

# Hope labour and the psychic life of cultural work

human relations  
2021, Vol. 74(11) 1841–1863

© The Author(s) 2020



Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/0018726720940777

[journals.sagepub.com/home/hum](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/hum)



Ewan Mackenzie  and Alan McKinlay  
Newcastle University, UK

## Abstract

How do we understand the psychic life of cultural workers under neoliberalism? ‘Hope labour’ is a defining quality of a cultural worker’s experience, practice and identity. Hope labour is unpaid or under-compensated labour undertaken in the present, usually for exposure or experience, with the hope that future work may follow. Hope labour is naturalised by neoliberal discourses but not fully determined by them. Drawing upon empirical research investigating the ‘creative industries’ in the North East of England, we ask how hope labour is made meaningful and worthwhile for cultural workers positioned as entrepreneurial subjects, despite its legitimisation of power asymmetries. We develop Foucauldian studies of governmentality by addressing how cultural work is lived through neoliberal categories, demonstrating the conflicting discourses and relations to self involved in the constitution of entrepreneurial subjectivity. We make a novel contribution to an understanding of hope and precarity by illustrating how cultural workers begin to occupy the site of the entrepreneurial subject amidst conflicting configurations of hope, desire, anxiety and uncertainty.

## Keywords

cultural work, governmentality, hope labour, neoliberalism, psychic life

## Introduction

Significant changes in the landscape of work in industrialised economies over the past four decades have been well documented. The proliferation of precarious work, job

---

### Corresponding author:

Ewan Mackenzie, Newcastle University Business School, 5 Barrack Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4SE, UK.

Email: [ewan.mackenzie@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:ewan.mackenzie@newcastle.ac.uk)

insecurity and the deregulation of waged labour is coupled with fundamental changes to the welfare state and a shift from state-led provision to social insecurity (van Dyk, 2018). The politics of activation (Moisander et al., 2018), coupled with the politics of austerity (Clarke and Newman, 2012), have encouraged informal, impermanent, unpaid and voluntary-led responses to structural problems, transferring risks onto individuals made responsible for the social costs of work and the risks of fractured labour markets (Dowling and Harvie, 2014; Smith and McKinlay, 2009). In contemporary neoliberalism, free labour is both exploited and enjoyed, voluntary and unwanted. It is a source of value that remains relatively unacknowledged, despite its disruptive impact on labour markets. Free labour is not simply appropriated, but voluntarily offered and structured within business practices and social relations that are not directly managed and often go unquestioned (Beverungen et al., 2015; Terranova, 2013). Since the 2008 financial crash, free labour, token-wage work, casualisation, outsourcing and ‘flexploitation’ have proliferated (Ross, 2017). Ill-defined ideas of ‘passion’ and ‘fun’ have become dominant tropes, embedding the idea that work is that which allows the individual to self-actualise (McRobbie, 2016). The onus has been placed on, and assumed by, individuals as the bearers of structural ambiguity and as socially engaged ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ (Foucault, 2008).

Cultural and ‘creative’ work is an exemplar of deregulated, ‘flexible’ and precarious work, foreshadowing and echoing the conditions of neoliberal work and employment (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Loacker, 2013; McRobbie, 2016). Yet cultural work is also a site of struggle, mediated through a confusing mixture of opportunity and uncertainty, where responsibilities become individualised yet ‘hope’ also manifests in care for self-worth, duty to others, and a sense of artistic, community and social responsibility (Alacovska, 2019; Banks, 2007; Cinque et al., 2020; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010). Although the labour process of cultural work may provide various experiences of liberation and ‘empowerment’, this is coupled with a trend of deteriorating funding and support, employment conditions and pay (McGuigan, 2010; Ross, 2017). Social networks are addressed not just as collaborative coping mechanisms but as economic assets to be grown and managed (Antcliff et al., 2007). Dependency on network contacts and sociability is valorised, and governmental strategies emphasise the circulation of ‘human capital’ and ‘creative capacity’ (Loacker, 2013; McRobbie, 2016; Smith and McKinlay, 2009). Studies of cultural work have tended to focus on contradictions between creative autonomy and capitalist cultural production (Banks, 2010). Here, however, we instead examine the discourses and technologies of power through which unpaid and under-compensated labour is made meaningful for cultural workers. ‘Hope labour’ is understood as unpaid or under-compensated labour undertaken in the present, usually for exposure or experience, with the hope that future work opportunities may follow (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013). In this article, we expand the conceptual relevance of hope labour by illustrating its role as a ‘resource’ for highly individualised cultural workers, even when their creative and cultural practice is collective. We illustrate how hope labour obscures the exploitative realities of unpaid or under-compensated cultural work among those who seek subsistence or autonomy in their work. Yet, we also show how hope labour is animated by desires for creative and personal fulfilment that both combine and contrast with the imperatives of market rationalities. We add a unique and

critical contribution to studies of hope labour by illustrating an ambivalent mixture of competitive, conflicting and contradictory relations to self in the constitution of entrepreneurial subjectivity.

Following Foucault (1982), we address autonomy as that which is both negotiated and governed in contemporary neoliberalism. Autonomy confronts power obliquely through complex historically situated practices. Hope labour offers novel insights into how these practices are 'lived out' by cultural workers. Conceptually, hope labour expands the free labour debate by placing an emphasis on the individual as a future-oriented productive subject pursuing a logic of investment (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013). Various outlined as 'aspirational labour' (Duffy, 2016), 'speculative labour' (Gregg, 2015) and 'prospecting labour' (Fast et al., 2016), hope labour is negotiated and naturalised through neoliberal discourses that frame the self as an enterprise (McNay, 2009). We develop a distinct approach to hope labour by drawing on Foucault's governmentality (Foucault, 1982, 1991a). Governmentality has obscured practice as a situated, agentive and temporal process in the conduct of everyday life (McKinlay et al., 2012; Walters, 2012). We address this limitation by examining the psychic life of cultural work and the practices of the self that serve to constitute subjectivity. Following Butler's work on processes of subjectification in her seminal work *The Psychic Life of Power* (Butler, 1997), as well as an emerging body of work exploring the psychic life of neoliberalism (Baker and Kelan, 2019; Binkley, 2011; Krce-Ivančić, 2018; Scharff, 2016), we illuminate a double valence of power that simultaneously subordinates and produces, negotiated through self-inspection, and self-beratement: where competitive reasoning begins to focus inwards in the performative constitution of entrepreneurial subjectivity (Scharff, 2016). We examine the conflicting and complementary relations to self that render 'hope labour' as viable and meaningful for cultural workers. We must consider the political and managerial exploitations of cultural work, but also the meanings that constitute a resource for cultural workers confronting everyday precarity (Alacovska, 2019; Cinque et al., 2020). This article makes an original and theoretical contribution to studies of the psychic life of neoliberalism by examining the different and often intimate ways in which hope labour is performed and made meaningful through cultural work. In the next section, we discuss the valorisation of the creative and artist subject, before moving on to outline our theoretical approach to governmentality studies and the psychic life of cultural work.

