

Beyond Work? New Expectations and Aspirations

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Introduction

In recent decades there have been extensive changes to work and employment in advanced economies, accentuated by the continuing effects of the 2007–2008 downturn. Employment is more precarious and fewer workers anticipate a steady 'age-stage' career progression to retirement. In the UK, where these changes are accentuated by austerity policies and Brexit uncertainty, more people are entering work but many are underemployed, seeking additional hours and income. Increasing numbers work for themselves, freelancing, self-employed, or running businesses. They are part of the trend in advanced economies noted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2015), away from a 'standard employment model' of a 'dependent' relationship between employer and employee, towards 'own account working'. Even for employees, there is pressure to be autonomous and self-managing, engaging with work as a personal responsibility. Digitalisation drives much of the internationalisation and accelerated trading, which require organisations and employees to be future-oriented and flexible. Digital communication also encourages extended working hours and also extends the possibilities for own-account working, for example, through the availability of online marketplaces and the possibility of using a digital shopfront instead of physical premises as the public face of a business (Luckman, 2015).

In this context, creative practices have gained a new significance as contemporary labour, as part of the global sector of contemporary cultural and creative work. The figure of the artist or creative maker offers a model for the worker as a self-actualising individual who accepts uncertainty and the requirement to self-manage (McRobbie, 1998; Taylor and Littleton, 2012). There are similarities to the figure of the entrepreneur (Brockling, 2016), another noted model for the contemporary worker that is also associated with creativity. The current revival of craft making similarly has been linked to a different 'social imaginary' for work and working lives (Luckman, 2015).

To explore contemporary understandings of work and creative practice, and the extent to which they may be merging in new norms of work and working lives, this chapter analyses interviews with UK creative practitioners. It investigates the meanings, values, and affect that they attach to their creative practices, and what these indicate about their understandings of work and the new normal of working lives, including their aspirations and expectations, and the difficulties they accept as necessary.

New Models of Work and the Worker

Ursula Huws (2013) suggests that ‘the normative model of work has shifted decisively’ (p. 5) away from an earlier model of ‘continuous, contractually formalised employment’ with ‘regular holidays, sick pay, pensions and prospects of advancement’ (p. 2). She claims, ‘Even if [the earlier model] was not a universal reality, it was seen as a legitimate aspiration’ (p. 2). This raises the question of whether a new normative model is emerging. Do new workers retain the older expectations for their working lives, or have they formed new ambitions and perhaps also accepted more limited aspirations?

Two idealised and interlinked figures, the entrepreneur and the creative worker, offer a starting point for exploring the emergence of a possible new model for contemporary work. Both supposedly exemplify the qualities of individual responsibility, autonomy, and flexibility required to survive in the contemporary circumstances of work and employment, including own-account working. The entrepreneur is understood to be not only a business leader, but also a particular type of person: optimistic, risk-taking, and high-achieving (Ahl, 2006; Brockling, 2016). The entrepreneur realises the ‘human potential for creativity and innovation’ (Ahl and Marlow, 2012, p. 543) and drives ‘social progress’ through ‘individual aspiration, endeavour and ingenuity’ (Royal Society of Arts, 2016). Somewhat similarly, the creative or cultural worker has been celebrated in various countries, but most famously by successive UK governments, for utilising ‘individual creativity, skill and talent (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2001) to generate wealth in a global creative sector. The sector was originally defined as industries linked to the arts (e.g., design, crafts, publishing) but subsequently was extended to encompass a much broader range, variously including fashion, retail, the ‘cultural industries’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2007) and the information economy (Fuller et

al., 2013). Through the original link to the arts, the creative association carries an additional promise of creative fulfilment or self-actualisation, which potentially functions as a warrant for managing low earnings and insecurity, on an analogy with the barely surviving artist in the garret (Taylor, 2015a; Taylor and Littleton, 2012). A further feature of the creative sector, noted by Mark Banks (2007), is the pursuit of non-economic values and a challenge to the 'rational' and 'acquisitive' aspects of capitalist enterprise (p. 184), for example, through claims to ethical and green business practices and sustainability. Recent media depictions extend the overlapping associations of idealised entrepreneurial and creative figures to people who work for themselves in any occupation, including self-employed workers and those running 'cottage industries' from home (Taylor, 2015a).

