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## **Craft Labour and Creative Industries**

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*This article examines the role and status of craft labour in the creative industries. While it tends to be overlooked, craft labour is an integral part of what is ostensibly an artist-led and 'creative' work process. The article highlights the necessity of craft in the creative industry 'workshop', and the relative autonomy enjoyed by its practitioners. However, while craft labour is depicted as vital, it is also subordinate to artistic labour, and amenable to reform through rational management and refinement of the division of labour - thus a series of likely threats to future craft production are outlined. The article concludes by appealing for further scrutiny of the conditions of craft labour in creative work.*

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## Introduction

When academics write of ‘labour’ in the creative industries, they tend to privilege the work of artists, ‘creatives’ and other extraordinary individuals. In keeping with the theme of this special issue I want to provide a contrast by reflecting on the role of ‘craft labour’ in creative industry production. I use this term, not to refer to the common *specific* crafts (such as woodworking, jewellery-making, ceramics, embroidery and the like) but to describe an input of the industrial labour process and the attitude or mind-set that configures that labour – one that I identify as intrinsic to many of those activities that have now come to be defined (mostly in the UK and Northern Europe, North America and Australasia) as cultural or creative industries. While creative industries are often identified as specific conjunctions or ‘contracts’ between (autonomous, conceptual) art and commerce (Caves, 2000), it is also the case that they depend on a range of supplementary, non-artistic jobs, some of which are based on craft skills and processes - such as camera work, set-design, printing, lighting, model-making, editing, studio engineering (to name only a few illustrative examples). These roles have tended to be overlooked in populist appraisals and in many (if not all) academic analyses of the creative industries.

The focus on craft labour is also prompted by recognition that it *appears* to be becoming more, rather than less, significant to creative industry production. The expansion of jobs in the creative sector – in film and television production, theatre, music and design – has led to an overall rise in craft-based employment even as the industries that contain it have sought to evacuate full-time, tenured labour and de-traditionalize the nature of the work contract (Christopherson, 2008; DCMS, 2009). Also, at least in the UK, recent economic policy focussed on the creative industries has shifted towards a skills and employability agenda that recognises the vital nature of nurturing craft and technical skills, rather than simply training artists (DCMS, 2008). Given the recognition in government that the creative industries lack workers with engineering, maths, computing and IT skills, and boast ‘a shortage of skilled people to do the essential jobs behind the camera and backstage’ (DCMS, 2008, p. 21), the focus of policy appears to be shifting to accommodate demands from employers for groups of suitably trained craft workers. In keeping with the prevailing

skills and innovation agenda then, it is entirely likely that craft labour will come under close scrutiny by government and employers in the forthcoming period, if only to ensure its organizations and practices are tailored to the demands of what is now optimistically termed the ‘creative economy’ (DCMS, 2008; Higgs *et al*, 2008).

However, these policy concerns form only a backdrop to the discussion in this article. The particular focus here is on a) the durability of craft labour in the creative sector and b) the extent to which the continuation of craft is threatened by recent transformations in flexible capitalism. In the first part of the article I outline the *necessity* of craft production to the cultural and creative industries. In contrast to conventional sociological arguments that stress the decline of craft work under conditions of advanced industrialization, I argue that craft labour has always remained an integral element of the creative industry labour process. Craft labour has survived largely because of its crucial role in supporting artistic labour – capitalism’s only source of original and authentic cultural commodities. The second part of the article examines, how, despite the apparent necessity of craft to creative industries, and the efforts of craft workers to preserve their status and freedoms, the future of autonomous craft work appears threatened by recent advances in rational management and in the refinement of the division of labour.

### **The decline of craft labour**

Craft can be defined as a form of skilled labour that is quality-driven, materially specific and motivated by internal, as well as external, rewards (Adamson, 2007; Sennett, 2007). Craft labour characteristically operates in and through socially-embedded ‘workshops’, as established in ‘pre-modern’ or ‘pre-industrial’ economies. Critical social thought has tended to portray (and often idealise) the workshop as a ‘lost world’ populated by apprentices, journeymen and master-craftsmen, that, while hierarchically ordered and authoritarian, proffered the opportunity for a humane and psychologically-rewarding life of labour. Steeped in religiosity and patriarchal in structure (women were excluded from the core tasks), the workshop nonetheless offered a closed and communal world of tradition and moral conduct, where, as Richard Sennett notes, ‘the ritual life of guilds and their fraternities provided a frame to establish their probity’ (2007, p.60).

