Clubs to Companies

Notes on the Decline of Political Culture in Speeded Up Creative Worlds

Angela McRobbie

Abstract.

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

[top of page]

Keywords.

Culture industries, club culture, network sociality, individuation, incubator.

Creative Industry Sectors as defined in Creative Industries Mapping Document , (DCMS 1998). Music, Performing Arts, Publishing Software, TV and Radio, Film, Designer Fashion, Advertising, Arts and Antiques, Crafts, Design, Architecture, Interactive Leisure Software.

Cultural Entrepreneur Club (initiative led by ICA, London, Nesta, Arts Council England, Goldsmiths College London and Cap Gemini Ernst and Young) 2000. Selected 'new job' titles of 400 invited members including Arts Promoter, Incubator, Consultancy for Inventor, Cultural Strategist, Multimedia Artist, Visual Support Consultant, Media Initiatives and Relationships, Digital Design

Consultant, Branding and Communications, Arts in Business Consultants, Art-To-Go Sales, Events Organiser, New Media Agent, net casting/e label/cdrom , Music Portal, dance/music/youth culture, Bio-entrepreneur (1).

[top of page]

Who Is On the Guest List? Club Culture Sociality.

This article provides a preliminary and thus sketchy account of some of the defining characteristics of work and employment in the new cultural sector in the UK, and in London in particular. It also describes a transition from what can be labelled first wave culture industry work as defined by the DCMS Creative Industries 1998 document (see above), to the more economically highly-charged and rapidly mutating second wave of cultural activity which has come into being in the last two or three years. This is marked by de-specialisation, by intersection with internet working, by utilising creative capacities provided by new media, by the rapid growth of multi-skilling in the arts field, by the re-configuring of the sector usually described as the 'independents' and finally by a new partnership between arts and business with public sector support (itself becoming more overtly entrepreneurial) taking the form of 'enabling' such enterprise. (For new job titles see above).

The expansion of the culture industries (both waves) also brings about, for a more substantial number of people, a decisive break with past expectations of work (2). Creative work supplants old, now outmoded ways of earning a living. It introduces different expectations of work and different ways of performing work. The auteur relation to creative work which has long been the mark of being a writer, artist, film director or fashion designer, is now extended to a much wider section of a highly 'individuated' population. (Marking the 're-birth', rather than the 'death of the author'). As people are expected to fend for themselves with less and less support from traditional structures of kinship or community, so also are they becoming 'set free', as Giddens would put it, from workplace organisations and institutions, they have to do the work of the structures by themselves, they have to create their own structures and one model which is readily available in a post-industrial economy is that of the artist, writer or the creative individual (Giddens 1991). But at the same time as this has happened, the cultural world itself has switched into new (neo-liberal) gear and is forcing its now vastly expanded creative workforce to adjust accordingly. As Lash and Urry suggest 'People are obliged to take control over their more flexible work lives.being constrained to reflect upon one's social conditions of existence ' (Lash and Urry 1994 p 37). So those working in the creative sector cannot simply rely on old working patterns associated with art worlds, they have to find new ways of 'working' the new cultural economy, hence the shift from first to second wave.

The 'authorial' voice of the following pages is tentative and also provocative in that I am drawing attention to observations, trends, future directions and other possibilities. The sociological aim is to propose a series of connections and intersections which contribute to the flow of cultural forms, and also to the working practices which make these flows happen. For example one suggestion, which also marks a unique intersection between work and leisure, is that the dance/rave culture which came into being in the late 1980s as a mass phenomenon has strongly influenced the shaping and contouring, the energising and the entrepreneurial 'nous' of the new culture industries. The scale and spread of this youth culture meant that it was more widely available than its more clandestine, rebellious, 'underground' and style-driven predecessors including punk. The level of self-generated economic activity which 'dance-party-rave' organisation entailed, served as a model for many of the activities which were a recurrent feature of 'creative Britain' in the 1990s. Find a cheap space, provide music, drinks, video, art installations, charge friends and others on the door, learn how to negotiate with police and local authorities and in the process become a club promoter and cultural entrepreneur.

