CHAPTER ELEVEN

Work In The Creative Economy: Living Contradictions Between the Market and Creative Collaboration

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Introduction

In today's neoliberal creative economy, many of us wear several hats and take on different identities in the pursuit of multiple jobs, projects and roles in a fragmented and precarious labour market. The emergence of what has become know as the creative economy coupled with the financial crisis in the late 2000s has led to the diminishing of the welfare state and especially arts funding under successive governments in the UK. There are now fewer full-time positions and a marked rise in self-employment, where a so-called 'creative class' are celebrated as the new 'model entrepreneurs' (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p. 2). This market-driven mentality devolves the financial risks of producing creative work in this sector to the individual, while the traditional workers' safety net of the welfare state slips from under their feet. Flexibility of the labour market is viewed as desirable for those who want more control over their time, yet it

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allows businesses to exploit freelancers without the need to provide social security including pensions, sick pay and holidays. Creative industries discourses promote cultures and models of collaboration in order to create a supportive co-working network on the one hand (in the neo-liberal context previously described, where there is less state support), but also for business efficiency, flexibility and profit on the other (Banks, Conor and Mayer, 2015, preface). This chapter outlines some of the general ways in which concepts of collaboration are employed across the creative industries, before contrasting these with the particular example of how this practice is explored reflexively and critically by independent artists and their collective processes.

The motivation and primary example of this chapter comes in the form of an auto-ethnographic reflection on my own working practices, employed as head of programmes and operations at a commercial creative start-up based around the distribution of digital artworks, but also as the founder of an independent art/research collective. Both forms of work have their own values and language and both also discuss ideas of collaboration in different ways. This chapter attempts to parse concepts of collaboration to critically approach new models of work that might open possibilities towards a different kind of future.

Creative beginnings

I completed my studies in Digital Image/Sound and the Fine Arts at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada in 2006. At the time I was already organising events independently with artists and musicians. My events became platforms for art with an experimental curatorial approach. These typically took place in disused spaces or venues and brought together a community of multidisciplinary artists working across media arts, video, music and performance to create collaborative events. At the time, I was naive to the role that artists play in the gentrification of cities, as first noted by Richard Florida (2002). Artists occupy disused areas which they revitalise with minimal means and bring new value by creating productive communities. However, the flip side that Florida is less concerned with is that property rents increase as a consequence and local communities are incrementally pushed out by property developers eager to build luxury flats and new (or often repurposed) commercial spaces. Though the events we organised were temporary, the areas in Montreal where they took place would later become gentrified as artist communities tend to be the first to identify and revitalise forgotten areas of the city.

Following my studies, I moved to Hong Kong to work in a media art space called Videotage and I continued to develop independent projects and curate events under a project called LOUDSPKR (www.loudspkr.org). My events were always produced on a shoestring budget and normally just broke even, with any profits going to the artists. The intent was never to turn it into something that I could earn a living from – it was always about community, shared experience,

experimentation and play. It was a great learning experience, however, the long-term sustainability of the projects was always a concern. At the time I didn't have a clear idea of what I wanted to do in terms of translating this experience into a career, but I wanted it to include elements of working with artists and creating platforms for sharing their work. These independent projects were a 'labour of love', undertaken in the hope that one day it would be possible to pursue them full-time.

Miya Tokumitsu (2014) discusses the idea of Doing What You Love (DWYL) as an expectation of work for people of my generation, where '[W]ork becomes divided into two opposing classes: that which is lovable (creative, intellectual, socially prestigious) and that which is not (repetitive, unintellectual, undistinguished).' In creative work, in particular, we are willing to sacrifice our free-time, work more for less, pursue unpaid internships and often work for free in exchange for the preeminent currency of the creative economy: recognition. Tokumitsu explains that DWYL is an ideological tool of capitalism that presents conditions of exploitation in a favourable light to the exploited, or in other words, presents work – particularly creative work – as advantageous to the socially disadvantaged. Through promotion of lifestyle, recognition and fame, the creative industries makes jobs desirable and at the very same time creates the conditions for self-exploitation and exploitation by employers. We may love the work, but we hate the stress and lack of financial security. It is difficult to find stability in a highly competitive environment where one constantly has to promote oneself in order to secure the next job. Angela McRobbie (2011) identifies the roots of the present situation in the UK in the emergence of the creative economy under New Labour, where the first generation of students graduated from art school with few job prospects and large amounts of debt. Young creative graduates have little choice but to attempt to turn their passions into a career in a 'talent-led economy' (McRobbie, 2011, p.7) which promotes individualism and competition. The nature of creative work in this scenario becomes 'permanently transitional' (McRobbie, 2002, p. 97), as workers skip from project to project without any long-term job security. I soon realised how this reality had become my own, even as I rejected participating in competitive industry.