The effect of industrial capitalism was to usurp the craft model. Industrialization marked the shift from a model of simple co-operation to a model of co-ordinated and capitalist-owned manufacture. This involved the reconstruction of the division of labour into more isolated and specialist tasks, the imposition of mechanization, and the formalisation of more bureaucratic control in a factory system. Such transformations appeared to enervate work of its ties to the past. In the *Grundrisse* (1857), Marx contrasted the meaningful and concrete character of pre-industrial craft labour with the threat posed by the purely abstract labour of the emerging industrial system. While craft offered the chance to practice skilled artisanal labour ‘immersed in its particular specificity’ (1857/1993, p.296), in contrast, industrial work served only to alienate the worker from the products of his or her labour.

For proponents of the Arts and Crafts Movement such as John Ruskin, William Morris and Walter Crane, craft work had provided an ideal for living, and their disdain for the industrial model of work was absolute:

It was essential to the [capitalist] system that the free-labourer should no longer be free in his work; he must be furnished with a [capitalist] master having complete control of that work, as a consequence of his owning the raw material and tools of labour; and with a universal market for the sale of the wares with which he had nothing to do directly; and the very existence of which he was unconscious of. He thus gradually ceased to be a craftsman, a man who in order to accomplish his work must necessarily take an interest in it (...) Instead a craftsman must now become a hand, responsible for nothing but carrying out the orders of his foreman (Morris, 1889, cited in Greenhalgh 1997, p.34).

In contrast to the estranged ‘hand’, the craft worker was venerated as one whose work was marked by the ‘impress of pleasure’ (Morris, 2008, p.21), and, as C. Wright Mills later put it, one who ‘lives in and through his work, which confesses and reveals him to the world’ (Mills, 1956, p.222).

By the 1950s, and the high water mark of mass production and Taylorized work,

the idea of a labour force steeped in technical virtuosity, the closed authority of the workshop and a sacred commitment to tradition and quality appeared an anachronistic fantasy:

For most employees, work has a generally unpleasant quality. If there is little Calvinist compulsion to work amongst propertyless factory workers and file clerks, there is also little Renaissance exuberance in the work of the insurance clerk, freight-handler or department store sales-lady (...) few telephone operators or receptionists or schoolteachers experience from their work any Ruskinian inner calm (Mills, 1956, p.219)

In terms of meaning and enlightenment work appeared to have very little to commend it. Harry Braverman's (1974) deskilling thesis further consolidated the idea that modern work had become fully routinized, monotonous and divested of semblance to the craft ideal. As John Roberts (2007) confirms, the degradation of craft skills was fundamental to the efficient operation of capitalism itself, since automation and the imposition of a technical division of labour was necessary for ensuring cost-savings and efficiency *and* for breaking the sensual bond between workers and the products of their labour.

For some, the demise of craft skills became complete following the pervasive 'computerization' of production in the putatively 'creative' or 'knowledge economy'. So while Lazzarato's (1996) and Hardt and Negri's (2000) assessments of the rise of 'immaterial labour' in post-industrial societies would appear to provide opportunities for the revival of skilled, autonomous and non-alienated forms of craft work (since workers are now more evidently required to become involved in advanced computerized, creative and technical manipulation), for Hardt and Negri, as for Roberts, craft skills become further subsumed by the rational imperative that seeks further to particularize work in the technical division of labour. While ostensibly skilled, computer-based knowledge and information work is now understood as tightly planned array of fragmented tasks, in which the worker is left with only 'an attenuated grasp of the technical processes that he or she now monitors' (Roberts, 2007, p.83) – so further diminishing the expertise and authentic relation to work deemed necessary for craft labour. For Hardt and Negri, today, as fragmented,

atomized labourers, ‘we increasingly think like computers’ and the ‘consequence of the informatization of production and the emergence of immaterial labour has been a real homogenization of labouring processes (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.291-2) - to the obvious detriment of a traditional craft approach.

The efforts of the contemporary craft worker are thus determined, not by workshop traditions, or local managerial interests, but by the systemic, all-pervasive notion of technically-driven ‘informatized’ production. So while, in creative industries, ‘craft’ occupations might well remain, the orthodox sociological critique would identify them as deskilled, divested of autonomy and devoid of genuine meaning (Roberts, 2007).