This kind of activity was to become a source of revenue for musicians and DJs first, but soon afterwards for artists, and then for any number of students, so that by the year 2000 the job of 'events organiser' is one of the more familiar of new self-designated job titles. The form of club sociality which grew out of the ecstasy-influenced 'friendliness' of the clubbing years gradually evolved into a more hard-nosed networking, so that an informal labour market has come into being which takes as its model the wide web of contacts, 'zines' , flyers, 'mates', grapevine, 'word of mouth' socialising which also was a distinctive feature of the 'micro-media' effects of club culture (Thornton 1996). The intoxicating pleasures of leisure culture have now, for a sector of the under 35s, provided the template for managing an identity in the world of work. Apart from the whole symbolic panoply of jargon, clothes, music and identity, the most noted feature of this phenomenon was the ease with which extraordinary organisational capacities were unleashed in the setting up and publicising of 'parties'.

In relation to this example, and as a kind of productive tension for this article, I want to emphasise the energy/activity dynamic. It is a tension because it reflects the point of agency, of actually making new cultural and media things happen, while at the same time club culture and its subsequent spilling out into wider creative fields, is also a young people's reaction to the prevailing social and economic environment which from the mid 1980s onwards has been strongly recommending just such self-reliance, non-dependence on the state, and 'enterprise culture'. In the absence of documentation of careers in club organisation, from criminal to legitimate, from alternative to corporate, from informal and disorganised, to global and highly organised, there is virtually nothing concrete upon which sustained analysis can be based, hence the hesitant tone. This absence also frustrates any attempt to draw out with certainty the broader social consequences of this phenomenon, it leaves us instead with a troubling sense, a tension, or simply an abundance of

unanswered questions. One is forced to make do with a 'reading' of such activity, with all the perils which arise therein (3).

The example of the shaping up influence of club culture therefore sets the scene for this chapter. Next I want to propose an agenda for analysis of this sector. First, in this field where patterns of self employment or 'false self employment' are the norm, what emerges is a radically different kind of labour market organisation defined by the highest degrees of 'individuation' (Lash and Urry 1994) (4). While inevitably the working practices of graphic designers, web site designers, events organisers, 'media office' managers and so on share some features in common with previous models of self- employed or freelance working, there are sufficient grounds to propose that the sociological impact of individuation accentuates and re-contours the self-employed identity, with the skills of marketing the self playing a much more prominent role. Instead of finance and economics being the reluctant backdrop (groan business!) to the more happily professed role as script editor, writer, film or television producer, editor or director, which means having an accountant in place, an agent to handle fees and a self employed tax status, the new scenario means re-defining the work as company activity, and making the business dimension more prominent.

This pattern has a complicated heritage in that it was forced upon creative individuals through the process of de-regulation, most noticeable, for example, in the television industry. But the new balance between art and economics is also the product of self-generated innovation and the repudiation of past, anti-commercial notions of being creative. Instead a determined body of young individuals have exploited opportunities around them, in particular their facilities with new media technology and the experience of 'club culture sociality' with its attendant skills of networking and selling the self and have created for themselves new ways of earning a living in the cultural field. Damien Hirst fits this picture. By the end of the 1980s the British art world was moribund with decreased funding and support coming from the Arts Council. Hirst combined what he had picked up from clubbing with what he learnt about conceptual art at Goldsmiths to fill a vacuum in the cultural world with ideas-art which was blatantly commercial, humorous, cynical, and playfully concerned with traditional topics such as 'life and death'.