In 2008 I moved to London to begin an MA in Culture Industry at Goldsmiths, University of London, to help put my work into perspective. It was also the beginning of the economic crisis, which had a large impact on the independent projects I was working on. The London I discovered was already saturated with artists and events. I did not want to compete with them or contribute to that already dense space. My work is always a response to the city: the people and possibilities (as well as the constraints) of a place. I felt more constraints than possibilities and it did not feel appropriate to continue the work in the same way. In times of economic crisis, we enter a space of withdrawal: there were more pressing issues at hand that needed to be addressed before we could really experiment freely again. At the same time, Goldsmiths taught me to see

the culture industry critically and understand my role within it as a cultural producer. I was contributing to the Creative Economy whether I liked it or not – to remain idle and passive was not an option and I began developing a new project which took a different form from the experimental events I was organising.

Precariousness

Soon after graduating I started an art/research collective called DOXA (www.doxacollective.org) with my collaborator Yuk Hui. We began organising a series of discussion events on 'Re-imagining Culture' which brought together artists, activists and collectives to discuss issues around the funding cuts to the arts, free and precarious labour, internships, and to find new models and strategies for cultural work in the current economic climate. We pursued projects not for the love of the work, but because we felt we could not continue our creative work in the same way and needed to take a step back to address our conditions of work first and foremost to find other ways of living and working together. Our creative practice became a research-, politics- and community-based form of work, bringing together groups with common concerns. We were informally organised and worked on a project-by-project basis due to limited time and resources. Our work critiqued the role of art in a market economy and the ways in which it was being appropriated into the neoliberal logics of the creative economy – through processes of gentrification and the branding of the city as well as the exploitation of the 'free' creative labour of artists. We were starkly aware of our own working conditions and role within an increasingly neo-liberalised economy – but we also had the desire to change it. Within the realms of the art world our work could be considered a form of 'socially engaged art' practice that, in Greg Sholette's overview (2015), 'attempts to bring about a system-wide reboot' (p. 98).

At the time of producing events with DOXA, I was also working freelance for arts organisations and creative start-ups. It was low paid but it allowed me the flexibility to pursue my independent work on the side. I worked for an Arts Council-funded organisation called Sound and Music producing digital projects and online video content. The organisation's funding was soon cut and projects dried up. I also worked in marketing for an online music start-up (now defunct) where I was essentially a paid intern for almost a year, but this also allowed me to take time off unpaid to attend residencies abroad. At the same time there were fewer opportunities and full-time jobs available in a labour market that became increasingly casualised as government cuts to the arts began to bite. I found myself in a typically precarious situation: Where precarity, as Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt (2008) note 'signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional

models of the political party or trade union.' (p. 3) Workers have fewer protections and social security as employers shift more towards freelance and temporary workers over full-time workers. Freelancers are naturally more precarious and require new political organisations to mobilise and defend worker's rights. It becomes more difficult to point fingers and to collectively mobilise when everyone has different and quite likely multiple employers. The financial burden is placed on our individual shoulders – though the system would say we have only ourselves to blame – or are there ways to find solidarity and instigate change in spite of these circumstances? The Carrot Workers Collective and Precarious Workers Brigade in the UK and Arts+Labour in the US are just a few groups working to defend labour rights for precarious workers within the arts and beyond. The work of DOXA continues to explore alternative models for collaboration as a means to address the precarious conditions of cultural work. It is long-term and ongoing as – symptomatically – we have limited means and time to organise whilst balancing other work.