However, we should note that in contrast to this standard deskilling thesis, others have argued that craft-style work relations have begun to significantly re-emerge in the post-industrial economic context. For some, in the 1970s, the decline of Fordist-style economic arrangements, and the correspondent emergence of ‘flexible specialisation’, where firms sought to innovate new production processes that could respond to more specialized and changeable patterns of consumer demand, led to the apparent resuscitation of traditional forms of craft production in embedded geographical contexts (Piore and Sabel, 1984). Subsequently, the rise of a putatively ‘new’, knowledge-based or informational economy has, for others, further reprised the return to embedded skills and craft production values in local ‘clusters’ (Scott, 2000; Porter, 2005). In particular, the turn to small-scale, team-based production, common amongst the emerging proliferation of computer-driven service-based, high technology industries, appears to witness the revival of certain ‘pre-modern’ craft-influenced work arrangements (Lash, 1994). Thus, within ostensibly de-traditionalized, flexible capitalism, we have been alerted to the possibility of ‘re-traditionalization’ (Lash, 1994; Adkins, 1999), where the ‘new’ economy reveals itself as a return to the situated, interpersonal and skill-centred forms of production associated with pre-modern (craft-rich) economies. As Scott Lash puts it; ‘pre-modern and communal-traditional forms of regulation [are] conducive to information flow and acquisition which are the structural conditions of reflexive production’ (1994, p. 127). As Sennett has more recently argued, the cutting edge high-technology sectors of the new economy now appear to operate as an ‘archipelago of

workshops' (2007, p. 54) where skill-centred production has become the norm.

### **The necessity of craft in creative industries**

While social science provides a compelling narrative of the degradation (and possible renaissance) of craft labour in the economy at large, it is also the case that historically, the creative industries have tended to organize production in accordance with the demands of a craft workshop model. Indeed, in cultural or creative industries the craft production model has always been considered absolutely *necessary*. The distinctive feature of cultural and creative industry work is the tendency to maintain (rather than eliminate) the tension between autonomous impulses of artistic and supplementary craft workers, and the demands of managers for standardized, commercially-oriented production. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, capitalists know that only through allowing workers certain 'freedoms' will they be motivated and inspired to produce the new or culturally-distinctive commodities required for the market (Ryan, 1992). Secondly, artistic and craft workers have fought to maintain a 'workshop' model - because this is what provides them with a sense of creative freedom and meaning in work. The decline of craft skills has therefore been less marked in the creative industries because both capital and labour have a specific interest in maintaining an authentic production process where craft, art and commerce can mutually combine and flourish – even though, as I will discuss, each will try inherently to tip the balance of the work process to favour their own preferential interests.

As Ryan (1992) has convincingly argued, capitalism must by necessity offer artistic workers a degree of autonomy in order to ensure they produce new or distinctive goods and services marked by originality. To cut off the flow of authentic commodities is to rely only on formulaic reproductions, with subsequently diminishing economic returns. Sooner or later, then, capitalists must return to the artists that provide the primary source of ideas and value in creative work (Witkin, 2000). As Brouillette (2008) confirms, the idea that a cultural commodity is produced by artistic labour working under conditions of creative autonomy, is often significant in convincing consumers that it is actually worth paying for. Consumers are not necessarily fools, and will periodically make demands for newness, originality or



difference in cultural goods. Only the unfettered creative can begin the process of satisfying that demand.

It is widely assumed therefore that the production of commodities in art, music, television, film and so on is seen to arise most effectively from real or simulated studio or workshop environments where artists are provided with freedom to organize their work process. Creativity is judged to derive from the efforts of these creative individuals or closely-knitted groups who can work together to generate something novel or distinctive. But, crucially, it is not just artists who are involved. Indeed the popular idea (strongly endorsed by governments, see for example DCMS, 2001) that the creative industries are populated by capricious artists, who use their 'natural' creativity to conjure new commodities out of thin air and magic, disclaims how original commodity production tends to operate on a more socially-embedded production model where artists work *in conjunction* with craft workers (the engineer, the programmer, the producer, the printer, the design team, the film crew and so on) to produce something new (Becker, 1984).