In this 'creative' and 'created' economy, older features of working life including the career pathway, the ladder of promotion, the role of bureaucracy, the 'narrative sociality' of a life spent in a stratified but secure workplace have been rapidly swept away to be replaced by 'network sociality' (Lash 2000). Work has been re-invented to satisfy the needs and demands of a generation who, 'disembedded' from traditional attachments to family, kinship, community or region, now find that work must become a fulfilling mark of self. The full (although by no means equal) participation of women is one of the most distinguishing features of the new world of work. There is a euphoric sense of by-passing tradition, pre-empting conscription into the dullness of 9-5 and evading the constraints of institutional processes. It could be suggested that

there is a utopian thread embedded in this wholehearted attempt to make-over the world of work into something closer to a life of enthusiasm and enjoyment. We could also note that for young women, now entering into the labour market as a lifelong commitment instead of a part time or interrupted accompaniment to family life as a primary career, the expectation that work is satisfying and inherently rewarding has a special significance alongside the need now to be one's own breadwinner.

The utopian aspects of work could also be understood as a new kind of post-socialist investment in the present. As a terrain for improvement and change the fields of the social or the political get taken over or hi-jacked by work, especially creative work, which becomes a site for personal satisfaction, for intrinsic reward. Please note, once again, some degree of sociological ambivalence in describing this expectation of 'happiness in work'. To have seemingly circumvented unhappy work and to have come upon a way of earning a living without the feeling of being robbed of time or identity or of ability is, even if temporary, nonetheless remarkable. But the larger question of course is how this accommodates to the needs of a form of cultural capitalism which is currently re-inventing itself as somehow innocuous or 'soft', at least in its Western forms. For the young woman fashion designer working 18 hour days and doing her own sewing to complete an order, 'loving' her work but self-exploiting herself, who is to blame, what is there to complain about? How long can this last? Is this pleasure in work a privilege of the few, are these highly individuated persons with their own distinctive skills portfolios the new captains of culture industry, or is there already a discrepancy between the way the job and the life are 'talked up' in the party environment, and the unsustainability of such a workload?

The second defining feature of new cultural work is that its 'time and space' dynamics, coupled with self-employment, short term project work and hence an individualised outlook, all contribute to a marked absence of workplace politics in terms of democratic procedures, equal opportunities, anti-discrimination policies and so on. Maybe there can be no workplace politics when there is no workplace, ie where work is multi-sited. Despite the utopian threads, woven as they are through the William Morris-like tapestry of art and life merging to create happiness at work, the structural condition of the information, communication and creative networks, along with the current 'anti-political-correctness' climate encoded into the language of 'cool', radically diminish the possibility of a re-invented politics of work . The necessity of speed and the velocity of transaction, along with the mobility and fluidity of individuals, throw into question the application of what has been described as a defining feature of this kind of work, that is 'reflexivity'. This refers to a process of constant self-monitoring and deep cognitive investment in the job. But in such speeded up conditions might not this only be attended to the immediate creative problem and its solution? Or to put it another way, the socially valuable outcome of reflexivity is yet to reveal itself. Does it point somehow in the direction of social and political engagement? We would need some ethnographies of reflexivity before it would be possible to draw any conclusions, or indeed before the qualities of reflexivity

can be assessed. A broader framework of social understanding might well remain out of reach or simply irrelevant, where a fast-moving network of individuals whose working moves are apparently governed by choice and by the successful exploitation of their own human capital, appear to celebrate the scale and impact of their own undertaking (5).

Ironically where sociology has, thanks to the concerted efforts of Beck, Giddens, Lash, Urry and Featherstone (a male, white mantra it has to be said), impressively re-invented itself to monitor and understand the dissolving of the old structures and their replacement by new more permeable and fluid 'economy of signs and spaces'(Lash and Urry 1994), the insights of sociology, never mind the vocabularies of workplace politics and democracy, have never seemed so far removed from a field where the social as a concept has all but disappeared. Granted, the idea that sociology might be applied in this or that working situation sounds fanciful, in fact this is not so, as Lash and Urry (1994) and others have argued (McRobbie 1994). But this process of application materialises in the social context of public sector or associated fields. The problem is that ideas or explanations, sociological or political which might provide an analysis of the new world of creative work have no obvious point of connection with or entrance to such a highly mobile, dis-sociated group of freelance individuals (6). There is indeed something chilling and timely about a 'sociology of individuation'. This is partly the result of the pervasive success of neo-liberal values, their insinuating presence in the culture and media sector, and their successful discrediting of the political vocabulary associated with the left and with feminism including equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, workplace democracy, trade union representation etc. And in inventing these new ways of working, older patterns of collective organisation and representation are made irrelevant. Until now the cultural sector, like the arts, has been positioned, by virtue of low rates of financial return and commitment to broadly humanitarian and egalitarian values, in the political spectrum as left of centre. Under our eyes this attachment is being loosened by the full-scale focus on culture by capital in all its diversity as a key source for economic growth.