Survival

In order to resist precariousness, I had to move outside of my field in the arts into the commercial creative industries, which includes marketing, PR and advertising. My first full-time position in the UK was in a creative agency in Shoreditch that developed mobile experiences for brands. It was my first time working in a commercial environment and I had little experience beyond my independent projects and non-profit work within the arts sector. I consciously chose not to pursue work in the arts given the cuts to funding, and the few low-paid jobs available at the time. I was not willing to pursue unpaid internships, due to the necessity to earn a livable wage. Survival became a priority as I needed to pay off student debts and find a more stable living situation before having the means to return to my independent work. In addition to debt, I also had minimum income requirements for my visa which I had to meet in order to stay in the country as someone from outside the EU. I was amongst the last of the applicants to receive the post-study work visa (now abolished) which allowed me more time to stay and work in the UK. These circumstances pushed me to find work in the commercial sector outside of my field. I made a conscious decision to attempt to separate work and life, where work is strictly something I do for a living, and any creative work I pursue is not under pressure to support my living. Working in the agency, I witnessed young designers and creatives working until midnight and on their weekends to complete jobs for clients on time. They were paid decently but were put – and put themselves – under high pressure. They loved producing creative content for high-profile brands, yet the flexibility of the working conditions also meant there was little work-life balance. In line with Mark Banks' (2014) discussion of the pleasures and possibilities of cultural work, I observed colleagues routinely 'being in the

zone' ('BITZ'): 'the optimal fusion of the productive mind and laboring body … while simultaneously normalising the self-exploiting surrender of body and soul to the economic principle.' (pp. 242–9)

Collaboration in the realm of the creative agency meant having a network of creative friends who have a wide range of skills from design, web, animation, photography, music etc. in order to source talent to realise a wide range of projects for brands. Socialising and making friends also becomes a way of finding someone to help on a project or finding new work. Being involved in the East London community most people work in the creative industries, often as freelancers and are highly networked as both their work and social lives become entwined. One's network also becomes one's brand and value that one brings to a company and also determines the jobs you get as a freelancer. Pandering to client expectations becomes a skill you have to learn to ensure that their money has been well spent. I quickly realised I didn't enjoy work in agencies, which have become a form of the contemporary factory for creative workers that churn out products and campaigns. I stayed only six months before seeking work elsewhere.

Following this period, I found a job at an online start-up called Sedition (www.seditionart.com) that distributes art in digital formats for display on screens and devices. It brought together my interest in art, technology and new models and platforms for art. Working full-time meant I had to put my independent projects aside for evenings and weekends. It was a step closer to bringing the work I do for a living and work that I love together. At the start-up, I started out as a community manager – managing the social media, promoting new artist launches and coordinating marketing events and projects. I had obligations to work full-time at a desk as a waged labourer, selling my time and body to a business. After work, I had little energy to pursue independent work with DOXA, though we have managed to produce projects, albeit over a much longer time scale. Juggling different modes of work are reflected in the practices, values and approaches to the work.

Reputation economy: Collective process vs. brand building

As a long-term project, the work of DOXA is something that does not have to produce profit or succeed as a business. It is a platform for developing and sharing ideas within a community to imagine and approach another future. These are projects and ideas that we could always return to when we find the means. The project is free to evolve with people and time as DOXA or as another entity for a different set of concerns that may be more pertinent to the times in a shifting economy. We can straddle different modes of thinking and working, but also understand the role it plays in our lives and our personal investments within them. On the one hand, working independently we struggle to find resources – we want to resist the market imperative for free labour yet our work with DOXA is always given freely. At times we have encountered disputes with

collaborators who have expected payment for participating in an event when none of us were paid except the designer of the poster for our event. To organise independently and informally requires trust and understanding that the work we are doing is not for personal gain. Regardless, we are generating value and building a reputation for ourselves by placing our names on promotional materials for events and listing them on our CVs as achievements. These were never the intentions, but we nonetheless find ourselves as participants in what Alessandro Gandini (2015) terms the 'reputation economy' (13).