Craft elements of production have survived therefore, because commodity production not only requires the ideas and innovations of artists, but the inputs of craft workers who can help develop these ideas and bring them to fruition as commodities. Thus, skilled, creative and relatively autonomous craft workers, providing technical labour inputs that come from the result of craft training, but at the same time, are not necessarily reducible to an *expression* of that training, are crucial to the production of creative industry commodities. Indeed, the craft worker, while principally an operative, occupies part of the territory of the artist in so far as they may be called upon to 'bring a degree of creative flair to their work' (Ryan, 1992, p. 113), or more substantially contribute – as many will do – to the creative process itself. To take a random (but illustrative) example, here Oscar-winning craft worker Thelma Schoonmaker explains the art *and* craft of film editing:

You get to contribute so significantly in the editing room because you shape the movie and the performances. You help the director bring all the hard work of those who made the film to fruition. You give their work rhythm and pace and sometimes adjust the structure to make the film work -- to make it start to flow up there on the screen (2005,

no pagination).

Many aspects of craft work retain discretionary qualities that belie their status as ‘deskilled’ and abstract inputs. Indeed such is the individual skill or competency of certain high-status craft workers, many will achieve the prestige and rewards ordinarily reserved for artists – they become well-paid, consecrated and *named*.

Of course capital’s preference for the workshop model is not to deny the industrialisation of ‘culture industry’ and the widespread efforts by risk-averse managers to ensure that more standardised and formulaic commodities are produced by tightly-controlled, abstract labour (Adorno, 1991). Nonetheless, while the exploitation of cultural goods may increasingly be industrialized, the original production of goods worthy of being exploited tends to take place under conditions where *the efforts of artists and craft workers combine*. Recently, David Hesmondhalgh has confirmed that a workshop model, where teams of primary artistic and supplementary craft workers combine (with others) to generate the desired unique or distinctive symbolic and cultural goods, is the industry standard – since ‘factory-style production is widely felt to be inimical to the kinds of creativity necessary to make profits’ (2007, p. 68). Even Theodor Adorno acknowledged the durability of craft production when he observed that ‘individual forms of production are maintained’ (2000, p. 233) amidst the standardization of the ‘culture industry’ commodity, or when he more precisely observed that ‘the act of producing a song-hit still remains in a handicraft stage’ (1990, p. 306). Thus, within both large and small independent television producers, record companies and recording studios, new media services providers, advertising agencies, art production companies and the like, there is a durable tendency to operate under ‘workshop’ conditions of relative autonomy where artistic and craft labour are implicated in the co-creation of new cultural commodities.

### **Craft as Utopia?**

In this respect, both artistic and craft workers appear to be models of utopian labour, since they have remained embedded in the workshop model of production so valorized by romantic and Left-wing critics. If art work provides the means to

achieving creative fulfilment and existential freedom, then craft work appears innately autonomous, non-alienating and skill-laden.

Furthermore, through the co-operative nature of workshop-based production, and the prevalence of both informal (friendships, social networks, clubs) and formal structures (craft unions, guilds), craft workers have been able to reinforce commitments to both the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards characteristically associated with craft labour (Sennett, 2007). The sense of being part of a collective remains an important benefit of creative industry craft production. Indeed, the rise of craft unions in journalism, printing, film, television and radio broadcasting and so on, have played a tremendously significant role in the development of creative industries, offering an organizational frame for the cultivation of collective consciousness and a corpus of skills, competences and job roles (see for example Antcliff, 2005; Mosco and McKercher, 2008). In the UK, organizations such as the NUJ (National Union of Journalists), BECTU (Broadcasters, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union) retain significant levels of membership and remain important for co-ordinating campaigns and critique. In the USA, the recent consolidation and merger of craft, media and communications unions into the CWA (Communication Workers Union) and in Canada the CEP (Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union) is a labour convergence strategy designed to boost the ability of craft (and other) workers to protect themselves from capital's excessive demands (see Mosco and McKercher, 2006). Interestingly, non-union grassroots organizations for representing film and television craft labourers as discussed by Caldwell (2008), and internet-based media workers collectives identified by Saundry *et al* (2007) are an emergent feature of the creative workplace and contain the potential to co-ordinate new kinds of progressive dissent. Further, as Saundry *et al* identify, there is a potentially productive convergence possible between the 'old' and new forms of labour collective.

Thus, the necessity for capital of retaining the craft workshop model not only appears to be the irreducible guarantee of craft work and employment, but the basis for preserving an ongoing solidarity and collective sentiment amongst craft workers. Occupying a distinctive, hard-to-destroy role in the creative industry labour process, one bestowed with significant autonomy, the creative industry craft worker appears to evidence the contemporary possibility of work 'immersed in its particular specificity'

and marked by the ‘impress of pleasure’. However, before we retire to celebrate the survival of the craft ideal, we should note that the fate of the creative industry craft worker is by no means assured. Indeed, when we consider, firstly, the status differentials between artistic and craft workers, and secondly, the distinctive role of the craft labourer as generalized form of abstract and *detail* labour, then the utopian prospects of craft appear significantly diminished.

