant message saying he wants to get to know me. I was startled because I did not know him (and) guessed he specially sought me…Then he called me on (the) internal line. I told him I did not know him…It was very disturbing – a stranger from nowhere (Victim of internal cyberbullying).

Not knowing the identity of a bully in instances of internal bullying exacerbates targets' distress: it leaves them puzzled about who or what has triggered the bullying, prompts them to engage in perennial guesswork about this, and renders them indecisive about the most suitable action to take. On the other hand, knowing the identity of a perpetrator enables a victim to seek to understand the bully's motives, leaving them in a better position to weigh coping strategies.

As described earlier, external victims, in voluntarily or compulsorily replaying call centre service interactions for learning and evaluation, are repeatedly exposed to the difficult situation. Their strain is then compounded. Further, their immediate recall of the bullying episode following termination of the interaction is usually hampered by the flow of further calls, which is relentless owing to the pace of work set by call centre dialling systems, themselves designed with competitiveness considerations in mind. So, not only are moments of reprieve and recovery reprieves difficult for the bullied worker to gain, but immediate consideration and review of the experience are prevented by the need to take the next call, thereby distorting the cognitive storing of the episode.

The fact that call centre technologies can supply concrete and permanent evidence of employee bullying by those external to the workplace offers no protection to these victims, whose defencelessness is intensified by managerial compliance with the ideology of customer sovereignty. Indeed, so entrenched is the belief in customer supremacy that employers

make no provision for redress against patently bullying customers. In fact, the electronic footprint of the abusive episode, captured by call centre technology, in conjunction with their acceptance of the sovereignty of the customer, tend to discourage victims from retaliating to external bullying. This ensures that victims' negative reactions to customers' cyberbullying are not overtly displayed. All their verbal signals in the service interaction have to support the correct performance of emotional labour, and the proof generated by the call centre's technological systems demands conformity, and so reinforces the customer's supremacy. The necessity for worker compliance is even more pronounced in offshored services where stringent SLAs tend to encourage internal bullying of a depersonalised nature. When, on the other hand, the managers of offshored service companies challenge unacceptable customer behaviour, the pursuit of redress on the basis of the proof furnished by their systems can ameliorate the situation.

Workers targeted by sexual harassment cyberbullying within their own organisations experience heightened vulnerability on two counts which exacerbate the boundarylessness, concreteness and permanence of the experience. First, since both bullies and victims belong to the same organisation and usually work in the same premises, the bullies can shift from electronically mediated to direct communication, and verbally or physically threaten their victims. Second, bullies can smear the reputations of their victims by contacting, or threatening to contact, their significant others, including spouses, or by discussing them publicly, sometimes using real or fabricated profiles, pictures, interactions or posts as proof.

Reclaiming Agency

Targets of workplace cyberbullying attempt to manage their situation by refusing to give in to their sense of powerlessness and be beaten. They may know that the source of their cyberbullying is external or internal, but they may not know the perpetrator's identity. It is usually possible for victims to deduce an internal bully's identity immediately or very rapidly, on the basis of the character of the workplace interaction and the manifestation of the bullying, and with the help of technology. Personal and

company phones, personal and company messaging systems and emails, signed posts and closed circuit televisions—all reveal the identities of internal bullies very simply. Where bullies use any of these technologies to remain anonymous (for example, creating alternative email accounts with false identities or sending emails from systems and internet protocol (IP) addresses outside the organisation), it becomes difficult or impossible to ascertain their identity, even though the nature of their bullying activities tends to reveal their organisational membership.

> The mail was sent to the whole office. But we could not trace the sender… that remained unsolved though we tried a lot. It was a junior, that was clear from the mail (Victim of internal cyberbullying).

The identities of customers who bully are evident to their victims, since the latter either make outbound calls directly to them or have to check their identity for the purposes of security when receiving inbound calls.

Bullies are not, however, deterred by the evidence captured by information and communications technologies. The calls, messages, emails and posts sent by perpetrators of internal bullying, as well as the IP addresses from which they are sent, leave digital footprints. Some channels through which cyberbullying is done (for example, emails, posts, and pictures that can be downloaded, saved and reviewed) leave a particularly permanent trace. Call recording and archiving similarly capture and store proof of the bullying of workers by customers. Yet, neither internal and external bullies seem to be restrained by the prospect of an enduring record of their behaviour.