## Valorising the 'creative' subject

In the past two decades, influential commentators have argued that industrialised economies are increasingly dependent on creativity fused with business acumen as a key facilitator for economic growth. Florida's (2002) concept of the 'creative class' ignored the social history of labour mobility, influencing urban policy that depended on an imaginary 'class' of affluent and mobile graduates as harbingers of a new 'creative economy'. Critiques of Florida's 'creative class' point to the unsupported abstraction of 'creatives' as an occupational category (Smith and McKinlay, 2009), and the effects of such thinking upon urban policy that exacerbated social divisions through gentrification and inequality (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015). In the UK, the establishment of the 'creative industries' (CI), the motif of 'creative economic policy' established by 'New Labour' in

1997, shaped an international standard for the colonisation of art and culture into the market's system (De Peuter, 2011). A new era of managerialism and entrepreneurialism was accompanied by efforts to further diminish the power of trade unions, echoing the preceding era of Thatcherism and a further shift towards the depoliticisation of work and employment (Hall, 2011; McRobbie, 2016). This period signalled a further departure from European traditions based on 'art for art's sake' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979), where state funding was based on the principle that autonomy for art and culture is essential, and insulated from the market, to a shift towards business, project organisation and corporate patronage (Banks, 2007).

CI definitions came to include a variety of spheres of 'creative', artistic and cultural work with different orientations, aesthetic principles, arrangements and resources, categorised on the basis of their potential to regenerate urban areas and create wealth and jobs (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015). 'Creativity' is outlined through CI policy discourse as that which can be transformed into economic, social and cultural 'value' and 'capital' (Böhm and Land, 2009; Townley et al., 2009). Such discourses emphasise self-government and enterprise in parallel with the contraction of state support for creative and artistic work. Subsidisation of artistic and cultural projects, organisations and activities are governed *economically* (Böhm and Land, 2009; Lee, 2017). Cultural workers, similarly, are required to 'invest' in self-presentation and brand identities as socially engaged subjects, while demonstrating the 'value' of their work.

McRobbie (2016) argues that 'passion' for work has become a normative requirement, especially in the 'creative economy'. Continuous attentiveness to opportunities, new contracts and projects involves modes of self-government through which one must continually manage one's public presence and portfolio, and accelerate accumulation. A key question for McRobbie (2016) is why the figure of the artist has moved centre-stage in policy debates on the future of work over the past two decades, as the artist has historically been associated with sporadic earnings and uncertain employment. Yet, it is the valorisation of this subject that is noteworthy, as one who is typically self-employed, in possession of an individualised set of transferable skills, ever ready to embrace the risk inherent in project-based careers. Cultural work is a test site for a 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011), where welfare-free employment policies idealise 'creativity' and the artist as symbolising hope and determination. The artist's creative and working life has become a model for how careers and jobs may take shape in the neoliberal era, where risks are transferred to individuals and employers are freed from the costs entailed in standard employment. Even when cultural workers appear to have employment status, project work implies a need to be hired for the next project, involving an acquiescence to long hours and an unwillingness to contest unfair working practices (Huws, 2019). The result is a form of governmentality that relies upon the valorisation and naturalisation of precarious labour conditions. Desire for change is directed away from the socio-political sphere and towards the self, as individual hopes and desires tend to eclipse concerns for the long-term collective health of cultural work (De Peuter, 2014; Scharff, 2016). Important here, however, is the degree to which this governmental programme is able to subsume aspects of 'creative', 'cultural' and 'artistic' discourses and practices into market rationalities, and how effective neoliberal discourses are at absorbing that which has historically been located beyond their reach (Huws, 2019; Lorey, 2009).

The creative turn is more than a matter of redeveloping CI sectors, but a more fundamental shift in the way in which capitalism is structured through the expansion of deregulated labour (De Peuter, 2011). 'Creativity' has become a political object for economic growth, job creation and labour reform (McRobbie, 2016). The image of the CIs produces a managerial agenda that valorises flexibility, project working, contracts, sociability and networking. Notions such as 'following your passion' efface the lines between labour and leisure, and naturalise cultural work as involving long hours of unpaid or under-compensated hope labour (Lorey, 2015). Precarity is the necessary trade-off for creative autonomy or developing a career through self-employment. Indeed, to knowingly choose free or underpaid work in exchange for autonomy is a common reasoning for unpaid or under-compensated labour in cultural work (Alacovska, 2018; Loacker, 2013). This echoes the exploitative conditions of, for example, college and university internships (Hora et al., 2020), where those who cannot afford to work for little or no pay are shut out (Perlin, 2012). Yet for cultural and creative labour, 'work', suggests Ekman (2014: 145), becomes 'a stage for self-actualization' and heartfelt enthusiasm rather than a contractual or hierarchical obligation, even if this is understood to risk managerial and self-exploitation (Cinque et al., 2020: 2). Cultural workers make sense of their labour through discourses of selfless responsibility to others, sacrificing economic return to follow one's dream, and the necessities of practicing creativity and self-care (Banks, 2007; Cinque et al., 2020; McRobbie, 2016). Cultural and creative work also involves what Huws (2019: 87) describes as 'really free labour', a form of personal fulfilment that cannot be subsumed into economic rationalities, and where workers willingly trade financial rewards with artistic freedom or public recognition when negotiating with clients or employers. Yet, however compelling, the image of the self-exploiting, self-determining and risk-embracing cultural worker provides little insight into how cultural workers produce everyday expressions of 'cruel optimism' through their hope labour.

Furthermore, there are questions around the appropriation of practices and discourses, those historically associated with artistic, feminist and leftist movements, into new forms of neoliberal governmentality. Cultural workers have not typically been understood as submissive populations (De Peuter, 2014), yet, to voluntarily choose unpaid or under-compensated labour to gain autonomy in one's work is no longer an act of dissent (Lorey, 2009, 2015). Rather, it is precisely such alternative forms of living and working that have become naturalised and obvious in their governmental function (McRobbie, 2016). The paradox between domination and 'empowerment', then, to which hope labour is central, is a defining experience of cultural work. For example, in Loacker's (2013) analysis of the independent Austrian theatre scene, a central concern of those subject to the regime of the CIs was to practise care for their art rather than their economic situation. The artists wished for their work to remain outside of prevailing economic orders, while encouraging critical scrutiny of economic rationalities. The paradox, however, is that ideals such as self-responsibility and passion for one's work dovetailed with neoliberal logics of individuals as self-organised, creative, flexible and risk-taking entrepreneurs. As an expert of self-organised project work, of passion and enthusiasm located beyond the bounds of waged labour, the artist comes to exemplify and embody the possibilities of a liberated, individualised and deregulated field of work. Loacker (2013) suggests that modern forms of liberal capitalism are mutable and adaptive, capable of absorbing

critique by assimilating them into governmental objectives (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Neoliberal rationalities are thus not obvious or unequivocal in their effects among those involved in 'flexibilised' forms of cultural work. In the following section, we discuss the theoretical approach that we adopt in order to ask how hope labour is rendered meaningful for cultural workers.