Working in a creative digital tech start up brings the imperative for recognition and the value of reputation to the foreground as the pre-eminent means for creating a market and generating profit. My role at the start up was to promote new artworks and artists and leverage the names of renowned artists like Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst, Yoko Ono to sell the business through our online channels including social media, email, affiliate partnerships and events. I was using the reputation of artists as a currency to sell the idea of the platform as a new way to collect and value the artworks that were for sale. It's about who you know and the reputation of artists and institutions that you partner with, and leveraging contacts and building strategic alliances that would mutually benefit our brands. For instance, we would actively seek out partnerships with high-profile museums and institutions like London's Institute of Contemporary Art and Serpentine Galleries (and even give extra to the partnership in exchange for the association). Through the partnerships we would be validated by an established institution – essential as a relatively new start-up. At the same time, I could also build my personal profile as a professional in the arts: the job gave me the opportunity to work with artists whom I would otherwise not be able to access. Alison Hearn (2010) argues that 'reputation' is conditioned and, arguably, constituted by cultural and economic institutions that have the power to authorize and direct attention, and transmute that attention back into value.' (p. 423). Referring to the work of Adam Arvidsson and Nicolai Peitersen (2009), she describes the ways in which reputation has become the 'new standard of value' in the digital age. The reputations of artists are also built on their track record of exhibiting in recognised institutions; critics and art historians validate their work and in so doing establish its value within the art market. The processes of the start-up place emphasis around the necessity of building value by association through strategic partnerships with cultural institutions and the marketing of high-profile artists. All of this seeped into the need to develop my own personal brand as a professional in the industry.

On the one hand, with our independent work recognition is not the aim but rather a derivative of presenting work in the public realm. Many artists choose to disavow ownership in support of more collaborative models of practice and produce work under an anonymous collective name. For instance, *Reena Spaulings* is a collectively-authored novel by New York artist collective Bernadette Corporation (Corporation, 2005), written by multiple individuals providing a range of perspectives about a fictional character. The many individual

contributions are brought together under the collective's name. However in the commercial art market, authorial recognition is valued as the means of validating an artist's work and determining its value. It plays a role in marketing and building of brands to develop strategic associations with well-known institutions. Despite resisting the competitive individualisation that is so central to the reputation economy, at times we are compelled to claim ownership and quantify the value of our personal contribution when it comes to payment, fees or protecting our 'intellectual property'. It becomes an issue when independent work becomes self-sustaining, and deciding who has the privilege to take the credit to be allowed to work on the projects full-time without relying on other sources of income. In addition to our collaborative projects we continue to use our individual names on published articles and other texts.

Intellectual property vs. free culture

The creative industries generate revenue from intellectual property and proprietary content that is protected and sold to ensure profits go to those who hold the rights. In the same way, the start-up sells artworks as high-resolution videos and images that are distributed as digital limited editions. The works come with a digital certificate of authenticity which has the signature of the artist and edition number. In a sense going against the nature of the Internet where files are infinitely reproducible, the platform creates a false scarcity in which only a limited number of works are available for purchase. Employing forms of digital rights management (DRM) including watermarks on artwork previews which are removed after the work is purchased, works cannot be downloaded (to avoid any free distribution of the work online) but are delivered so they can be viewed on any device through the browser or using one of the free apps for iPhone, Android and Samsung Smart TV. The certificate of authenticity confirms that the user is the owner of that original edition from the artist (rather than an illegitimate copy). It reinforces the idea of original ownership and the value of limited works by notable artists. We have direct relationships with the artists and have contracts with them to distribute their work. The arrangement opens up a number of possible new revenue streams with a 50:50 net revenue share with the artist, though the artist retains the copyright to their work. As Sarah Brouillette (2009) has written, 'commercial value requires aesthetic value that only accumulates through disavowal of commerce, such that autonomy and market determination are an intimate dialectical pair.'(844)

In contrast to independent art circles there is a different kind of value circulating in free culture (Lawrence Lessig, 2004) and the open source movement – which values keeping creative content and software open to be used and altered to allow ideas to evolve and thrive, particularly with online work which can be easily shared. For artists who value free culture, this creates a problem in terms of how to make a living from selling one's work when it's available online for

free. By protecting the proprietary artwork, the start-up creates a model for artists to sell works in a limited format and create value through scarcity and also secondary sales through the trade platform. Once works have been sold out, they can be re-sold on the trade platform for any price. In many cases, the value will increase since they are no longer available for sale as such. Since so much content online is available for free, the start-up creates a means to sell digital artworks and secure its authenticity and value. Going against free culture, the works cannot be downloaded or removed from the platform. They are held securely in the Vault in your account. They are copyrighted works by artists – who might legally take you to court for any unauthorised use of their work.