Targets of internal cyberbullying, however, can use this evidence to expose and seek a resolution to the bullying problem, by directly confronting the bully, by involving their supervisors or through processes of formal redress. Nonetheless, among my research interviewees, I encountered several victims who were not confident of their employers' disciplinary processes and so did not follow up on the proof available to them. In these kinds of cases, though their helplessness is perpetuated, workers rely on the support of their colleagues, families and friends to restore their equilibrium (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013a). Employees who are the targets of depersonalised bullying also see little point in confronting the

problem: bullying is seen as a function of organisational design (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013b).

Some forms of bullying are not apparent to anyone except the victim. Personal calls, texts and emails, for example, are privately received, whereas group calls, texts and emails and posts are more open. The degree of openness has implications for how victims cope with the bullying and how witnesses respond to it. Victims are sometimes reluctant to expose the situation, through fear of stigmatisation or the need to maintain a good impression of themselves, in which case they cope alone. Witnesses may express either indifference, which places extra stress on targets, or support, which sustains the latter even if the problem continues.

The very technologies that are used to cyberbully can be appropriated by its victims to either avenge or publicise their ill-treatment, fight back, gain support or inspire collective action among their colleagues. This too can help them to cope.

> I forwarded his (team leader's) mail to the team…everyone got to know. He became a bit careful (Victim of internal cyberbullying).

Those who are bullied by customers do not have the option of redress, so the digital evidence captured by call centre technologies is unusable. On the contrary, call records are relied on to ensure that targets do not display their displeasure to customers, with those caught doing so being warned or dismissed. These victims of customer cyberabuse are more likely to seek the assistance of their superiors and the support of their peers to help them cope.

For example, during difficult calls, non-verbal encouragement can be provided by colleagues and supervisors and unmanageable exchanges can be escalated to team leaders. Employees can then request short breaks to recover. As they become increasingly familiar with their roles, workers tend to need fewer breaks and escalations. Stringent performance requirements laid down in the SLAs of offshored call centres also stipulate that employees may not interrupt the call flow. Instead, they are informally supported at the end of the working day by their peers and superiors, though this involves emotional support only. Neither supervisors nor colleagues seem able to challenge abusive customer behaviour, or to influence their

employers' and clients' policies on handling bullying. Even the process of call monitoring and assessment overlooks the bullying of employees by customers.

> Customers will scream, abuse…they know recording is on. But no bother. Quality people listen to calls so we can learn, improve. But they do nothing. It is all about business (Victim of external cyberbullying).

My co-researcher and I came across two types of 'reverse customer abuse' practised by workers on live calls, taking advantage of the absence of visual cues in the call and of the limited manual controls available to them (D'Cruz and Noronha 2014). First, employees place the phone in mute mode and loudly curse the abusive customer, with team members participating. Alternatively, they press the mute button and enable the phone's loudspeaker, so that the customer is publicly audible and all team members can hear the tirade.

> Now I am used to it…first it was horrible. We have fun also…[My supervisor] doesn't say anything. I have to bear [it] because [the] pay is good… Where else I will get this money? (Victim of external cyberbullying).

'Reverse customer abuse', reflecting routine resistance, generates no digital evidence to implicate anyone, though superiors may witness it and express disapproval, limiting the scope for 'communities of coping' (Korczynski 2003). The potential for collective worker mobilisation is in general constrained by managerial, industry, government and wider societal discourses which veto formal worker resistance in India.

Additionally victims cope with their situation by cognitively framing it to minimise the threat. This includes attributing the abuse to their bullies' personal shortcomings, treating the experience as part and parcel of contemporary working life, focusing on favourable aspects of the job, emphasising their own personal strengths and assuming a spiritual position. Adopting an air of resignation and invoking more positive thoughts and feelings are other ways in which workers manage the situation, and all these cognitive frames are critical to their regaining mastery and re-establishing an internal locus of control.

Customers who are considered to be geographically remote are also regarded as less menacing, and this moderates their targets' sense of being aggressed. Sexual harassment victims, for example, know that abusive customers located overseas cannot immediately appear in person. Those in offshored services gain extra comfort from the use of national identity management strategies (Poster 2007) which protect their personal details and location.

> They say, 'You are nice, I want to marry you…'. But they cannot do much…they are overseas, don't know our office…[so our] discomfort is less (Victim of external sexual harassment cyberbullying).

Employees who experience abuse often resort to quitting their jobs as their coping option (D'Cruz 2012). Victims of cyberbullying that I interviewed also referred to this as an option, but sought to ensure that their new position and pay is equivalent to or better than their old position and pay, so that their careers and income are not compromised. Leaving their employment and finding alternative work is a worthwhile solution provided that their new organisation sanctions bullying. For victims of external abuse, this means exiting service work altogether—until such time as the industry rethinks its total compliance with customer sovereignty. However, depersonalised bullying of staff is expected to rise in the current competitive, neo-liberal business context as organisations develop tougher management practices in pursuit of their survival and success (D'Cruz 2015).