## **Neoliberal governmentality and the psychic life of cultural work**

Governmentality implies that power and knowledge are radically dispersed in strategies predicated upon increasing individual 'freedom', while reducing the role of a given state or administration. It is not a question of regulating 'free' subjects, but a question of how 'free' subjects are constituted, and how they constitute themselves through reflexive processes of subjection (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1991a). Governmental strategies gain legitimacy not by serving vested interests but in the degree to which they are rendered natural and neutral. In this way, 'government' does not point to state institutions, but to the activities and practices that may shape the conduct of others (McKinlay and Pezet, 2017). 'Government' as 'the conduct of conduct' encompasses issues of morality and ethics in the idea of 'self-government' (Miller and Rose, 2008). Self-government implies that the 'governor' and the 'governed' are two aspects of the same actor, be that a human individual or a collective such as a social movement or an organisation. These forms of reflection are made 'governmental' (rather than philosophical, theoretical or moral) through their ambition to make themselves practical, producing a connection with practices that give them effect. 'Government', recalling early modern connotations, assumes a close link between power relations and processes of subjectification (Foucault, 1982). It is a 'contact point' between techniques of 'freedom' and techniques of the self, implying forms of agency and self-direction (Foucault, 1988: 19). Importantly, however, self-government does not solely make the self and others 'governable': there is always the potential *not* to be governed through existing rationalities. In conditions of neoliberal governmentality there is ambivalence among the governed, and notably, as we report on here, ambivalence *within* self-government itself (Lorey, 2015; Scharff, 2016).

In neoliberalism, subjects are obliged to address themselves in terms of their 'human capital' and their 'marketability', as autonomous and enterprising entrepreneurs responsible for their own 'investments' (Gershon, 2011; Weiskopf and Munro, 2012). Individuals are designated as agents of their own trajectories, capable of navigating precarious situations with scant guidelines for action, and where the career is made in relation to the self, not the organisation (Svejenova, 2005). This mode of reasoning dissolves the distinction between labour and capital, work and leisure, producing an image of the self as a productive and individualised subject (Read, 2009). The concept of human capital 'plays a distinctive role as a vehicle for extending the economic grid deeper into the fabric of social relations and for exercising a specific form of power which does not operate through the imposition of social conformity' (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012: 690). Rather, human capital produces effects, where the extension of economic reasoning into new areas produces new identities, and new configurations of 'freedom' and 'hope'. The



neoliberal imperative to become an ever-more active and competitive subject is experienced as ambivalence between desire and anxiety, since ‘the entrepreneur of herself is left on her own to choose the most appropriate way to work on her competitiveness’ (Krcce-Ivančić, 2018: 263). The will to survive and perhaps thrive is an inherently exploitable desire that is impossible to satisfy fully (Butler, 1997). Critiques of the socio-political are reframed as critiques of the self, as the logic of competition is turned inwards and experiences of inequality and failure become individualised (Baker and Kelan, 2019; Scharff, 2016). Hope labour promises deferred security, stability and possibility, while simultaneously exacerbating exploitative labour conditions through ideals of individual ‘enterprise’ in the present (Alacovska, 2019; Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013).

Governmentality research has worked from official texts and programmes with scant reference to individual or collective agents (Barratt, 2008; Fournier and Grey, 1999; Walters, 2012). The claim of excess generalisation is based on a tendency to prioritise the programmer’s perspective as ‘mentalities of rule’ (McKinlay and Pezet, 2017). Governmentality creates the conditions for certain sorts of individual freedoms to be exercised, for specific types of individual to be imagined, measured and managed or, better still, to manage themselves. Yet, how neoliberal subjectivities are ‘lived out’ remains opaque. In Butler’s (1997) seminal work, *The Psychic Life of Power*, the subject is a result of an emergent process of subjection, where there is both a calling from ‘without’ as well as an inner rumination in terms of the self’s relation to self. The psychic form that power takes thus involves ‘a turning back upon oneself or even a turning *on* oneself’ (Butler, 1997: 3), where subjection implies a recurrent and equivocal state of becoming. In this view, subjectification is conceptualised as social practice, and is never completely reducible to prevailing neoliberal rationalities (Binkley, 2011). Different features of the psyche are given conflicting positions within a relation of ambivalence (Butler, 1997). Determinism is thus replaced by uncertainty, doubt, and competing and conflicting relations to self among those positioned as entrepreneurial subjects. As we illustrate below, these conflicting relations to self are not restricted to specific groups, such as elite orchestral musicians (Scharff, 2016), but can encompass diverse forms of cultural and creative labour in the play of ‘hope’ labouring, echoing the conditions of neoliberal work and employment more generally.

## Methodology

Our research is part of a larger project designed to understand the scope and nature of the ‘creative’, ‘digital’ and ‘IT’ sectors in the North East of England in 2017. The project’s first stage was a survey of a 10% sample of the region’s ‘creative industries’ (CIs), defined in accordance with the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) methodology (DCMS, 2014). The survey design was influenced by sense checks from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) and Financial Analysis Made Easy (FAME) databases, which confirmed a high proportion of ‘micro-businesses’ in the region (over 80% of the CI sector): those with 0–9 employees. Reports of a growth in self-employment (or freelance work) across Europe, with the UK experiencing a 36 per cent rise from 1.40m to 1.91m between 2008 and 2015, and strongly represented by CI sub-sectors (IPSE, 2015), confirmed the importance of freelance work. The survey

adopted the ONS Labour Force Survey (LFS) definition of freelancers as those who run businesses that do not employ people other than themselves. Our survey returned a response from 224 self-declared freelancers.

The survey included questions about unpaid labour among freelancers: how many hours of unpaid labour per week and why. We then identified survey respondents who reported high levels of free labour for interview. We also engaged with and interviewed freelancers and micro-businesses in the sector willing to discuss their experiences of unpaid and under-compensated labour. This forms our data. Our survey reported a mean of 13 hours' unpaid labour per week by freelancers across all CI sectors. The highest means, excluding the micro-sub-sector of crafts, were reported in the music, performing and visuals arts (17 hours per week) and design (16 hours per week) categories. Those in music, performing and visuals arts and design, as well as advertising and marketing, were most likely to highlight 'passion' and enjoyment of work to justify their unpaid hours (again excluding crafts). Additionally, younger respondents (born from 1985 onwards) and female respondents were more likely to cite passion and enjoyment of their work, skills enhancement and extending one's network as justifications for unpaid labour (O'Flynn and Petersen, 2007; Scharff, 2016). Passion and enjoyment of work, as well as 'upholding reputation', were significant motivations for unpaid labour among those who began self-employment within the last 5 years.

Interviewees were selected based on self-survey reports of high levels of unpaid work as well as through engaging with active freelancers, micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses in the CIs. Interviews were also undertaken with key agents involved in the promotion of CI sectors. We interviewed 30 participants. Our freelance participants were principally from the music, performing, visuals arts, and design categories, which reported some of the highest levels of unpaid labour. We also interviewed participants from the advertising and marketing and publishing categories, which reported an average of 9 hours per week of unpaid labour in both sectors and passion or enjoyment as a significant justification. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour, and focused on the ways in which participants addressed themselves as cultural, entrepreneurial and artistic subjects. Experiences and understandings of unpaid or under-compensated labour were explored in terms of how it was made meaningful in relation to life and work. We used flexible interview prompts that were amended as interviews progressed, allowing participants to speak in their own voice and introduce their own relevant issues, giving context to their working lives (Cochran, 1990).