With DOXA all our work is distributed online for free. We publish our texts and PDFs online which are free to be downloaded and viewed. Our interest is to share the knowledge globally to others who might find our work useful or enlightening when addressing the same questions. We support copyleft values where work is distributed freely, yet any derivatives must be distributed under the same conditions.

Open source software is distributed using licenses such as the GPL (General Public License) where anything incorporating open source software must itself be licensed as free software under the same terms. This enforces an ethic of sharing in the software development community and supports keeping knowledge open (as opposed to closed and proprietary). By keeping code open, a global community can contribute and continue to build and improve the code without limitations. It is still possible for commercial companies to use open source software, which is made available for free by charging for customer support and hardware. Open source is connected to the idea of the commons in the sharing of knowledge and resources that is not privately owned. Originally pertaining to natural resources, the digital commons relates to open access to knowledge (i.e. Wikipedia) and free use of digital assets including images, music, and videos. The copyleft movement and Creative Commons creates more flexible licensing for the use of creative works as a step towards a digital commons (Berry, 2008). Artists have explored the notions of the commons extensively in recent years. For example, Ele Carpenter's ongoing project Embroidered Digital Commons (2005–16) (Lacetti, 2006) invites people to embroider and stitch a lexicon around the digital commons as a shared language for understanding the term.

Enclosures of the commons occur in the privatisation of shared resources where we are required to pay for access to content and information. It can be said the limitations on the use of the artworks on the platform where they cannot be downloaded or freely used but only legitimately purchased with the certificate of authenticity marks the enclosure of creative work and limits access to those who can afford to purchase them (though works on the platform are more affordable than works in the traditional art market ranging from as low as £5 up to £1,000). Works can only be viewed with a watermark overlaid on the

Figure 11.1: Paolo Cirio, *Daily Paywall* (2014). Newsprint and plastic newsrack, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist.

video prior to purchase and in lower resolution. Watermarks do not appear on purchased artworks, which are available in high-resolution formats.

Artists have responded critically to these online enclosures, which are contradictory to the liberatory promise of the Internet in which information can be so readily available and distributed. An example would be paywalls for news websites like the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* which limit access without payment of a subscription fee. Artist Paolo Cirio created a project called *Daily Paywall* (2014) in which he hacked the paywalls of these news sites and made the articles available for free as a means to circumvent the enclosures on knowledge in today's digital economy. Readers could earn $1 for responding to quizzes on the featured articles as a reversal of economies. In a discussion on the digital commons with urban theorist Tim Waterman, he states: 'the commons will never be fully enclosed, because capitalism is dependent upon the commons to create value that it then marketises and financialises.' (Catlow and Waterman 2015). Waterman sees possibilities for resistance as the commons is lived and enacted. He says, 'It's not at all a contradiction to say that what is common is simultaneously enclosed, exploited, and liberatory. It's a matter of tipping the balance so that the creation of the commons outpaces its negation.' (Ibid)

Working commercially in a start-up and giving my labour freely as part of a research collective I am acutely aware of how these seemingly contradictory logics can co-exist. Artists can still distribute their work online for free, yet sell a version of the work on a canvas or digital frame in a gallery. On the one hand I necessarily have to invest my efforts in protecting intellectual property and ensuring payment for creative work, on the other hand I contribute work to the commons to be freely accessed by all – but with no remuneration in the case of my free labour and self-exploitation. In addition to the open and closed models of creative work, there are also horizontal and vertical models of organisation to consider.