The entrepreneur and the creative worker therefore suggest the possibilities of a model for work in which contemporary workers experience new demands but also have new rewards to aspire to. Together, the figures suggest the possibility of earning a living and achieving fulfilment or self-actualisation by utilising individual creativity and innovation, while maintaining ethical standards, for example, in relation to sustainability and green values. Celebratory accounts of contemporary work and employment suggest that working autonomously, utilising creativity, and following a personal interest potentially compensate for the difficulties of sustaining economically marginal work activities (e.g., long working hours, uncertain financial return, fewer legal protections or welfare safety nets, and greater isolation). Other accounts are more critical, for example noting that the creative sector's volatile labour markets reinforce and exacerbate gender and other inequalities (e.g., Gill and Pratt, 2008). This chapter will look at the experience of creative practitioners as workers, stepping back from both celebratory and critical accounts to examine how creative activities are pursued and viewed by practitioners themselves, including whether they are linked to the acceptance of a new normal of work.

A Research Project with Creative Makers

The research discussed in this chapter is an interview study conducted in a small city in the UK. The city is one of the 'new towns' built within commuting distance of London in the 1960s and 1970s. It is relatively affluent, with strong economic and employment growth

(Irwin Mitchell, 2017, p. 13). The research participants are 24 artist-makers from the city and surrounding areas who were interviewed in 2016 as part of a project to celebrate the city. The participants can be described broadly as 'middle class' on the grounds that they have education and qualifications that potentially enable them, if they want, to obtain relatively high-status employment, although some might self-identify as working class because of their family backgrounds.

The participants are creative practitioners who produce made objects (in contrast, say, to conceptual artists). They can be seen as part of the ongoing third wave of craft discussed by Susan Luckman (2015, p. 18), although some describe themselves differently, for example as artists rather than as craft workers. Some were contacted through their use of studio spaces provided by charities or the local government. Other participants were accessed through these initial contacts. After appropriate consents had been obtained, each of the creative makers was interviewed for approximately an hour. The questions focused on the making process, connections with other people, and plans for future practice. The interviews were therefore largely about the making process, with other discussion, including biographical information, linked to that focus. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

The research presented in this chapter adopts a double analytic approach to the interview data set. It combines a broadly ethnographic tradition that approaches talk and other forms of language data as informational accounts (e.g., of speakers' circumstances, experience, and life practices) (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), and a narrative–discursive interpretive approach (e.g., Taylor and Littleton, 2012) that analyses language data as evidence of established cultural and discursive resources (e.g., discourses, discursive practices, or narrative structures). The narrative-discursive approach explores the situated take-up and implications of these resources, for instance, as constraints on the tellable claims and biographies of participants. The data extracts that are presented in the following sections illustrate patterns found across the data set. The focus of the analysis is on commonalities in participants' accounts of the details of their creative practices and lives as makers, and on shared associations, values and meanings in their talk. Extracts are therefore presented without reference to individuals or their specific creative practices (Taylor, 2012).

New Work or a Separate Practice?

The creative practitioners introduced in the previous section might be categorised as contemporary workers within the global creative sector, exemplifying the trend of own-account working noted by the ILO (2015). Alternatively, they can be seen as people who are following a creative practice that is separate to work, in the long tradition of amateurs or hobbyists. Discussing the problems of the amateur–professional distinction, Luckman notes the frequent denigration of amateur making (e.g., as ‘uncritical’ (p. 51)), but concludes that it ‘continues to play an important role within craft practice’, for example by keeping alive skills. She suggests that when considering the craft economy, the exact location of a maker on an amateur–professional continuum is less important than the quality of the goods produced, especially given the need for many trained practitioners to complement more ‘artistic’ work with production lines (p. 55). This section begins a fuller exploration of the status of the current participants, considering the status of their creative practice as amateur or otherwise, as part of an exploration of its relationship to work.