### **Art versus craft**

In creative industries, artistic labour has a high status, and is valorized as the primary source of creativity, ‘genius’ and aesthetic value. While capitalists must try and manage artists, they also know they must indulge them in order that they feel equipped to produce the magical goods that manifest their talent. The craft worker, in comparison, is a mere producer and inhabits only a mundane world of tools and technique. The craft worker is also regarded as supplemental rather than primary labour – labour in service of the artist, one who supports the ‘talent’ while operating under the close scrutiny of managers. The rewards for the successful artist are high, both materially and in terms of consecration and prestige. The reward for the craft worker is a wage or salary, as they are usually debarred from royalties, and tend to be denied the pleasures of consecration and fame. Indeed, as we have seen, beyond a miniscule elite, the craft worker is abstract labour, unnamed and uncelebrated [1].

Thus, unlike artistic labour, which remains relatively free and unfettered (though, of course, still managed to some degree), craft labour is regarded as *always* subject to the infinite perfectibility of management and refinements in the technical division of labour. Although, as argued, the demands of creative workshop production have somewhat insulated craft workers against the kind of deskilling and dis-identification imagined in the conventional sociological critique, it is nonetheless the case that craft workers are considered as ‘variable capital to be put to work across continuous cycles of production’ (Ryan, 1992, p. 140) rather than extraordinary talents to be provided with infinite latitude to express themselves in the production process. Craft work is able to be managed – simply because it depends on learned skills, techniques and technical processes that are replicable and generalizable. Craft workers know this, and in their responses to managerial edicts tend to be viewed as

conservative, for as Ryan notes, craft workers ‘have material foundations for cooperating with creative management’ (1992, p.141), since it is only through producing recognised good quality work (according to technically applied, rather than aesthetic criteria) in accordance with managerial demands, that they can maintain their position of relative autonomy in the labour process.

So while artists and craft workers both possess ‘relative autonomy’ – it appears artists are actually *more* autonomous since their ability to resist the incursions of rationality and managerialism in the day-to-day practices of work are more pronounced and protected. The craft worker’s grounds for maintaining a position of autonomy are limited to their ability to undertake demonstrably good technical work, which is not only generalizable (in principle, others could do it equally well), but is able to be rationally evaluated and assessed by managers as a component in the overall calculus of technical inputs. The defence of the artist against rational management (‘I am original’, ‘my art is inimitable’, ‘you cannot tame creativity’ etc.) is unavailable to all but the most skilled craft workers whose talents are recognised as unique or commensurate with non-replicable elements of artistic labour. In fact, it is the case that the artistic labour process has been preserved at the *expense* of craft freedoms, since capital can only afford to offer artists their special dispensation by shoring up the production of surplus-value in other areas of the production process – including ensuring that craft work is rendered more routine, standardized and predictable.

### **The threats to craft**

While craft labour remains a vital and necessary element of cultural and creative industry work, it is also the case that the intensification of economic rationality in flexible capitalism appears to be further undermining the possibility of skilled, autonomous craft in its recognisably traditional form. The desire to further control craft production has arguably led to some constriction of the relative autonomy that has hitherto been considered necessary in the creative workshop context. In this section I offer only a broad indication of some of the processes at work.

a) *'Creative' management*: the prevailing fashion for 'soft' or 'informal' management through 'creative teams' (simulated workshops) does not obscure the fact that creative industry firms and managers are seeking to retain a tighter control over the conditions of creative production (Ryan, 1992; Thrift, 1997; Bilton, 2006; Banks, 2007). Thus, while managers will tend not to dispute employees' demands to be regarded as 'craft' workers, they will try to ensure that these quasi-autonomous inputs are tailored most efficiently to commercial demands. Although in craft production, utility and function have always been a consideration, workers, much more so than in the recent past, must contort themselves to commercial demands over and above the demands of the craft and its practices (see Bourdieu, 1998; Banks, 2007; Caldwell, 2008; Sengupta *et al* 2009). Thus while Sengupta *et al's* (2009) media workers were provided with high levels of autonomy in the specific execution of their work tasks, they were also subject to 'inflexible deadlines and very stringent standards of control' where there was 'little room for creative licence or room to maneuver for individual employees' (2009, p. 48). In John Thornton Caldwell's (2008) study of film and television workers, one way around the problem of managing craft workers is increasingly to use non-unionized labour, more likely to accept lower pay, longer hours and compromises on autonomy. Susan Christopherson (2008) notes that weakening craft unions (such as in the USA the Cinematographers Guild) have tended to ignore this emergent workforce in favour of defending the few remaining 'good jobs' for its established members. Outsourcing technical and craft inputs through offshore and overseas production locations is also an effective means of overcoming the demands of local craft labour force (Miller and Yúdice, 2002). Thus, even in this 'archipelago of workshops' there is no guarantee that craft labourers are able to retain their traditional autonomy in the contexts of production – under conditions of intensified competition, managers are becoming extremely adept at managing the craft input to suit their own preferential interests.