Horizontal vs. vertical

Like most commercial businesses today, the start-up is organised hierarchically with a CEO, senior staff and junior staff. Though as a start-up it is much more flexible and roles and responsibilities are much more fluid and there a fewer layers of management where one may take on many responsibilities as part of a small team. When I started working at the start-up, I had a domineering, micro-managing boss who was relentless and very difficult with members of the team which reinforced the traditional power divides within the company. Many staff members were hired and fired at a fast rate due to clashes with the CEO. Hierarchies are reflected through pay and responsibilities. Members of the team report to the head of their department and respond to tasks handed down from their manager. There can be a level of competition to get the promotion and pay rise or stock shares. Cost cutting reduced the size of the team and the hierarchies are less drastic, but they still continue to exist.

This is in stark contrast to DOXA, where we choose to organise horizontally. Setting up the collective we researched flat models of organisations such as cooperatives, where ownership is shared, and pay and responsibility is equally distributed. Cooperatives promote peer learning where employees learn from each other and take on different roles in the company. With a long history dating back to the seventeenth century, cooperatives began primarily within the agricultural, insurance and banking industries but can be also applied to creative businesses. An example is Calverts, an art and design cooperative operating in East London for over thirty years. We invited them to present at an event titled*: Towards an Economy Of The Commons* at Chisenhale Gallery in 2010. Director Sion Whellens (cited in Wong, 2009–12, p. 150) describes cooperatives as 'an organization of men and women who come together to address their common social, cultural and economic needs.' As a flat organisational model, each member or employee of Calverts is a 'director' yet simultaneously has the responsibility of answering the phone - a task normally taken care of by lower level office administrators. As a small business, they operate with about 10 full-time members who are equally invested in the work and share the use of the

equipment for their personal creative projects. Members, who generally stay in the organisation for 10 years, share knowledge and skills through apprenticeships and help new staff step-up to their various roles. As an organizational model, Whellens described seven principles of a cooperative, which include:

1. An open and voluntary membership;
2. Democratic organisation (one member one vote);
3. Members in economic relationship with each other;
4. Autonomy from institutions, governments and corporations;
5. A model of education i.e. helping each other develop and learn professionally and in practice;
6. Cooperation with other cooperatives to create a larger economy of cooperatives around the world to develop a global movement and;
7. A mandate to provide sustainable development within the communities in which they operate.

Cooperatives present a model that is fair for their workers who have a say in the running of the business and receive have equal pay to all others in the company. Though often only able to operate successfully on a small scale, there are examples of larger cooperatives including Suma, a vegetarian and organic food wholesaler with over 140 employees / owners. For Brett Scott cooperatives are premised on 'risk-sharing between those who participate in the venture, and also common access to the common pool of what is created in the process' (quoted in Sharp, 2014). In a neoliberal economy where risk is increasingly placed on the individual with little social security, the cooperative redistributes risk across a support network, reducing the precariousness and associated anxieties individuals might otherwise experience.

Today tech companies are appropriating more horizontal management models like Agile which are often implemented within hierarchically organised companies. Agile is a business methodology that is widely used in IT businesses as a means to assist in effective self-management of technical teams where communication between each team member is made easier and issues are made visible in order for the team to respond to quickly and efficiently. It is management practice that supports close team working and communication, sharing of skills through pair programming, and constant reflecting on progress to make appropriate changes along the way in conversation with the primary stakeholder. The way of working is iterative and collaborative and intended to improve the productivity of project teams. In his recent exhibition *Products For Organising* at Serpentine Galleries, artist Simon Denny looks at corporate organisational structures including Agile and Halocracy (a horizontal, self-organising management structure) and draws links to hacker culture.