From an outside point of view, the creative practitioners in the current study might appear to engage with their creative practice *as* work in that they commit a large amount of time to it on a regular schedule and in a separate dedicated space, and expect to receive some income from it. The practice requires specialist materials and equipment and therefore involves investment. Each practitioner presents a public identity linked to the creative practice, usually through a website and sometimes other online sites like Etsy or, less formally, through membership of specialist groups. In all these respects, the practitioners are similar to many own-account workers in both creative and non-creative fields. Their working arrangements correspond to the ‘key cultural work models’ listed by Luckman (2015), ‘micro-entrepreneurialism, self-employment, online selling and working from home around family responsibilities’ (p. 60), with the same person sometimes combining several of these.

The most striking respect in which the participants’ creative practice appears to differ from conventional understandings of work is in relation to earnings. Although, as noted, the practitioners expect some income from what they do, only a minority make enough to support themselves, and even the most financially successful comment that they cannot charge prices

for their work that fully reflect the time and effort of making it. Previously available sources of funding for creative work, such as grants and residencies, have largely disappeared as a result of austerity policies. More positively, the local economy is strong, providing markets for many of the practitioners. They also sell online and through craft fairs and other outlets. Some participants, including women who combine their creative work with childcare, receive extra financial support from their partners, and a small number receive government benefits, for example because of disabilities.

In addition, most of the practitioners supplement their incomes from creative making by following the ‘double life’ described by Taylor and Littleton (2012), ‘in which creative work is sustained alongside, and by, other forms of work or jobs that are undertaken with the specific intention of earning money’ (p. 69). The ‘other’ work of these participants includes: teaching their specialist practitioner skills; utilising those skills to make mundane ‘un-creative’ items that the maker distinguishes from the creative outputs (e.g., plain ceramic objects for other people to decorate); running a business that supplies the raw materials for creative work; and working as an employee in a completely separate occupation. A variation on the double life is the situation of those practitioners who have retired from a conventional career and taken up a creative practice subsequently, rather than concurrently, living off an occupational pension or savings from previous ‘other’ work.

While the ‘double life’ initially provides a recognisable description of these participants’ life arrangements, the distinction between their creative and ‘other’ work is not always clear cut. For example, practitioners may depend on income from teaching, which can seem to be an extension of their creative practice, but some claim that teaching leaves them no time for their own making; in other words, it is a separate job. Practitioners who run their own businesses selling their creative outputs may have to devote most of their time and energy to practical management rather than making, so in their case, too, the other work may take over from the creative practice, especially if outputs are replicated following an earlier design. Even those practitioners who sell on a smaller scale or less frequently may devote a large amount of ‘un-creative’ time to contacts with possible clients, self-promotion, and applications for residencies, grants, and exhibitions. The double-life distinction between creative and other work therefore becomes blurred and this again raises the amateur–professional question. The

practitioner's creative identification is potentially challenged if non-creative earning work takes up more hours or days in the week than creative practice. This might mark the practitioner as a hobbyist, and the participants in Taylor and Littleton's (2012) research strongly rejected the 'hobby' label for their creative practice, as if this marked it as lesser quality.

Because of their limited earnings from their creative work, most of the participants experience financial insecurity, although the extent of this varies. The most secure are probably those who do most 'other' work currently or those with pensions or savings from previous employment, while the least secure are those who have dedicated all their working lives to their creative practice and have always survived on a very limited income. Uncertainty about earnings means that many of the practitioners have a precarious hold on their workspaces. Some rent their studios privately and worry about how long they will be able to afford to pay. Other practitioners have council space with lower, subsidised rents but only a limited guaranteed tenancy. In contrast, most of the practitioners seem secure in their living accommodation, whether owned or rented. This may be because most are long-term residents and local property values are relatively low in this city (though rising), especially when compared with London. Several noted that an advantage of living in this city is being able to afford a home space that is large enough to work in.