The extent to which the new world of work contributes directly to the decline of political society is a clear gain for the free market economy. In the cultural sector where for reasons of its emphasis on the creative and expressive, it might be imagined that this could be the right place for social minorities to succeed and for women to achieve equal participation, it now seems possible that quite the opposite is happening. What we see (although of course clear visibility is obscured in the labyrinthine and endlessly mutating, and thus sociologically actices which reproduce older patterns of marginalisation (of women and people from different ethnic backgrounds) while also disallowing any space or time for such issues to reach articulation. In a field of power and competition if there is no representation from subordinate or disadvantaged groups then inevitably dominant groups will happily reproduce their own structures of access and exclusion (7). In this case the club culture question of

'are you on the guest list?' is extended to recruitment and personnel, so that getting an interview for contract creative work depends on informal knowledge and contacts, often friendships. Once in the know about who to approach (the equivalent of finding where the party is being held), it is then a matter of whether the recruitment advisor 'likes you' (the equivalent of the bouncer 'letting you in'), and all ideas of fairness or equal representation of women or of black or Asian people (not to say the disabled) fly out of the window.

In this new and so-called independent sector (see Leadbeater and Oakley 1999a) there is less and less time left in the long hours culture to pursue 'independent work'. The recent attempts by the large corporations to innovate by buying into this sector means that the independents are in effect dependent sub-contracted suppliers. And where such lucrative contracts are to be had, in a context of increasing competition from so many other creative companies capable of providing similar services, it is hard to imagine there is time and space for private reading never mind wider critical debate. (As Lash and Urry comment '.information technology canerode the critical crafts of reading and writing. What Agger calls 'fast capitalism' undermines the power of the book' (Lash and Urry 1994 p 324). And after-hours, in the dedicated club/networking space, with free vodka on tap all night thanks to the sponsorship of the big drinks companies, who dares to ask 'uncool' questions about the minimal representation of women and non white young people, about who the big clients are and what they do with the product, and about the downside of the 'talent-led' economy? In an atmosphere of businesslike conviviality overseen by accomplished 'pr's, the emphasis on presentation of self is incompatible with a contestatory demeanour. Personal angst, nihilism or mere misgivings (see Giddens 1991) must be privately managed and, for the purposes of club sociality, carefully concealed (8). This is a 'pr'meritocracy where the question of who gets ahead on what basis and who is left behind finds no space for expression, in that speed and risk negate ethics, community and politics.

[top of page]

The Decline of the Indies.

The necessity to earn a decent living as a young person in his or her early twenties who has trained or graduated in the field of media and creative arts, now largely means looking for work in the private rather than the public sector. There are fewer jobs in the public sector arts and media world, they are not well paid, and in fact many such jobs have in the last few years become 'freelance', or outsourced by some means, usually as single projects (9). Social scientists and cultural studies academics have to be realistic about the pervasiveness of corporate culture values and, more important, willing to dissect their complex and mutating character, as they reach out to embrace young people, allowing them in some instances to retain the guise of independence and freedom by working in a self-employed capacity. There is an even more awkward question of how commercial values have been, in a sense, radicalised as a way of

keeping ahead of the times, or being seen to be 'cutting edge'. Within the last five years the UK creative industries have become more overtly commercialised, as a result of being dependent for revenue from the big brands and from corporate sponsorship. This has coincided with media and arts convergence, expansion and enlargement. With the rise of digital TV there are more and more commercial content providers, with the establishment of the Film Council there is a renewed commitment to producing commercially successful film output, with the international success of the young British artists there is greater demand for art, more spaces to show it in, more interest from sponsors who benefit from such associations, and alongside all of this, of course is the expansion of the internet and the opportunities it opens up for online writing, journalism, editing, design work and so on.