Management structures and methodologies have evolved to be more open and allow for levels of self-management where digital artisans or knowledge

Figure 11.2: Simon Denny: Products for Organising; Installation view, Serpentine Sackler Gallery; 25 November 2015 – 14 February 2016. Photograph © 2015 readsreads.info

workers feel more in control and capable of self-realisation – a mode of production that promises seemingly unalienated work. Tiziana Terranova (2000) has observed that '[K]nowledge workers need open organizational structures to produce, because the production of knowledge is rooted in collaboration...' She claims that '[T]he fruit of collective cultural labor has been not simply appropriated, but voluntarily channelled and controversially structured within capitalist business practices.' (Ibid, p. 39). Models of collaboration and self-organisation existing in what might be deemed the 'authentic' cultural labour of hackers and artists are adopted in order to draw value from knowledge workers – but with productivity, efficiency and ultimately profit in mind. Though many tech start-ups strive towards a flat management model, they are still relatively rare (Kastelle, 2013) and many still operate hierarchically particularly as they grow larger. Several notable horizontally organised tech companies like Valve (Warr, 2013) and Github (Finley, 2014) have also revealed the invisible hierarchies that continue to emerge in a workplace, which resemble the social dynamics of high school cliques.

Despite the blurring between horizontal and vertical now in the contemporary work environment, my experience in the creative tech start-up is still very strictly hierarchical, despite being a small team. At DOXA we have no formal structure. We strive to be collaborative and do not instill hierarchies. However,

hierarchies do naturally emerge even amongst individuals – between those who are older, more experienced or more outspoken. It is possible to practice models of consensus decision-making, though we are too informally organised to develop fully as a cooperative. It is however a case study we'd like to explore and develop for future projects.

Conclusion

Those of us involved in creative work in the digital economy are pushed to work multiple jobs and living an existence within contradictory values, investing our resources across commercial and non-commercial worlds. We willingly give our time and put our minds and bodies to work at all moments of the day, to the point where the separation between work and life breaks down. We are caught between practices of self-branding, protection of intellectual property, negotiation of competitive hierarchies, sharing of knowledge and resources, and the collaborative production of value that benefits the many over the few. We can also see the ways in which the industry appropriates ideas of collaboration and how neoliberalism cannot exist without the commons as it operates to monetise and financialise it.

Anton Vidokle discusses the dilemmas faced by artists and explores the possible economies for artists to support their work and living. He writes that 'art is suppressed under the specter of bohemia, condemning artists to a precarious and often alienating place in the day-to-day relations that hold other parts of society together.' Artists can alternatively take the route of Andy Warhol and embrace the market economy by promoting their own brand and artwork as commodity, but then they have their work 'regarded as mere craft'. Other artists will fall back on finding sponsors/patrons to support and legitimise their practice. He says, '[w]e are perfectly capable of being our own sponsors, which in most cases we already are when we do other kinds of work to support our art-work. This is something that should not be disavowed, but acknowledged openly. We must find the terms for articulating what kind of economy artists really want.' Vidokle recognises the value of balancing 'other kinds of work' to support one's art practice and to avoid allowing art becoming profitable as it is promoted in the creative economy. Many artists and cultural workers (like myself) will seek work within the industry to support independent practice. Other avenues such as education or academic fields have similar values to art practice,in contrast to pursuing work in the commercial industries, that might outrightly contradict an individual's own independent practice.

Increasingly we see artists reflexively interrogating these issues. For instance, in Maria Eichhorn's exhibition, *5 weeks, 25 days 175 hours* at Chisenhale Gallery, she asks the staff to take the five-week duration of the exhibition off work