In summary, even though the practitioners may organise their lives as if their practice is a form of work, for most living on the income from the practice does not appear to be a realistic aspiration. Furthermore, in contrast to the expectations of work linked to Huws' (2013) normative model, most do not look forward to a substantial or steady increase in their incomes over time. Indeed, many said that it is now more difficult for them to survive financially than it was previously, because of the effects of the recession on sales and also because of the austerity policies which have reduced available public funding for grants and studio space. Yet, although there were many expressions of frustration that most of the outputs cannot be priced to reflect the time and materials that have gone into the making, there also seemed to be an acceptance of financial insecurity as a regrettable reality, and it was not cited as a reason for stopping the creative practice. The practitioners do not present earning as a rationale for what they do. One conclusion might be that the earlier normative

model of work described by Huws has been superseded, since a sufficient and stable income is apparently no longer regarded as a 'legitimate aspiration' (Huws, 2013, p.2). Alternatively, the creative practice might be distinguished as 'non-work' that needs to be supported through 'work' or another source of income. To explore these points further, the next section turns to participants' own categorisations of their creative practice and other activities. Through an interpretive analysis of the interview data, it considers what is distinctive about creative practice in these participants' accounts, in what ways they describe it as different to work, and what this indicates about the expectations and aspirations they might attach to work more generally.

The Rewards of Creative Making

Discussing their creative practice, the participants make claims about its distinctive features. One of these is the intense concentration involved. A number of participants refer to this as therapeutic because it apparently offers an escape from ordinary life:

... when you're [engaged in the practice] you just concentrate on what you're doing and you forget all your other worries ...

What I find is that when I'm [engaged in the practice] it doesn't matter what's happening in my life at that particular time everything is just completely cut off because I'm so absorbed in what I'm doing that you know you have no worries everything just kind of disappears into the wind really so it's very very therapeutic ...

... And I just I don't know why I just love it I find it so therapeutic it's what I call my bliss once I'm doing it and I'm into it I just love it ...

... time just disappears it's very therapeutic there's no thinking about anything else or mind wandering when you're working with this sort of stuff

...

These accounts correspond to the 'optimal' or 'flow' experience described by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2002). He suggests that all people aspire to this

experience as their 'foremost goal'. It can be achieved temporarily, for example by playing games or taking mind-altering drugs, but longer term it is achieved by acquiring skills of concentration and involvement, and setting goals: 'Flow drives individuals to creativity and outstanding achievement. The necessity to develop increasingly refined skills to sustain enjoyment is what lies behind the evolution of culture.' Csikszentmihalyi therefore associates flow with both work and creative activities, although in his account the latter are not necessarily linked to the arts. (He cites examples of production line workers achieving the experience.) For the participants discussed here, however, the concentration is specifically linked to creative practice.

In addition to these accounts of concentration, the participants present their creative practice as unfixed, emphasising ongoing change and development. They continually experiment with new materials and new equipment. They seek advice and learn new skills, attending workshops, demonstrations, and training courses. They utilise the 'affordances of digital technology' (Luckman, 2015, p. 26) in order to research alternative materials and techniques and establish new relationships with other practitioners online, often internationally. Their accounts of their creative practice construct it as a 'quest', but one without an ultimate conclusion. Only one of the participants, who is also one of the most financially successful, refers to retiring or otherwise deciding to end her practice. For the others, their making is presented as an apparently endless project of change and new possibilities:

'I've got some ideas and working out ideas cos as an artist we never stop changing ourselves We keep changing how we're doing things'

This emphasis on an open-ended forward trajectory has parallels with the creative and entrepreneurial models discussed earlier and is in striking contrast to the participants' (mostly) stable living arrangements. They do not refer to plans to change their place of residence or, unless forced, their current studio arrangements, but they anticipate and embrace change in their creative practice.