The simultaneous processes of expansion and convergence, as well as the move to culture (like moths to a light) by companies which in the past might have had no such affiliation (eg Becks beer is now a major sponsor of arts and media, likewise Absolut Vodka) have all contributed to the shift to the second wave of the cultural and creative economy. This is characterised by the decline of the 'indies' and the rise of the (corporate-minded) individuals. For example British Fashion Design (McRobbie 1998) documented, as a step by step process, the daily lives and working patterns of the art school-trained and fine art-oriented fashion design graduates, as they struggled to set up on their own working from market stalls and from small design outlets. The study charted the way they juggled to keep their cash flows buoyant as they dealt with, on the one hand the manufacturing sub-contractors who took their orders and often threatened to deliver late, and on the other hand the retailers for whom space on the rails for the collections required perfect delivery time. It was noted that the biggest obstacle for the designers was their seeming inability to deal with export sales. The costs for this to be done effectively required a much larger source of capital investment than they were able to access. The average well known UK designer was working with an annual turnover of less than 200,000 and there was a significant discrepancy between the levels of success and publicity such individuals could achieve and the much more meagre indeed often threadbare and shaky economies they presided over. While committed to retaining their independence and their 'own label' they reality of survival was managing to work for two or three bigger outlets, and combining this with a 'bit of teaching' and with the 'own work' concentrated into at best 2/3 days a week (in the context of a 7 day working week).

In fact by the time the book was published it was apparent that independent, fine art- fashion design based on a self-managed, small scale outlet, was rapidly becoming unviable. While of course there was always going to be a handful of stars who went off to Paris or Milan the days of the pattern established much earlier in the mid 1980s by fashion designers like Bodymap (who were designing their collections on the kitchen table, and still signing on the dole while staging their immensely flamboyant shows) are now over. The high rate of bankruptcy, the spiralling rents for retail spaces, and then from the mid 1990s onwards the incredible effort on the part of the high street chains to

translate catwalk designs into off the peg styles within a couple of weeks, thanks to new and improved technology, all of this announced something of a death-knell for the wide range of independent designers. As the big chains moved in, the dedicated young designer outlets like Hyper Hyper found it more difficult to compete. Thus we see the shift from market stall to concession space. By the end of the 1990s the only way to be 'independent' was to be 'dependent' on Kookai, Debenhams, Top Shop, indeed the only way fashion design could survive was to sign up with a bigger company and more or less relinquish 'creative independence'. The corrosion of creativity was further achieved as the chain stores 'adopted' less than a handful of graduate stars a year and often discarded them within the year. No state supported infrastructure for young and struggling designers working from tiny outlets now remains with the demise of 'dole' and its replacement by the Job Seekers Allowance, and a range of Business Start Up Schemes which provide advice and support only. This is a good example of a fine art oriented design practice which needs public subsidy to flourish.