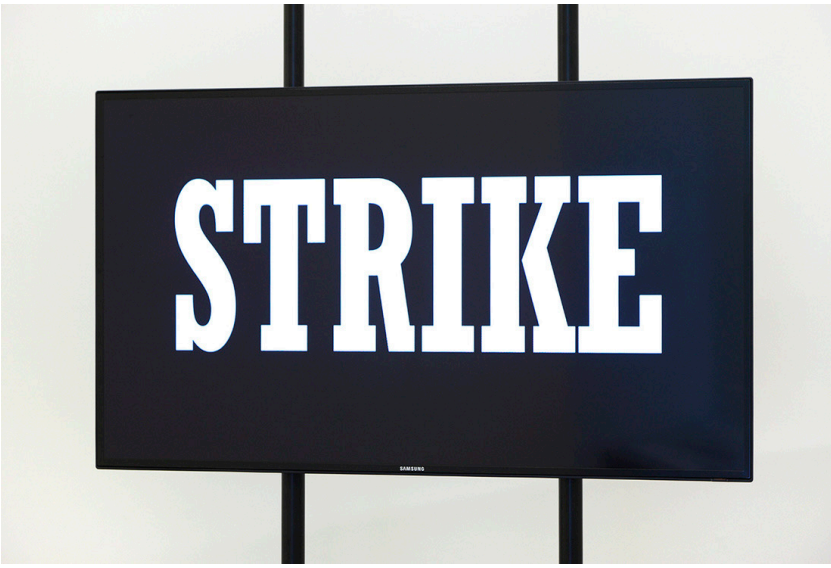

Figure 11.3: Hito Steyerl, *Strike*, 2010. Image courtesy of the Artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York.

and close the gallery. The project questions contemporary labour conditions in which leisure and free time is taken at the workplace and so ancillary staff are freed from their duties to explore their non-work interests whilst still being paid (Searl, 2016). The project suggests that the traditional weapon of labour – the strike – continues to offer scope for resistance against the demands of work. Yet the artwork also demonstrates why this traditional mode of resistance has receded in the creative economy. Hito Steyerl (2015) discusses the artist's strike where the current art economy relies on the physical presence of the artist. She explains that the artist's strike makes little sense when 'No one working in the art field expects his or her labour to be irreplaceable or even mildly important anymore. In the age of rampant self-employment or rather self-unemployment the idea that anyone would care for one's specific labour power seems rather exotic.' An artist strike could take the form of absenteeism in which a prop is used as a placeholder as a reminder of the absence of the artist which may otherwise go unnoticed.

The artist collective AutoItalia produced a project called *On Coping* in which artists shared their strategies in dealing with the current demands of the economy. Strategies include exploring hobbies as affordable therapy, processes of taking care of the self, and identifying pressures, absences and loopholes in one's life. Therapies are a way of coping with the situation, but do not resolve them. It eases the pain in a way that yoga and meditation have

become popularised as relief to our stressful lives. *On Coping* brings together artists to discuss their precarious and financially strained conditions and their creative approaches to coping. Additional propositions for the future of work are presented in Accelerationist theory which advocates technology as the primary means of liberating humans from the dictatorship that work has on our lives.

Writers like Paul Mason, as well as Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, approach ideas of post-capitalism which support the idea of full automation – where machines take over certain jobs and humans need to work less and less. This will be coupled with a universal basic income provided by the state which would abolish poverty. Mason (2015) believes the shift towards post-capitalism will be supported by free collaborative economies where information and resources are free and abundant. Srnicek and Williams envision '...building a post-work society on the basis of fully automating the economy, reducing the working week, implementing a universal basic income and achieving a cultural shift in the understanding of work.' (2015, p. 111) As the Left has lost the imagination for the future, these theorists attempt to posit a position we can take forward. There are many considerations when thinking about full automation particularly the kinds of work we expect machines to take over (including care work) and the risks of increasing machine intelligence to also self-create and self-update, yet the proposition of eliminating work and liberating us from our work identities frees us to imagine the possibilities of what we could do and desire for the world. Though full automation is still projected far into the future by several decades or more, it presents us a vision to collectively work towards starting at the present.

For the moment, as we can only speculate on a post-work world, we must continue our work in building the commons through models of sharing knowledge and resources, as well as by experimenting with ways of working cooperatively together. We may have to continue creating a separation between our for-profit and non-profit work that we do to support our living, but to continually defend the commons and understand the ways in which we are exploited in the neoliberal creative economy so as to limit the damage – to ourselves but just as importantly to the communities we work among. There are ways in which we can move towards another future, by pursing the important work that we do (outside the work we do to survive). These different economies can co-exist as we find models between the commercial and non-commercial work as we have in the current climate to find the means to pursue the work we truly value. We can fight for fairer contracts and government support for freelancers and precarious workers, and lobby for a universal basic income (soon to be trialled in Ontario, Canada) (MacDonald, 2016; Segal, 2016). Above all it is necessary to create time and space to find new ways of living and working that might enable us to approach alternative visions of the future in an economy that is fairer for all.

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