Conclusion

While power and resistance in workplace cyberbullying mirror the dynamics of face-to-face workplace bullying, the virtual form affects the dialectics of control in different ways. Power in workplace cyberbullying is a polymorphous, shifting dynamic, with both bullies and victims exerting agency in order to gain mastery (Noronha and D'Cruz 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik 2006). Despite their apparent powerlessness, victims attempt to influence their bullies' actions, and this suggests that no absolute power

exists in contemporary workplaces. While workers have limited chances of success in resolving bullying issues, at least they gain a sense of control over the situation. As this chapter has shown, the form of workplace bullying is interrelated with power and resistance. The particular attributes of cyberbullying, namely, boundarylessness, anonymity, invisibility, concreteness and permanence, affect the autonomy and sense of helplessness of both bullies and their victims. The form of bullying is another dimension to consider in theorising workplace control, along with existing issues such as duality-versus-dialectics (whether control is a zero-sum game or whether it is distributed) and legitimacy-versus-illegitimacy.

The coping strategies of bullying targets have been characterised as avoidant, passive and emotion-focused, but it is important to recognise the fact that they also empower the victim, and hence can be seen as being more direct, active and problem-focused responses (D'Cruz 2012). At the same time, by deploying coping theories together with those of power and resistance, we can improve our psychological understanding of victim behaviour in the context of a sociological body of knowledge concerned with meso- and macro-level processes, underscoring the value of interdisciplinary perspectives. Nonetheless, it is worth acknowledging the subtle difference between the search for redress and the exhibition of counter-aggression on the part of workers who are bullied. The quest for redress is an attempt to secure restorative justice, problem resolution and closure. Counter-aggression, on the other hand, is much more concerned with retaliation and revenge, reflecting 'reciprocal bullying' (Omari 2007), effectively an escalation of abuse.

Existing literature on the interface between workplace bullying and power has examined internal sources of abuse. Focusing on external cyberbullying raises two issues. First, it is clear that some customers consider it legitimate to bully workers because employers turn a blind eye to it, or even sanction it through their acceptance of customers' absolute sovereignty. Employees' potential responses are therefore limited. In promoting customer supremacy, employers, due to their position of authority over employees, can be seen as having legitimate power arising from their company ownership or managerial status, though their personal qualities may bolster this charge, complicating the abuse coming from outside. Second, in virtual service interactions, workers are subjected to

electronic monitoring and surveillance, the evidence of which curtail the scope of their responses.

As digital technologies increasingly constitute the cornerstone of modern workplaces worldwide, with growing virtualisation of employment, it is likely that cyberbullying will rise in frequency though its manifestations may change. Tracking the phenomenon as it continues to evolve, through rigorous research, will be the key to developing effective interventions to tackle it.

Unfortunately, however, the power dynamics in operation when customers bully workers in call centres are also global. Interpersonal and inter-organisational power relationships are overlaid by North-South divisions of race and class and by the capitalist dynamics of offshoring (Mirchandani 2012). Racial harassment of Indian employees by customers from the Global North is a common and recognised phenomenon (Mirchandani 2012; Poster 2007). The 'aversive racism' that frontline service workers experience as they enact emotional labour (Grandey et al. 2004) is both facilitated and compounded by the stringent performance requirements set out in SLAs between clients and service providers, which are in turn anchored in both parties' competitive considerations and preferences for favourable industrial relations. These factors exacerbate the powerlessness of the workers who are bullied at multiple levels. As the neo-liberal project progresses, the 'societal embeddedness' of global production networks will militate against any reduction of pre-existing inequalities (Coe et al. 2009). Thus, despite purported greater worldwide integration into global oneness (Castells 1997), the hegemony of the developed world persists, limiting the economic and social upgrading of the developing world (Posthuma and Nathan 2010). Yet, Indian call centre agents continue in these jobs, notwithstanding the straines, due to poor labour market conditions in other sectors, which do not offer them equivalent employment alternatives. They cite the financial returns, material benefits, improved quality of life and social mobility associated with their jobs as important considerations in the trade-off (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013b). Race and class dynamics are not limited solely to the hegemony of the Global North, but class issues of the Global South, linked to people's aspirations, must inform our understanding of the complexities of offshoring as well.

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