An additional notable feature in their accounts of creative practice is its relationship to the personal. Conventionally, of course, based on a male 'bread-winner' norm, there was a clear dividing line between the professional or public arenas of work and the other parts of life that

are private and personal, usually marked by the strictly enforced boundaries of working hours. There was also a conventional and gendered division between work and home, with the latter the conventional territory of the housewife or homemaker. Her work of social reproduction was essential to the formal workplace, ensuring that the acknowledged workers in the family were available and fit for employment. More recently, theorists have suggested that this is too narrow a conceptualisation of the contribution of the personal to work. Attention has been drawn to all the aspects of so-called personal lives that sustain contemporary industry and contribute to profits, such as social media use and other identity practices and forms of self-presentation, including those involved in emotional labour (Hochschild, 2003). As a consequence, the conceptual separation between work and personal life breaks down.

Somewhat differently, the model of the creative worker draws on 'a particular, intensely individualistic theory of art and how it is made' (Becker, 1982, p. 353) that emphasises 'the maker's special qualities and worth' as the basis of art and therefore, by extension, makes personal involvement central to creative making. Personalisation has also been cited as one of the attractions of contemporary creative work (McRobbie, 1998). In previous research, I noted that for the creative worker, 'her [creative] work is personal in the sense of being unique to her, shaped by who she is, and a product which she owns, as the creative or artistic maker' (Taylor, 2011, p. 364). In the data set discussed in this chapter, there was a similar emphasis on producing something unique, often contrasted with mass produced items, and also an emphasis on ownership. For example, several participants mentioned that they were reluctant to sell particular pieces of work because of this personal ownership:

... I have a big box upstairs and every now and then my husband will say
But you're supposed to be selling that [LAUGHTER] Because I did
something I mean this is one of my favourite ones I made this a long while
ago and so yes sometimes it's impossible to part with a particular piece ...

The participants describe their decision to pursue their creative practice or give more time to it as a prioritising of the personal. In contrast to work (former or current), the creative practice is for themselves:

I just wanted to do something different I wanted a new challenge I've been teaching for about seven years I've been working [for another employer] as well ... And I just wanted something new I wanted something to kind of freshen me up and if I'm not making and creating I get a bit edgy and I want to get my hands dirty and almost although I was [helping other people through my work] but I kind of felt that I was kind of not doing enough for myself ...

I was a busy [occupational title] working long hours and doing lots for others and I realised that I wasn't doing anything much for myself

... there was always something missing in my life I think you know because I think I like what I'm doing working in [occupational field] and it's convenient as well and you do get a decent salary and you get a good standard of living and other things But there was always something missing

The distinction made here between doing work for others and doing creative work for yourself was also noted by Taylor and Littleton (2012). Some of their participants criticised themselves for being 'selfish' in pursuing the creative work, but in the current research, this does not appear. Instead, there is a pattern of entitlement, exemplified in the extracts above. Participants present themselves as deserving the personal focus of the creative practice.

In addition, participants present personal connections as integral to the making process. Asked where they gain inspiration (the question itself invoking a classic image of art and artistic making as originating in the individual: Becker, 1982, p. 353), participants present as the starting point a personal experience, such as visiting a special place, or a personal life circumstance or relationship, a preference or feeling, or a tenet of a personal philosophy:

... I was lucky enough to visit [place name] and I try and capture what I saw in the landscape there So I found it such a natural sort of err place wild existence actually people live there It's an incredible landscape ... Just off the chart really it blew me away ... And I wanted to try and figure out a way of recapturing that in my [work] when I got back ...