Our data analysis adopted a 'Foucauldian' approach to the investigation of particular discourses (Foucault, 2008) identified in the discursive strategies of participants (Alvesson and Karreman, 2011). The methodological commitments of Foucauldian discourse analysis propose the examination of relations of power, discourse and the historical constitution of individuals and groups as subjects (Foucault, 1980, 1982). The composition of subjectivity is dependent on norms that are facilitated through structures of recognition. Yet these norms are not deterministic, and emerge and fade depending on the operation of power in specific contexts (Raffnsøe et al., 2016). In this way 'discourse' refers to distinctive ways in which to talk about events, objects and selves. Our analysis adopts an iterative approach between empirical material and theory to investigate how



participants relate to their labour, others and the self (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011). By paying attention to discursive rules, as ‘what counts as what’, our analysis remains sensitive to linguistic practices as they emerged. Selves in this sense are located in discourse, and what becomes important is not so much the interpretation but rather the discursive rule it serves (Potter and Wetherall, 1987). The accounts discussed here are not reflections of a given ‘reality’, but instead utterances that have effects. In Foucault’s own genealogical work, for example, knowledge and truth exist, but only insofar as they apply to particular discursive contexts and historical circumstances (Foucault, 1991b).

## Learning and ‘human capital’

The economisation of life under neoliberalism has become so exhaustive that people recognise themselves as a business (Brown, 2015). Individual autonomy, rather than being positioned in opposition to state or managerial control, becomes a vehicle for neoliberal agency as self-responsibility consistent with market rationalities (Gershon, 2011). Managing oneself was taken for granted by freelance respondents, accustomed to regarding learning as the accumulation of ‘human capital’. As this freelance artist and curator commented,

I personally prefer being lighter on my feet and prefer to be able to move from project to project. And that way I kind of feel, personally, that I develop at a faster rate in terms of my knowledge and ability than if I’m locked into a pattern. (Freelance artist and curator, Male, 43)

Here, the self is both an economic object and an improvable subject that demands the management of how one should accumulate learning experiences and abilities (‘to move from project to project . . . I develop at a faster rate in terms of my knowledge and ability’). Such comments were rarely accompanied by references to changeable or uncertain employment circumstances, but rather stressed the self-management of the accumulation of skills and knowledge. To be a creative worker was to be entrepreneurial: both hinged on self-reliance. As this freelance artist and curator continued, while stressing the importance of accruing a range of skills,

It’s like a classic kind of Darwinian thing that if you’re adaptable you survive. If you can evolve, you can survive in a turbulent market. And the art market is as turbulent as it gets . . . You don’t see many adverts in the newspapers for electronic installation artists. They don’t exist. So, it was that moment of realising that I have to be able to perform a number of tasks I guess is something that’s carried throughout my whole career. (Freelance artist and curator, Male, 43)

As one diversifies learning and abilities in alignment with the labour market, the risk of failure is mitigated (‘if you’re adaptable you survive. If you can evolve, you can survive in a turbulent market’). The figure of the entrepreneur is defined as one in almost constant transition, supplementing an unprofitable activity with other more profitable activities through the enhancement of one’s ‘human capital’ (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012). The entrepreneurial self was *necessarily* incomplete. Our respondents grappled with

the singular imperatives of neoliberalism. The practice of free labour was rendered meaningful and worthwhile because it could aid the development of one's competences as 'investments' to be deployed and thus amortised in the future. As this freelance composer, digital sound recordist and software developer described,

The other problem is, for me, that I'll always pursue some new little trick to learn, for myself, so I'm not very good at telling myself that this thing I've spent all night figuring out is for the client, and I should be paid for it. I think 'well, I'll use that in the future, therefore it's my own learning, therefore it's my own professional value, therefore I shouldn't get paid for it'. It's ridiculous. I may never use it again, and if I do, well, hey, that's experience and you're paying for experience. (Freelance composer, digital sound recordist and software developer, Male, 33)

Human capital operates as a technology of the self to the extent that learning is marketable ('therefore it's my own learning, therefore it's my own professional value'). The 'hope' in such labour recognises the inherent risk in how the investment in learning *may* be amortised by an improved, more valuable future self ('therefore I shouldn't get paid for it . . . I think 'well, I'll use that in the future'). Free labour is both a business problem ('I'm not very good at telling myself that . . . I should be paid') and a potential economic gain for an economised project of the self ('I'll use that in the future . . . it's my own professional value'). Responsibility for amortising improved human capital is wholly the individual's. The process of subjectification entails that the burdens of neoliberal discourses are willingly assumed and turned inwards by the individual. Unfavourable labour conditions are translated into the sole responsibility of the 'hope' labourer. The logic of competition is focused inward: any possible critique of the social is reframed as a critique of the self ('I'm not very good at telling myself that this thing I've spent all night figuring out is for the client, and I should be paid for it').

At other times, participants described a proactive engagement with unpaid and under-compensated labour. One app developer, seeking to establish herself as a reputable freelancer, when discussing her life partner (another aspiring freelance app developer), described a programme of self-development through working for others for little or no payment: 'He always likes to learn. He's basically a workaholic . . . He wants to learn all these new programme languages and stuff and, like, these [hope labour projects] kind of force him to do that' (Freelance App Developer, Female, 22). This, again, produces an image of a self-investing individual managing oneself to better accrue human capital. Yet these descriptions of learning also included references to the intrinsic value of the creative process and the meaningfulness of one's work to both oneself and others: 'So a lot of the [hope labour] projects we work on are, like, fun . . . we're doing a special sort of tablet app for vegans, and that's obviously stuff that we'd use . . . and so can anyone else who wants to' (Freelance App Developer, Female, 22). Undertaking free or under-compensated creative work is meaningful and worthwhile, insofar as it resonates with personal and social interests. To be outside the mainstream, to have only fleeting experiences of organised hierarchy or being managed, was understood as a precondition of creativity and personal development (Petriglieri et al., 2019: 129–131). This reflects and ratifies the reasoning that cultural workers must exchange unpaid and under-compensated work for meaning, self-determination and autonomy. Yet it also illustrates how progressive

social and political values may co-exist with, and even complement, economic rationalities (Banks, 2006). As this freelance artist and curator commented, when discussing social responsibility as an aspect of his work,

If there is anything that is in any way . . . usable by others, then I tend to open source it or release it over Creative Commons. So, I don't own it. Well I do, I'm the creator and I apply a license to it, but then with Creative Commons I tend to apply one of the most liberal Creative Commons licenses that I can. I just want a bit of credit for it, because I've got to market myself somehow. (Freelance artist and curator, Male, 43)

The intersection between collective creative autonomy and the 'marketable' professional self appears to be, in this case, agreeable. Being associated with the work that one produces does not just reflect pride in one's achievement, but also constitutes the means to build a reputation and secure future work (Huws, 2019). This naturalises the image of the precarious cultural worker as one who negotiates a line between paid work and creative autonomy, without conceptualising the two domains as incompatible or irreconcilable (Loacker, 2013; Lorey, 2009).