b) *Speed and employment instability*: as Sennett has observed, in contemporary capitalism, production is based on speed; fast, short-term transactions and constantly shifting deadlines and tasks - a world, then, where 'craftsmanship sits uneasily' (2006, p. 105). The craft workers characteristic desire to undertake 'good work' – methodically, carefully and slowly – is clearly at odds with the demands of much creative industry production; environments where the necessity of meeting the

deadline, within increasingly truncated time and budget constraints tends to override concerns with intrinsic quality and ‘good work for its own sake’ (Sennett, 2007, p. 20). Helen Blair’s (2001) study of the on-set labour process in the UK film industry revealed the special primacy given to speed and efficiency in production over and above other values. Workers now simply have to do what needs to be done to complete the job under increasingly restricted time and resource constraints. While this can to some extent stimulate creativity and innovation (necessity as the mother of invention), the increasingly obsolete nature of the craft approach is indicated when the demands for cheap and instant product simply prevent workers producing work to the standards of excellence trained for, and conventionally accepted as ‘good work’ (Sennett, 2007). Sengupta *et al*’s (2009, p. 48) report on media workers found that around a quarter of those interviewed now found it ‘impossible to complete tasks properly’. In Caldwell’s (2008) work on ‘production culture’ in US film and television industries, he found the ‘old rules’ surrounding the craft process of production simply do not hold in a situation of ‘ever-increasing budgetary and production value scarcity’ (2008, p. 43) – speedy hit-and-run production is now the norm, with attendant demands on craft labour to cut corners, disclaim tradition and look for easy ‘solutions’ to technical problems. Caldwell further suggests that because craft workers in film and television increasingly inhabit what he terms a ‘nomadic labour system’ (ibid, p. 113) marked by ‘manic’ instability and a constant search for new work (even amongst those with a good reputation and credentials), the continuity of employment and co-operation necessary for the development and dissemination of skills conducive to craft development are inhibited. Divested of the security of fixed, tenured employment and forced into competitive rather than co-operative relations with other exponents of craft skill, there is now less opportunity for the traditional accumulation, refinement and transferral of craft skills in the community context (Dormer, 1997). Indeed, as I now discuss, for managers, the necessity of such structures may be obviated by the possibilities offered up by new technology.

*c) Technical Innovation:* in contrast to the (largely theoretical) arguments of autonomists, it is clear that more empirically-focussed writers such as Caldwell and Christopherson have begun to more concretely identify how technological change can impact on the skills and occupational identities of the creative industry craft worker. While in industries such as printing, deskilling through automation has been long

acknowledged, ('the last vestiges of the printing craft seem likely to be eliminated' in Ryan's (1992, p.113) doom-laden terms), others, such as music production, film and television production and graphic design, while increasingly automated, have remained committed to the idea that a *range* of discretely skilled craft and artistic labour is still necessary for shaping the effective use and application of technology. Yet, it may now be the case that pace and intensity of technological change in these sectors, where many design, music, film and television production and postproduction techniques have become largely possible to coordinate by an individual using a laptop (Caldwell, 2008), we are indeed entering a utopian/dystopian world where the workshop appears increasingly to be replaced by the workstation.