And I've just been quite strong in that way that I'll follow what I really feel
I'm very emotional with my art and it has to really resonate with me and
that's when I do my most successful work

... there are so many fundamental things like I think you know the issue of
human beings being fundamentally flawed is something which does actually
concern me a lot I do worry that in the present climate there's a sense of loss
of moral compass and I think that I'm not saying that what I'm doing is
trying to redress that but I think if it makes people aware that these things
occur then maybe that's a good thing

The importance of this personal starting point for the making process is sometimes described
in terms of almost alchemical conversions or encodings. For example, one participant
explains a piece of work as based on a personal typology of life relationships, which she has
categorised as significant in terms of 'heart', 'soul' or 'mind', associating specific colours
with each:

... Now it's a bit complicated it's a bit conceptual Basically what I've done is
I've written down all the significant people in my life ... And some of the
relationships that I've had they start off orange because they're heart
significant and then they become soul significant for a while and then you
break off and then they change to yellow and become mind significant
because they're still there in your mind but they're not in your heart anymore
they're not as strong

Another notes:

Normally I work with lots and lots of colour but for some reason I've had
this need over the last couple of months to work with far less colour and I
don't know why and I don't know how long it will last or whether I can just
work through it and then get back into to doing some really you know more
colourful things I don't know Strange that how your life things that happen
in your life can really affect you

In these accounts, the personal connection is presented as providing meaning and significance (even if these may not be recognisable to others) and as driving the creative making. These encodings constitute a trajectory from the personal starting point to the made object, and potentially beyond, into future making. The forward movement implicit in the trajectory is similar to that of the developmental processes presented in the participants' accounts of experimentation with new equipment and materials.

In addition to the meanings given by personal connections, the participants also claim significance for their work which derives from long established techniques and traditional materials:

I see myself as a fine artist using a traditional set of craft skills

... this kind of black clay And I love the kind of the er you know it just looks like something that's been pulled out of the earth and that's what I kind of go for with my ceramics

By describing their practice in these terms which invoke the (extended) past, participants utilise the discursive practice of constructing continuity and additional significance by 'nesting' their personal work narratives with the larger narratives of history (Gergen, 1994, p. 203; Taylor, 2010, p. 66). Some project the narrative into the future and posterity considering the legacy of their work through its 'vintage' status or simply the lastingness of its materials:

... when you make something there is a quality about it that you can't get anywhere else It's priceless really If you have got the money and want something unique and different it's well worth it And it's something to treasure as well Because I have boxes that I put my [made objects] in with my name on and it's somewhere to keep them and I'd like to think that one day my [made objects] will be vintage they will get handed down and kept

.. and I just fell in love with working with fire working with the fact that you could take metal and just transform it into anything that you want I mean the only thing that comes close to it is clay and I can guarantee the only things

that will survive is metal artefacts and ceramic so in a way some of my stuff's going to last forever hopefully

The extracts in this section exemplify patterns found in the larger dataset in the participants' talk about their creative practice. Their accounts emphasise the process of creative making as intensely concentrated, separating the makers from their ordinary or mundane lives, and as experimental and dynamic, moving them ever onward. Making is presented as personal, in several senses. The creative process starts with aspects of the maker's self and experience and incorporates them within larger histories, constructing a new significance for both the maker and the creative output. It provides something 'for' the maker, compensating for what has been taken away by work. Elsewhere, in their detailed accounts of specific techniques and outputs, participants refer to some of difficulties conventionally associated with work, such as stress, tiredness, and safety issues, but their overviews of creative making are strikingly positive.

Conclusion

Discussing both the creative sector and contemporary work more generally, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2011, p. 17) have called for more 'good work'. They describe this partly in terms similar to Huws' (2013) normative model, as offering 'decent pay hours and safety ... work life balance; security'. However, they combine these features with the 'autonomy; interest and involvement... esteem and self-esteem' and 'self-realisation' more associated with the creative and entrepreneurial ideals of new work. This is, of course, a version of 'that moral-intimate-economic thing called "the good life"' discussed by Lauren Berlant (2011, p.2), and Hesmondhalgh and Baker's full list again raises the question of what people now expect and aspire to. Are there new understandings of what work entails and can provide, or is it still understood in terms of the normative model outlined by Huws? And if there has been change, have different expectations simply been added, or have some of those held previously now been relinquished?