## Exposure and 'networked' reputation

Beyond the role of human capital in a project of the self, hope labour was invested with other economic meanings – specifically, the creation of a professional or 'networked' identity to gain paid work in the future. As this aspiring freelance editor commented,

I think there's this idea that you should be . . . engaging with things that you know your audience is going to find interesting. I guess that's, kind of, why I'm on it [social media] as well, you know, I'm not just on it for my interests. I am on it to market my freelance work, so essentially if I'm never saying anything, that's not really helping. Often when I have said things it's been quite a good free marketing tool, really to just talk about the kind of work you're doing . . . whereas before you perhaps wouldn't think of posting it. (Freelance editor, Female, 30)

Voluntary online social production constitutes a form of 'hope labour' in the production of a professional identity. Producing voluntary content aligns with a desire to gain recognition from the labour market that one hopes to enter. As this ostensibly optimistic freelance editor explained: 'I would hope that people would associate me with [the labour market I want to work in] . . . and that I'm potentially available for work' (Freelance editor, Female, 30). Digital media is not a cause of unpaid or under-compensated labour, but rather a mechanism that naturalises the deregulation of labour by blurring the line between work and non-work activities, employment and free labour, through the economisation of social domains (Beverungen et al., 2015). As this freelance editor elucidated,

So, I guess I hope to give a kind of overview of the sort of work I do . . . I mean [social media] is a bit more personal as well, they might get an idea of the slightly more fun things that you put out on [social media] and aspects of your personality as well, so it's not all 100% business . . . you also need to show that you're a human being and not just a kind of cold marketing sort of person. (Freelance editor, Female, 30).

A mixture of personal, social and economic relations to self are not easily distinguishable as the opportunity for self-realisation revolves not just around paid work, but also the hope of being recognised as both a competent and socially engaged productive subject.

Labouring in the hope of developing a reputation or gaining exposure was not, however, limited to the digital domain. Free labour was widely understood as a necessary precondition to paid employment: creative value must be demonstrated before economic value can be delivered. As this more established freelance writer and artist commented, when reflecting upon his transition into more stable work,

You're applying [for grants] but you haven't got the portfolio or the experience in order to be able to prove that you can do what you're applying for . . . so there's this trap . . . there are less opportunities, they are more competitive . . . Often organisations will take advantage of that with young and inexperienced people. In a sense it does get over a particular problem that that young and inexperienced person has, that they then have something in their portfolio that they can present. So, it's not a completely one-way kind of exploitative relationship. I would say it's more complicated than that. It's perhaps something that's, kind of, culturally accepted within the sector as necessary . . . and also I think in wider society people will feel like the artist has to prove that they deserve to earn their living . . . To be able to get the work, that does mean engaging with people and not being paid for it. (Freelance writer and artist, Male, 40)

The image of the 'worthy' cultural worker is one who has become economically viable in the eyes of wider society after engaging in free labour ('the artist has to prove that they deserve to earn their living'). This outlines unpaid work, for those able to afford it, as an obligation: a legitimate pathway to finding future work despite its unintended, negative effects on a given labour market or sector (Siebert and Wilson, 2013). The consumption of art and culture is rendered more noteworthy than the creative process itself, or indeed the precarious labour conditions that an aspirational, youthful, or inexperienced cultural worker may be subject to. It becomes the responsibility of the hope labourer to ensure that they receive a return on their investments. As this freelance writer and artist continued,

The way that I approached that situation was that I was very tactical about what I did when I was starting out, so that I made sure that the [hope labour projects] I was doing were really going to get me to where I wanted to go in the long run, and I wasn't just doing a load of stuff for free . . . eventually you have to start to pull back on [free labour] a bit in order to be able to earn a living once you start getting experienced enough. (Freelance writer and artist, Male, 40)

The self-image of the cultural worker is one who assumes responsibility for their future 'human capital' regardless of structural inequalities. Hope labour is legitimised as a rite of passage; precarity must be embraced as a symbol of 'passion', where 'most people experience the situation where they begin by doing [free labour] . . . you know, "I want to get my work published" or, "I want my picture on the wall"' (Freelance writer and artist, Male, 40). Ideals of self-actualisation, recognition and individual autonomy reproduce and naturalise neoliberal reasoning. The image of the cultural worker is valorised as an individualised and competitive entrepreneurial subject.

For respondents seeking to establish themselves as freelancers, the lure of projects that promised exposure, and in turn better paid work, was sufficient to justify lengthy spells of poorly paid labour. As this aspiring freelance app developer explained,

We're getting paid £500 to do this app [for a local city centre marketplace] and it's going to be a *lot* of work. But it's just because we [my partner and I] want to do some freelance projects and that will get us some exposure, and we can maybe get more people interested from there. But obviously, the amount of hours that we are going to put into that app, it's going to be, well, it may be even months, you know, about £2 an hour or something . . . It's just like, [it] felt like it was a nice thing to do, and the exposure would help us out . . . [The local city centre marketplace] does get into . . . local news quite a lot when they do things. But it would be quite a big story if they brought in some quite, you know, futuristic app . . . And then there'd be, like, a little thing [on the app], it wouldn't be in your face or anything . . . it'd say, 'This is by us'. (Freelance App Developer, Female, 22)

The desire to gain some form of future autonomy in the labour market takes shape as a calculated investment through hope labour in the present. Potential recognition as a worthy and independent cultural worker produces a technology of the self, where a mixture of personal and economic motivations coalesce ('[it] felt like it was a nice thing to do, and the exposure would help us out'). Implicit in this account is the notion that one is intentionally choosing to undertake underpaid work in exchange for self-determination in the future. Hope labour requires that cultural workers discount structural inequalities, reproducing themselves as 'exploitable'. As this freelance artist and curator aptly summed up, 'Artists are really bad at saying how much they're worth, so if there's anything [that] could help, it's like a bit of handholding and solidarity, because they'll undercut each other all the time, because we're all so broke' (Freelance artist and curator, Male, 43). The logic of competition, then, is not only directed inwards and towards the self, but also towards one's fellow cultural workers amidst competitive and precarious circumstances.

### *Risk, anxiety and sociability*

Neoliberal agency arises in choices 'that balance alliances, responsibility, and risk using a means end calculus' (Gershon, 2011: 540). Risk is experienced as a necessary corollary of opportunity and reward. For this creative studio director, hope labour was undertaken on the assumption that an unknown proportion of one's work would become economically 'worthy' to clients and funders in the future:

You get to a stage where you just have to start assuming that some of these things [might happen] . . . you know, you will talk about like, maybe four or five projects for that period of time, maybe in the future, and one or two of them will come off . . . There has been times where we have had to take virtually no wages, and there were times when I have relied on savings, or I've relied on [my girlfriend], because she is an earner . . . It's partly the way we manage things, but also just the way that things didn't come off, things like projects didn't happen that we were counting on. (Creative Studio Director, Male, 38)

Despite working from a relatively insecure position ('There have been times where we have had to take virtually no wages'), there is hope that a share of one's hope labour will eventually be compensated. Crucially, freedom is not equated with choice, but rather with the freedom to act according to one's future calculations. This unease speaks of uncertainty coupled with a desire for predictability, and is managed inwardly by over-compensating through the practice of hope labour. As Krce-Ivančić (2018: 270) notes, 'while deviances in the self-entrepreneurship are inevitable, the anxious expectation of trouble is always here to discipline such estrangements'. Such examples show how the risks of deregulated labour markets are accommodated and sustained by subjects who intensify the management of their productive self. As this creative studio director described,

[We are] in discussion about a project to do [at a festival] next year . . . but nothing's confirmed at all . . . I guess not everyone would feel that comfortable with it. We've just gotten accustomed to it . . . We sort of went through this period of just going out there and just throwing everything at everyone and anybody . . . It was not a pleasant experience . . . It was hard, but you know, you go through that. (Creative Studio Director, Male, 38)