The reduction of a set of previously discrete humanized craft labours to a range of push-button, pre-determined inputs organized by one or more individuals does appear to uphold the basic deskilling thesis. The idea that many separate craft skills can be combined to productive effect is also explored in Christopherson's (2008) work. She shows that, while there has recently been a renewed expansion of craft employment in television, this has largely been centred on low-end programming for emergent cable channels and networks, where the focus is on fast, cheap productions with limited labour inputs. Larger broadcasters and networks are also starting to learn from this low cost model. Innovations in light-weight video, lighting, audio and editing technology often means that production is possible with 'crews' of one or two people – and frequently, as Christopherson notes, 'writing, directing, camera work, editing and promotion for distribution' (2008, p. 88) may be undertaken by the same person. This workforce is hybrid, multi-tasking (and, in some attenuated sense, multi-skilled). While the idea of the versatile, resourceful 'all rounder' is attractive (not least to capital), the likely downside is a weakening of accumulated knowledge (there are few mechanisms for sharing or spreading expertise), a decline of specific quality in discrete craft skills, and the expansion of poorly remunerated, exhausting and unstable employment comprised of what one of Christopherson's interviewees referred to simply, as 'bad jobs' (2008, p. 88). The extent to which this kind of hectic, over-filled work meets the demands for sensual, embodied and skilled labour characteristically associated with craft – one that demands a 'unity of head and hand' (Sennett, 2007, p.179) the time and space to permit self-reflection, and the ability to learn and refine from mistakes - is of course a matter for debate. It is highly



likely however that this integrated model of combining (and so eliminating) craft skills will make significant inroads into other creative sectors.

*d) Individualization/ Decollectivization:* despite the best efforts of unions, and the rise of new non-union collectives, it appears that collective representation amongst craft workers remains in steep decline. By the 1980s, across Europe and North America, those ostensibly powerful craft unions and trade associations, that had arisen to protect the conditions and codes of craft work, found themselves under threat, as deregulation, mechanization and computerization of production made some serious inroads into craft employment, replacing the skilled middle rank of secure jobs with machines and temporary and freelance workers (Antcliff, 2005; Bodnar, 2006; Mosco and McKercher, 2008). In the UK, significant reversals for print and broadcasting (amongst other) unions appeared to seal the fate of the craft worker – condemning them to ‘permanent impermanence’ as organizations sought to retune work to the demands of flexible capitalism (Willis and Dex, 2003; Aylett, 2004; Antcliff, 2005; Saundry *et al*, 2007). In France, media and communications unions found themselves similarly denuded as jobs were lost and terms and conditions fundamentally revised on a low cost, flexible model (Bodnar, 2006). Craft workers have since become recognised as part of the new ‘precariat’ – insecure project workers, lifted out from the embedded contexts of the closed shop and the comforts of tenured in-house production. As a result, many craft labourers working as freelancers, or project workers, shifting from job to job, or employed in flexible organizations are finding it increasingly difficult to challenge deleterious conditions of work. Indeed, such is the weakness of their position - given the oversupply of labour and the ease with which workers can now be hired and fired - it is unsurprising workers often appear wary of ‘making trouble’ (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker forthcoming; Saundry *et al* 2007).

As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (forthcoming) note in their study of UK creative and craft workers, working below official BECTU rates and ignoring their own exploitation was routinely accepted by camera operators as the necessary price of employment. Similarly, journalists who insisted on NUJ recommended ‘per word’ rates of pay tended to find work hard to come by. Increasingly, like their artistic counterparts, craft workers are not only discouraged from organizing but encouraged to see themselves as self-enterprising, and as authors of their own occupational fate.

As numerous commentators have attested, the creative industries are comprised of increasingly individualized labour, operating in occupations that stress the virtues of self-reliance, unique talent and personalized, performative modes of work (see also Bourdieu, 1998; Ursell, 2000; McRobbie, 2002). This tends to disclaim the necessity of collective organizing – even amongst those workers most traditionally unionized (such as journalism, printing, film and television workers) the communitarian basis of craft has become seriously challenged by those employment structures and, now, *self-identities* that stress individualized work and disavow commitments to fixed or formal contracts, equality of opportunity and the standardisation of rewards (see Holgate and McKay, 2009 for example). As Saundry *et al* suggest, for many, ‘reliance on the support of the union represents an admittance of failure within the Darwinian world of freelance audio-visual labour markets’ (2007, p. 188).

Further, despite their cautious enthusiasm for non-union, or more informally networked and rhizomatic e- and net collectives, both Caldwell and Saundry *et al* remain concerned that these interventions will lack the collective will and means to broker significant changes in the conditions of labour. Despite the optimism of those who see the effective convergence of the precarious ‘multitude’ in these post-unionized times (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Holmes, 2004; Bodnar, 2006), even its erstwhile enthusiasts have started to question its ability to reconcile the variable demands of its proponents, with Neilsen and Rossiter observing that we may now be witnessing the ‘decline of [precarity] as a political concept motivating social movement activity’ (2008, p. 53). While this seems somewhat pessimistic and premature, it does have the virtue of illustrating some of the uncertainties that now surround the possibility of radical labour reform.