The large companies need to innovate and to develop a more experimental youth-driven image and this is provided by the second wave of young cultural entrepreneurs who retain an organisational and economic independence by hiring out their services on a contractual basis. But what is squeezed out in this process is independence and socially engaged, critical creativity. Freelance economies in the field of film or video production cannot, for example, take the strain of turning down work to free up time to make, let us say a short documentary film uncommissioned and with no apparent destination. Instead cultural production is increasingly driven by the imperatives of market and consumer culture, and the consequent banality of image and text is concealed by the technological euphoria, the association of newness and youthfulness, and of course by the parties. What I am suggesting is that despite talk about 'incubation' periods in the talent led economy, the competitive space of the new cultural economy is a speeded up 'full on' capitalist economy where culture is detached from the social, nothing like a 'way of life', and nothing more than lifestyle. Granted there are still fashion designers, architects, writers, artists, musicians and other creative occupations, but being somebody known as a specialist rather than a multi-skilled 'creative' is becoming a thing of the past and a mark of being over 35 (10). In the shift from the first to the second wave of creative economy in the post-Thatcherist enterprise culture the kind of small scale economies of the decade from the mid 1980s to mid 1990s have all but disappeared. The labour market for the second wave of cultural workers displays a strongly neo-liberal range of characteristics which minimise the prospect of culture and creativity becoming 're-socialised'. Thus we could say that the cultural entrepreneurialisation set in motion during the Thatcher years has in the Blair period been almost fully accomplished. This way of making a living stands quite apart from traditional work and also from the earlier forms of creative self employment.

[top of page]

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Incubator.

There is a danger of course in veering back towards economic reductionism in a discussion like this. But this is not an argument about economic conditions setting the limits for forms of cultural production, instead it is about the difficulties of producing an adequate reading of the ways in which cultural flows are produced hyper-actively by agents whose freelance status in an increasingly individuated environment seems to pre-dispose them to a double de-socialisation, in working practices they have to fend for themselves and the work they produce must also bear the distinctive marks of their own personalised signature. Why? Because as cultural producers in a 'talent led economy' they must differenciate themselves from others and one very obvious way of doing this is by embodying their own talent or portfolio of skills, they are their own human cultural capital. Where speed is of the essence this means 'branding the self' so that a client can access in a flash the kind or quality of work which is associated with the person . The freelance creative person must flag up talent in an unashamedly competitive and individualistic manner. Self-reliance is total and the state steps back as the 'entrepreneur of the self' takes over as the new archetype in the arts and cultural field. While the intensity of the new work ethic mirrors the Chancellor of the Exchequer's vision of full employment, the by-passing of public sector vocabularies including equal opportunities and workplace democracy is in fact much closer to the views upheld by Charles Leadbeater (1999b) in his recent book Living On Thin Air. This account (which was praised by Tony Blair himself) demonstrates the full force of an Americanised talent-led economy, where there is no place for social commitment, no question of lifelong learning or public sector supported re-training, unless such services can be delivered for profit. This is the 'new right' by stealth inside New Labour's new meritocracy.

It is as though culture was suddenly embraced by New Labour coming into office as an unexpected source of economic regeneration (as in the Cool Britannia episode). Here is something (a last gasp of Empire) that could cheaply be packaged for export (to include some of its own home-grown post-colonial talent), it didn't seem to be looking for substantial state hand outs because thanks to Mrs Thatcher these 'kids' had learnt how to fend for themselves, and finally of course, this is what 'we' have always been good at, pop groups, fashion design, pop-art, 'working class' youth culture. What good fortune. No need for planning when artistic types have always enjoyed chaotic and disorganised ways of working. In fact there are many issues which New Labour does not want to discuss, including the lack of social insurance (and the prohibitively high cost of private insurance), competition from abroad, (already the Uks lead in innovative fashion design is in decline), new social, spatial and other divides regarding access to cultural fields (eg the high cost of living in London), the social consequences of a fully individuated and network oriented creative labour market, and the sociological consequences of Britain eventually

finding as a solution to the globalisation of the economy, its own Post-Fordism on its doorstep and on the streets.