Managing risk as a component of opportunity and reward implies an orientation towards an unknown future as socially engaged subjects ('We sort of went through this period of going out there and just throwing everything at everybody'). Through hope labour, possibility and meaning were constructed in ways that rendered the individual wholly responsible for associated risks and costs. Assuming responsibility for one's future employment prospects produced unease and anxiety, functioning as a technology of government: self-mastery was both necessary and elusive, inevitable and impossible. As this freelance editor explained in regard to establishing a professional reputation early in her freelance career,

You find that life/work merge of, you know, I might just be sat on the sofa and then I'll find myself, sort of, scrolling through [work] emails . . . you're constantly thinking about projects or thinking about things you could be doing . . . Your reputation as well . . . if you've got a [social media] account you kind of have to be relatively active on it . . . if you're not working on a project you can always be looking for a project or potential clients . . . I think trying to show that you're engaged and busy. A couple of colleagues have actually gone on what they call an 'internet break' for a week or so and they've backed off from it, but I think most people do feel, like, a pressure to sort of keep your social media up to date. (Freelance editor, Female, 30)

Sociability and networking were valorised and reproduced, generating a perpetual apprehension and the production of a more encompassing professional identity animated by competitive relations to self ('you find that life/work merge', 'you're constantly thinking about projects or thinking about things you could be doing'). As this freelance artist and curator commented, when stressing the importance of sociability and its relationship with vulnerability,

In the arts . . . there's a trap that people fall into. I'm going to sound like a psychopath here, but that you have to be really nice with everybody all the time and that you have to be everybody's



best friend . . . People are trying to extract value from your time and they'll keep taking that value if you keep giving them it as well. So you have to be careful with that. (Freelance artist and curator, Male, 43)

Hope labour extends to the social production of the professional self. It is unwanted and desired, seductive and seemingly obligatory. Yet, these contradictory experiences are mediated through conflicting processes of subjectification, illustrating that subjectivity must be activated for neoliberal rationalities to become and remain hegemonic.

## Negotiating conflicting discourses

Neoliberal discourses and rationalities were always negotiated, never deterministic (Binkley, 2011; Butler, 1997; Scharff, 2016). Hope labour was understood as a vehicle to a more secure economic future. For some, free labour spoke to a sense of oneself motivated by non-instrumental values. Here, the artistic subject appeared alongside, but not always comfortably aligned, with neoliberal rationalities. As this digital artist and sculptor commented,

I definitely, all the time, work unpaid hours . . . The majority of the hours that I work . . . I hope that it's part of a larger thing where eventually things will become more lucrative . . . I think there's that side of it but there's also the side of it where I think I would want to top myself if I wasn't doing it as well. So it's probably like an emotional payment and being able to express myself creatively . . . So the stuff I make is so impractical, I don't suppose in any case that anyone will ever pay for it. So, it might be shown somewhere and somebody might be interested in it, but I suppose it's more about just satisfying the creative itch. (Digital Artist and Sculptor, Female, 29)

The artist's creative impulse is deployed as a discursive strategy that disrupts the neoliberal subject. Hope labour is again evident ('I definitely, all the time, work unpaid hours . . . I hope that it's part of a larger thing where eventually things will become more lucrative'), yet career aspirations are secondary to the intrinsic desire to practise self-care as an artist ('I think I would want to top myself if I wasn't doing it as well'). Although this illustrates that different discourses are available in the context of cultural work, and that entrepreneurial discourses are not deterministic (Scharff, 2016), it also illustrates that artistic ideals, through having passion and 'no alternative but to practice and care for one's art', can co-produce precarity. Unpaid work is considered necessary for autonomy and self-care. Yet, such artistic discourses both contradicted and complemented neoliberal discourses, as this digital artist and sculptor continued:

I remember [my teacher in] art history [said] 'What makes you do your work?' and I was sitting next to [another student], and we both said, 'The client and the cash' . . . Then [presently] coming back to this [idea that], 'I make art for myself', it seems a little bit untrue in some sort of way because there's a reason why I make it I suppose . . . [the teacher] turned round and said, 'You shouldn't be making art work for those reasons' . . . Coming round to that, I suppose I agree more with him now, but I still feel like it's a bit of a cop out . . . Because it should be your career, shouldn't it? It should be a lucrative career. I think that's just more about the importance

of art in general . . . this is the whole thing going back to should artwork be paid for when it's in an exhibition, and I think it should . . . It's seen as a personal kind of passion thing that people can go and enjoy afterwards . . . but it should be given more value than it is. (Digital artist and sculptor, Female, 29)

The artist's innate creative impulse is deployed as something which both confirms and disrupts the neoliberal subject. By placing some production beyond the economic (Lee, 2017), the subject restores the primacy of art. Yet the value of art itself is couched within an economic framework, a response to a perceived neglect of artistic labour. The artist appears both governable *and* ungovernable, where a conflation of artistic and economic rationalities involves both artistic self-determination and the 'hope' that one's creative labour will be economically valued. The figure of the artist or cultural worker, then, appears as a deeply ambivalent subject, aware of the ethical importance of artistic autonomy and the intrinsic value of the creative process, yet at the same time attracted to entrepreneurial discourses of self-realisation that may validate one's efforts in line with market rationalities. A pronounced sense of ambivalence was expressed in the negotiation of these conflicting discourses, illustrated through different relations to self at the intersection of autonomy, economy, and in the primacy of one's creative practice. As this digital artist and sculptor elucidated,

So it's just my hobby but it's not my hobby, it's more serious than a hobby but it is something that fills my time that doesn't feel like work . . . But in doing it in a way where I'm able to create the things that I want to create without, sort of, financial constraints I suppose, I don't know. Then it sounds like it's about money as well again, so I don't know. (Digital Artist and Sculptor, Female, 29)

For others, the imperative to consider one's work within an economic framework was problematic in itself. As this artist and curator commented, when discussing her attempts to negotiate making a living as an artist and curator,

I think I'm uncomfortable charging people for things. I don't sit comfortably with that idea . . . I kind of think [my work] is just what I'm thinking anyway . . . I don't feel like it's labour or hard work . . . I'm not very good at money as a system . . . I don't really get why it has to be like that . . . It's a stupid thing to say what I'm saying actually. It's idiotic because obviously I understand the world works in the way that it does, but I don't think it needs to or should, and therefore I don't always act as if the world works [that way]. So you kind of end up existing in a slight parallel . . . what I want to do with my work, is kind of really challenge some of those systems. (Artist and Curator, Female, 38)

One's labour, in this case, is invested in the intrinsic benefits of artistic and creative practice ('I kind of think [my work] is just what I'm thinking anyway'), what Huws describes as unalienated 'really free labour' (Huws, 2019: 87). Yet, the notion that one's work should be placed beyond economic rationalities is, at the same time, considered to be unreasonable ('It's idiotic because obviously I understand the world works in the way that it does'). A mixture of conflicting relations to self are evident as the artistic subject is deployed to disrupt the marketisation of one's labour. Yet, the legitimacy and neutrality

of the artist subject position appears vulnerable and answerable to the imperatives of the market ('So you kind of end up existing in a slight parallel'). Creative labour, in this instance, is reframed to emphasise the primacy of art both beyond and against prevailing market rationalities. Yet, this negotiation is felt ambivalently and equivocally. The individual is left to manage the tension between inexorable pressure of economic logics and artistic logics of practice (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007). Production becomes the moment at which an otherwise compelling economic logic is, if not reversed, then suspended in favour of the logic of practice. Practice becomes the moment in which individual projects of self-actualisation are most fully realised.