In summary, it appears that craft work in the creative industry workshop is becoming more closely managed, with its commitments to quality diminished by speed and instability, its technical practices fragmented and standardised, and its social and collective basis undermined. Yet, the apparent paradox here is that capital cannot by necessity eliminate craft (despite the apparent will to do so) because this would seem to prevent the future production of demonstrably new or original commodities that not only bear the imprint of art, but, also, the crafted excellence, authenticity and quality that consumers appear to routinely demand. While the

'culture industry' can skilfully finesse the similarity of standardized commodities through means of advertising, marketing and branding, this has its limits, and customers will eventually demand or aspire to something new that has its provenance in the art and craft workshop. On the one hand, then, the craft worker appears increasingly remaindered as detail labour, a dead hand, divested of the opportunity for 'good work' – but if this were entirely the case the creative industries would cease to function as producers of creative, aesthetically distinctive and *authentic* commodities, and would doubtless suffer quick collapse. Yet, it is also the case that if a public perception of excellence and authenticity is able to be made without recourse to humanized craft labour, that is, with machines and managed labour, then the prospects for the continuation of craft appear less certain. The decline of 'good' craft jobs and the rise of large numbers of 'bad' ones may be an indication of both the *expansion* of craft labour and its *reduction* to the status of mere detail.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have argued for the necessity of craft in creative industries, an (often ignored) labour input that serves and combines with artistic labour in the essential production of new and authentic cultural and creative industry commodities. The relative autonomy of craft labour in creative industries, and its status as a potentially utopian form of labour were noted. However, in recognising its low status (compared to artistic labour), and its amenability to rational management and technical control, I have identified the possibility of decline in these idealized workshop conditions. In identifying threats to the continuation of craft it was averred that this ostensibly 'good work' is increasingly subject to the demands of advanced, flexible capital for controlled, standardised production, divested of traditional craft values and practices. The paradox noted here, however, was that the continuation of creative industries appears to depend on finding the balance between offering craft and artistic freedoms, and imposing constraints that permit effective commodification. In this respect, a total standardization of craft would eliminate some of the expressive human inputs traditionally deemed necessary for authentic cultural goods. However, for some, as a consequence of managerial and technological innovations, craft labour appears increasingly *expendable* - and it may be the case that the necessity of craft and its characteristic approach to work do indeed become consigned to history. Thus,

while craft labour survives, how long and in what form it will continue to do so remain important topics for debate.

Finally, this article has sought to respond to one of the concerns of this special issue – namely that current industry and policy discourse on the creative industries is rooted in an individualistic model of creativity that tends to focus only on artistic labour and its organization. Studying craft workers, and the character of workshop models, has analytic (and democratic) potential in so far as it avoids privileging the ‘artist’ as the only source of productive labour in creative work (though of course their significance should not be underestimated), and opens up the lens of workplace studies to other forms of labour operant in the creative industries – ones more traditionally regarded as essential in industrial relations and workplace studies, but curiously overlooked in the creative industries literature. Such a move is designed not to romanticize or utopianize the potential of craft labour, but to recognise that the conditions of cultural and creative work are variable, and amenable to critical analysis from a number of perspectives.

## Notes

[1] Partly this separation derives, at the level of production, from the belief (well-established by the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century) that art must be free and undetermined in order to reveal the truth of the world and that craft, because of its insistence on tradition, skills and technique - the making and not the meaning - could not be autonomous nor attain the position of critique. Thus, in comparison to the ‘purest’ forms of Romanticism and, later, Modern *conceptual* art, crafts’ insistence on ‘usefulness’, and its apparent lack of radical or intellectual aspiration, came to be seen as embarrassing and shameful. Indeed, the Modernist separation of having ideas from making objects led to what Peter Dormer termed the possibility of ‘art without craft’ (1997, p.18) – perhaps most famously symbolised by Marcel Duchamp whose selected ‘ready-mades’ (produced after 1912) exploded the idea that artistry was intrinsically linked to skill and technical ability (see Greenhalgh, 1997; Roberts, 2007 for a fuller discussion on this theme).

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