This chapter has explored these questions through a discussion of research with UK artist-makers whose working lives diverge sharply from Huws' model and, in many respects, appear to approach an alternative creative/entrepreneurial ideal of work. In the analytic approach

adopted in this chapter, the participants' aspirations and expectations are not understood in individual terms but instead as the meanings in play around work in society today, available to be taken up in the talk of individual speakers but not originating with them. In other words, the approach does not present an explanation of the patterns in the participants' talk as evidence of individual psychology or pathology, such as a demand for more personal attention or a rejection of the responsibilities of conventional work. Rather, the analysis explores shared understandings of work, including the affective colouring and associations that have accrued around the working life.

In the contemporary context of work and employment in the UK, these artist-makers could be categorised as own-account workers (ILO, 2015), outside the security of the conventional employer–employee relationship. Their talk corresponds to the entrepreneur's optimism and the creative worker's pursuit of self-actualisation through individual and personalised creative practice. Yet their talk refers neither to the integration of the personal into work, which is associated with theorisations of new work, for instance, as involving emotional labour (Hochschild, 2003) nor the exploitation of emotion and personal identity for profit (Conor et al., 2015). These academic arguments have apparently not (yet) entered contemporary discourses of work. Instead, the participants' accounts present creative practice as personal and separated from other parts of life, including work. As they characterise it, the creative practice is not work in the terms of Huws' model, because it does not provide a sufficient or steadily increasing income and it is not expected to; the expectation is that other activities ('work') must be undertaken to obtain that.

The earlier normative model of work outlined by Huws (2013) legitimised an expectation of working for others on satisfactory terms. In contrast, both the creative/entrepreneurial ideal of new work and these participants' accounts of their creative practice centre on a personal project. Hesmondhalgh and Baker's (2011) terms for 'good work' imply that the two are compatible. Yet the artist-makers discussed in this chapter aspire to involvement and satisfactions from their creative practice that work supposedly cannot provide. They have apparently relinquished positive expectations of work in a failure of the 'optimism' discussed by Berlant (2011), or perhaps an avoidance of the situation in which an 'optimistic relation' becomes cruel, that is, when 'the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim

that brought you to it initially' (Berlant, 2011: 1). Underlying the artist-makers' organisation of their lives is an acceptance of the limitations of conventional work as not able to provide the positive affect and personal meanings and values that they aspire to and associate with their creative practice. The participants want to escape from work. They expect a more central place in their lives for their creative making than the leisure time made available by 'contractually formalised' work (Huws, 2013) which was the conventional time of hobbies such as craft making (Luckman, 2015). Perhaps confirming the individualism of late capitalism (e.g., Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), they are claiming a priority for the personal, which is supposedly excluded from work and also other parts of their lives. This emphasis on the personal and on other affect-laden meanings of their creative making, including its place within the extended trajectory of posterity, is a rejection of the anonymity of work as a collective social practice.

These aspirations and expectations of creative making could be dismissed as claims made on life by the privileged, exemplified here by these participants as people who live in a relatively affluent area of an affluent country and are able to support themselves, sometimes with difficulty but without (according to their own accounts) resorting to the truly bad work that must be accepted by the poor. However, as an indication of prevailing assumptions and expectations in society, their talk suggests that the earlier model has not yet been superseded by a 'new normal' of work. In addition, their claim to something more might indicate increasingly negative meanings and affect which are now attached to work. This is concerning, because it seems to amount to a society-wide misrecognition of its possibilities, as if work, all work, is being given a very bad name. Alternatively, and equally negatively, the claim may be the consequence of a more general decline in the quality of work experience and working lives, even for the educated and qualified middle class, who might once have expected to find more satisfaction through their work in once-respected occupations, including self-actualisation and personal reward.

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