## Conclusion

The limitations of Foucauldian readings of governmentality, often abstract in nature and without reference to individual or collective agents (McKinlay et al., 2012; Walters, 2012), can be addressed through an analysis of how people actually 'live out' neoliberalism (Baker and Kelan, 2019; Butler, 1997; Scharff, 2016). Less a case of a discursive illusion (Lee, 2012), autonomy is contested and felt ambivalently in the midst of conflicting and incongruous discourses. Rather than 'living with' an enterprise economy (Storey et al., 2005), our analysis highlights how people 'live through' and struggle inwardly with neoliberal categories that attempt to define, animate and subsume them as 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Foucault, 2008). We suggest that such a reading complements Foucauldian studies of governmentality whilst also contributing to a 'hopeful sociology' (Alacovska, 2018, 2019) of cultural work: a project that can encourage alternative ways of conceptualising and enacting work beyond neoliberal imperatives of deferred security and upward mobility, and towards a more far-reaching reframing of creative and cultural human labour (Lee, 2017).

By focusing on how hope labour becomes meaningful and worthwhile, aspects of the psychic life of neoliberalism are elucidated, pointing to the manner in which the onus of structural problems is placed upon the individual *by* the individual (Butler, 1997; Krce-Ivančić, 2018; Scharff, 2016). Answering a call from Kuehn and Corrigan (2013), we have illustrated how the logics that underpin hope labour diffuse into cultural work's labour markets more generally. Hope labour is important because it shifts costs and risks onto the labourer, further extending the reach of capital by enveloping the subjectivity of cultural workers made responsible for their own 'investments'. We have illustrated how hope labour is sustained by different discourses that have the effect of (i) turning labour into human capital (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012), (ii) turning labour into valuable 'experiences' which may provide exposure and reputation (McRobbie, 2016), (iii) turning labour into self-managing 'risk strategies' that may provide opportunity and reward amidst uncertainty (Gershon, 2011) and, finally, (iv) aligning artistic ideals of intrinsic creativity and autonomy with entrepreneurial subjectivity (Loacker, 2013). In each of these examples, we have illustrated how individuals grapple with prevailing discourses while constituting themselves through them. Crucially, we have also demonstrated how the practice of hope labour involves a competitive relationship with oneself (Binkley, 2011; Butler, 1997) as well as with others. In doing so we have extended a growing body of work on *the psychic life* (Butler, 1997) of neoliberalism by illustrating how

competitive relations to self are not limited to specific groups, such as elite orchestral musicians (Scharff, 2016), but are pertinent to a diverse range of cultural and creative labour.

Our analysis illustrates how anxiety, uncertainty, and a lack of control over one's future can animate and consolidate entrepreneurial agency. Uncertainty and anxiety were observed not as a side effect of subjectification but as key processes in the establishment of entrepreneurial subjectivity. The sense of ambivalence which characterises cultural work (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010) is, we suggest, related to contradictions felt in response to the neoliberal imperative to turn experiences of insecurity into a future deferred security. Yet, such individualised logics of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011) are clearly detrimental to the future of cultural work, which, as one of our participants noted, depends on solidarity among its workers for its economic survival. Subordination and acquiescence to structural ambiguity, then, provides the conditions of possibility for the continuation of the neoliberal subject (Butler, 1997). As individuals come to occupy the site of this subject, an apparent lack of agency over their future is consolidated by a *different* form of entrepreneurial agency that promises more self-control. Even when the human drive for innate artistic creativity is deployed to disrupt the neoliberal subject, and where production is about the primacy of art outside the economic, anxiety and uncertainty play a part in the 'hope' that one's artistic efforts will be economically valued in the future. Such examples illustrate the manner in which artistic and cultural acts may become naturalised and enveloped within neoliberal rationalities in subtle and intimate ways (Lorey, 2015).

Our article makes a novel contribution to understanding the connection between hope and precarity by illuminating some of the complexities involved in the psychic life of unpaid or under-compensated cultural work. Exploring futurity, in our case, has sought to take account not just of the political and managerial exploitations of cultural work, but the apparently authentic motivations of workers (Alacovska, 2019) attempting to live through neoliberal categories. In doing so we have not conceptualised cultural workers as dupes or apathetic calculators (Alacovska, 2019; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011), but as those in the play of a social milieu governed by insecurity and anxiety (Krcic-Ivančić, 2018; Lorey, 2015). Although we acknowledge futurity as a technology of neoliberal governmentality (Scharff, 2016), we do not seek to reduce 'hope' to a catch-all imperative of deferred economy alone. Rather, by illuminating ambivalent relationships between desire, anxiety and uncertainty in the constitution of entrepreneurial subjectivity, our contribution is more modest: to forward a timely critique of the disproportionate effects of neoliberal rationalities in the psychic life of cultural work (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1982).

The connection between the psychic life of power and Foucault's governmentality has political consequences, which, we argue, implicitly involve the importance of an emphasis on the political potential of subjectivity beyond prevailing neoliberal imperatives. In the interests of the long-term health of cultural work, desire for change can be directed away from the self (Scharff, 2016) and towards socio-political, so long as self-conduct has the potential *not* to align with dominant governmental rationalities (Lorey, 2015). 'Hope labour' is only accessible to those who are able to afford to make such unpaid or under-compensated 'investments'. Its prevalence also undermines the value of labour in

the sectors it takes place, and so it serves to naturalise (self-) exploitation and inequality. A socio-political emphasis, we suggest, can involve a wider reframing of the value of cultural and creative labour beyond the call of individualising market rationalities typical of ‘creative economy’ discourses (McRobbie, 2016). It is beyond the scope of this article to address persistent questions about how unpaid and under-compensated work could be better rewarded, the benefits of a Universal Basic Income, or how cultural and creative workers may be encouraged to unionise. Nevertheless, some of the collective and personal values attached to cultural and creative labour we have observed illustrate its importance as something that cannot be subsumed by economic rationalities, and its role as a form of personal and community care (Alacovska, 2019; Cinque et al., 2020). We should look to the potential of creative and cultural labour to subvert the normalisation of precarity rather than symbolise it. So long as there is ambivalence in self-government, there is the potential for refusals and reversals of prevailing conditions and effects (Lorey, 2015). ‘Hope’, in this sense, is critical, rather than neoliberal, in its desire for a more flourishing future.

Hope has never trickled down. It has always sprung up. That’s what Jessie de la Cruz meant when she said, ‘I feel there’s gonna be a change, but we’re the ones gonna do it, not the government. With us, there’s a saying, *La esperanza muere ultima*. Hope dies last. You can’t lose hope. If you lose hope, you lose everything’. (Terkel, 2003: xv)

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the editor Timothy Kuhn and the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful and invaluable comments. We would also like to express our thanks to Susan Kirk, Charles Harvey and Ken Starkey, all of whom provided insightful and supportive feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

## Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article. This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (grant number AH/P005160/1) and match funded by Newcastle University, Northumbria University, Durham University, The University of Sunderland and Teesside University, UK.