Let me conclude by going through some of those features which serve to consolidate new structural divides in the cultural economy. If the club is the hub then age and domestic responsibilities define patterns of access and participation. While sociologists have pointed to the increasing impact of age in changing labour markets (especially for women, see Walby 1997) in the creative sector there is simultaneously a stretching out of the contours of youthfulness (ie middle youth) through the marketing of lifestyle goods to the under 50s, and also a retrenchment and re-marking of boundaries, in that the new ways of working bear the hallmark of the rave culture generation. The night-time economy of club culture translates directly into the long hours culture of new media and creative work. This is obviously incompatible with having children, and certainly incompatible with being, for example, a single parent. Work merges with leisure and when a deadline must be met friends will lend their support and work through the night (this is also a pattern described in British Fashion Design McRobbie 1998). The assumed youthfulness and the impregnable space of the club suggests that these are not 'open-minded' spaces. Of course all occupational groups develop their own intimate ways of working, nor is the club per se a novelty for artistic and creative persons. The point I am making is that when the network combines with the club there is a greater potential for closure and for the erosion of democracy in working life. There is a danger that the network for cultural and creative working takes on the attributes of a neo-liberal enclave, where public sector persons including academics are barely present and 'by invitation only'. There is a greater degree of instrumentalism. What warrants the presence of others if they are not 'good for business'? (11)

The second structural dynamic is that of qualification. The conventions associated with the traditional CV and the job application process are nothing short of overturned in the network culture, and yet it seems certain patterns do re-emerge. Top or 'branded' universities promise graduates better access to big companies seeking to outsource creative work, and the same holds true for appointments with venture capitalists. Universities and colleges become key sites for developing the social skills for the network (once again often as party organiser) so, for the 45% of young people who at present do not enjoy three years of higher education, this is a further absence of opportunity. (It is also unlikely that mature students who tend to be concentrated in poorer universities are in the position to immerse themselves in the hedonistic and expensive culture of networking). Third there is the spatial dynamic, with only a few urban centres providing anything like the cultural infrastructure for gainful employment in creative fields. With a handful of private-public partnerships now replacing the kind of city cultural policies for regeneration pursued in the 1980s and into the early 1990s, there is the appearance of shadow culture industries in Glasgow, Manchester, and Nottingham (all of which are have large student populations) while as Leadbeater reports Cardiff Bay has also seen the development of a thriving new media sector. But this leaves vast tracks of the country more or

less untouched by the work opportunities provided by the cultural and creative network and it creates an enormous imbalance between London where at least on the short term, freelance curators and art project managers can have five jobs on the go at once (and thus juggle the bank balance around the cash-flow) and elsewhere where 'portfolio income' is replaced by at best 'one job at a time', usually with spaces of no work in between . (Is London also disembedded and individuated, a city state with its own speeded up economy? What distortions occur as a result of this 'lifted out' status?)

Age, gender, ethnicity, region, and family income re-emerge from the disguised hinterland of this new soft capitalism and add their own weight to the life chances of those who are attempting to make a living in these fields. As Lisa Adkins argues new forms of re-traditionalisation begin to have an impact on the participation of disadvantaged social groups and minorities (Adkins 1999). Adkins is suggesting that where state provided supports disappear and community weakens, and where individuated persons operate on a more self reliant basis, in this case in the new cultural economy, then there will almost inevitably be a process of having to fall back on traditional forms of support. This can mean a return to tradition for women. For example being excluded from the network because of children, or finding it difficult to avoid reproducing traditionally patriarchal family forms. Such changes also are the result of the double process of neo-liberal successes in the field of work and the negating of the values of the left and the women's movement. Finally there is the sheer incommensurability of working patterns in the creative network with existing official, governmental and social science paradigms. There is as yet no category for the curator/ project manager/ artist/ website designer who is transparently multi-skilled and ever willing to pick up new forms of expertise, who is also constantly finding new niches for work and thus inventing new jobs for him/herself (eg incubator/creative agent), who is highly mobile moving from one job or project to the next, and in the process also moving from one geographical site to the next. Social interaction is fast and fleeting, friendships need to be put on hold, or suspended on trust and when such a non-category of multi-skilled persons is extended across a whole sector of young working people, there is a sharp sense of transience, impermanence and even solitude (Auge 1995).

Research on these areas would have to consider the specifically gendered and ethnic consequences of individuation. The existing methodologies of the social sciences might well be brought into crisis by the fluidity and hyper-mobility of these agents. There are a number of other points of tension or ambivalence which also throw our older political paradigms into crisis. In the past I have taken issue with those who have (often with a sneer) considered the ambition and energy, the glamour and desire for success on the part of these young people as evidence of their either being complicit with the aims and ambitions of the project set in motion by Mrs Thatcher, or else of their being ideologically bludgeoned into believing the Hollywood dream (McRobbie 1999). My argument was that it was quite possible to adhere to principles of social justice, and gender and racial equality while working in the seemingly glamorous world of

the culture industries. Of course in the absence (yet again) of studies which systematically tracked creative employment with political sensibility, my comments were based simply on working closely with students who would be entering or who already had entered these fields. The accelerated speed of cultural working in the second wave marks however an intensification of individuation, a more determined looking out for the self. At this point the possibility of a revived, perhaps re-invented, radical democratic politics which might usefully de-individuate and re-socialise the world of creative work is difficult to envisage.

To conclude, if the instruments of the social sciences are challenged by the flows of creative individuals, and likewise the vocabularies of social democratic practice seem ill-equipped for the new mobile work-sites of cultural capitalism, so also is it the case that the identity of these cultural workers as bounded by the characteristics of 'British creativity' is a quite profo und misnomer. The creative work the government wants to flag up is less British than is assumed (12). Many are producing for a global market, as mobile subjects the political peculiarities of the nation state begin to look either insular, or restrictive, for example in relation to work practices and migration law. This undermines the value of a vocabulary of political culture bound by nation. The second wavers are re-describing culture and creativity as we know them, transcending and traversing a multiplicity of boundaries which come tumbling down in an 'ecstasy of communication'. We cultural studies academics, with our specialisms and our single skills, are meanwhile marooned in an under-funded public sector. We might teach these young people in the relatively fixed space of the seminar room, but once they enter the world of work, our encounters with 'incubators' and others are increasingly estranged and contingent.

[top of page]

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Notes.

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

2) The DCMS Mapping Document (1998) indicates employment rates in culture and communication at over 1 million persons. [back]

3) The 'reading' here refers to a kind of flow analysis with social and cultural trends seen in this context as loosely connected textual movements. As a method associated with Cultural Studies it also attracts fierce criticism from traditional social scientists. [back]

4) False self employment is used by economists to refers to company pressure

on individual workers to re-define themselves as self employed while remaining key suppliers of skills, services or expertise to the same company. [back]

5) The pr strategy of marking achievement or success with a party, discovers the potential of art as a backdrop for doing business. Nowadays there is no business that cannot be conducted at a 'launch' in a gallery. [back]

6) This raises the question of how intellectuals might have to adapt in order to engage with corporate creative individuals (see Nixon 2001 forthcoming). [back]

7) This demonstrates the need for 'culture intermediaries' whose role it is to negotiate, as advocates, a stronger presence for radical and democratic values in the new terrain of arts, culture and business. This, as I understand it, is the role of Goldsmiths College involvement in the above club. [back]

8) This point is made clearly in 'Good Character and Dressing For Success' by Jesh Hanspal, unpub MA Thesis Goldsmiths College 2000. [back]

9) At both parties held by the Cultural Entrepreneur Club (September/October 2000) I was introduced to arts administrators working as freelances for public sector organisations. [back]

10) At the above mentioned Cultural Entrepreneurs Club I was also introduced to a trained architect working as a time-based arts agent, a photographer working as a curator/administrator and a graphic designer working as a web-site editor. [back]

11) Again, on both occasions I attended this club I was the only academic present. Unlike the business mentors and venture capitalists also present I found no immediate role to play other than to 'chat' with former students. [back]

12) The nominations for the Turner Prize 2000 include three non UK artists, one German, one Dutch and another Japanese all based in London, and two of whom trained in London art colleges. [back]

[top of page]

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[top of page]

Angela McRobbie is Professor at Goldsmiths College, London.