## ORCID iD

Ewan Mackenzie  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6875-5379>

## References

- Adorno T and Horkheimer M (1979) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London, UK: Verso.
- Alacovska A (2018) Hope labour revisited: Post-socialist creative workers and their methods of hope. In: Taylor S and Luckman S (eds) *The New Normal of Working Lives: Critical Studies in Contemporary Work and Employment*. London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 41–63.
- Alacovska A (2019) ‘Keep hoping, keep going’: Towards a hopeful sociology of creative work. *The Sociological Review* 67(5): 1118–1136.
- Alvesson M and Karreman D (2011) Decolonizing discourse: Critical reflections on organizational discourse analysis. *Human Relations* 64(9): 1121–1146.

- Antcliff V, Saundry R and Stuart M (2007) Networks and social capital in the UK television industry: The weakness of weak ties. *Human Relations* 60(2): 371–393.
- Baker DT and Kelan EK (2019) Splitting and blaming: The psychic life of neoliberal executive women. *Human Relations* 72(1): 69–97.
- Banks M (2006) Moral economy and cultural work. *Sociology* 40(3): 455–472.
- Banks M (2007) *The Politics of Cultural Work*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Banks M (2010) Autonomy guaranteed? Cultural work and the ‘art–commerce relation’. *Journal for Cultural Research* 14(3): 251–269.
- Barratt E (2008) The later Foucault in organization and management studies. *Human Relations* 61(4): 515–537.
- Berlant L (2011) *Cruel Optimism*. London, UK: Duke University Press.
- Beverungen A, Böhm S and Land C (2015) Free labour, social media, management: Challenging Marxist organization studies. *Organization Studies* 36(4): 473–489.
- Binkley S (2011) Psychological life as enterprise: Social practice and the government of neoliberal interiority. *History of the Human Sciences* 24(3): 83–102.
- Böhm S and Land C (2009) No measure for culture? Value in the new economy. *Capital and Class* 33(1): 75–98.
- Boltanski L and Chiapello E (2005) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London, UK: Verso.
- Brown W (2015) *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*. New York, NY: Zone Books.
- Butler J (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cinque S, Nyberg D and Starkey K (2020) ‘Living at the border of poverty’: How theater actors maintain their calling through narrative identity work. *Human Relations*. Epub ahead of print 3 March 2020. DOI: 0.1177/0018726720908663
- Clarke J and Newman J (2012) The alchemy of austerity. *Critical Social Policy* 32(2): 299–319.
- Cochran LR (1990) Narrative as a paradigm for career research. In: Young RA and Borgen WA (eds) *Methodological Approaches to the Study of Career*. New York, NY: Praeger, 75–102.
- DCMS (2014) *Creative Industries Economic Estimates Methodology*. London, UK. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/499683/CIEE\\_Methodology.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/499683/CIEE_Methodology.pdf) (accessed 15 January 2018).
- De Peuter G (2011) Creative economy and labor precarity: A contested convergence. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 35(4): 417–425.
- De Peuter G (2014) Beyond the model worker: Surveying a creative precariat. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 6(1): 263–284.
- Dowling E and Harvie D (2014) Harnessing the social: State, crisis and (big) society. *Sociology* 48(5): 869–886.
- Duffy BE (2016) The romance of work: Gender and aspirational labour in the digital culture industries. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19(4): 441–457.
- Eikhof D and Haunschild A (2007) For art’s sake! Artistic and economic logics in creative industries. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* 28(5): 525–538.
- Ekman S (2014) Is the high-involvement worker precarious or opportunistic? Hierarchical ambiguities in late capitalism. *Organization* 21(2): 141–158.
- Fast K, Ornebring H and Karlsson M (2016) Metaphors of free labor: A typology of unpaid work in the media sector. *Media Culture & Society* 38(7): 963–978.
- Florida R (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Foucault M (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.



- Foucault M (1982) The subject and power. In: Dreyfus HL and Rabinow P (eds) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Brighton, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Foucault M (1988) *Technologies of the Self*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Foucault M (1991a) Governmentality (lecture at the Collège de France, 1 February). In: Burchell G, Gordon C and Miller P (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Foucault M (1991b) Questions of method. In: Burchell G, Gordon C and Miller P (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Foucault M (2008) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978–79*. Burchell G (transl.). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Fournier V and Grey C (1999) Too much, too little and too often: A critique of du Gay's analysis of enterprise. *Organization* 6(1): 107–128.
- Gershon I (2011) Neoliberal agency. *Current Anthropology* 52(4): 537–555.
- Gregg M (2015) Hack for good: Speculative labour, app development and the burden of austerity. *The Fiberculture Journal* 25: 183–201.
- Hall S (2011) The neo-liberal revolution. *Cultural Studies* 25(6): 705–728.
- Hesmondhalgh D and Baker S (2010) 'A very complicated version of freedom': Conditions and experiences of creative labour in three cultural industries. *Poetics* 38(1): 4–20.
- Hesmondhalgh D and Baker S (2011) *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Hesmondhalgh D, Oakley K, Lee D, et al. (2015) *Culture, Economy and Politics: The Case of New Labour*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Hora MT, Parrott E and Her P (2020) How do students conceptualise the college internship experience? Towards a student-centred approach to designing and implementing internships. *Journal of Education and Work* 33(1): 48–66.
- Huws U (2019) *Labour in Contemporary Capitalism: What Next?* New York, NY: Palgrave.
- IPSE (2015) *Exploring the UK Freelance Workforce in 2015*. London, UK: Association of Independent Professionals and Self Employed Small Business Research Centre, K.U.L. Available at: <http://www.crse.co.uk/sites/default/files/Executive%20Summary%20-%20Exploring%20the%20UK%20Freelance%20Workforce%202015.pdf> (accessed 25 May 2018).
- Krcic-Ivančić M (2018) Governing through anxiety. *Journal for Cultural Research* 22(3): 262–277.
- Kuehn K and Corrigan TF (2013) Hope labor: The role of employment prospects in online social production. *The Political Economy of Communication* 1(1): 9–25.
- Lee D (2012) The ethics of insecurity: Risk, individualization and value in British independent television production. *Television & New Media* 13(6): 480–497.
- Lee HK (2017) The political economy of 'creative industries'. *Media Culture & Society* 39(7): 1078–1088.
- Loacker B (2013) Becoming 'culturpreneur': How the 'neoliberal regime of truth' affects and redefines artistic subject positions. *Culture and Organization* 19(2): 124–145.
- Lorey I (2009) Governmentality and self-precarization: On the normalization of cultural producers. In: Raunig G and Ray G (eds) *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*. London, UK: MayFly Books.
- Lorey I (2015) *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*. Derieg A (transl.). London, UK: Verso.
- McGuigan J (2010) Creative labour, cultural work and individualisation. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 16(3): 323–335.
- McKinlay A and Pezet E (2017) Governmentality: The career of a concept. In: McKinlay A and Pezet E (eds) *Foucault and Managerial Governmentality*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- McKinlay A, Carter C and Pezet E (2012) Governmentality, power and organization. *Management and Organizational History* 7(3): 3–15.
- McNay L (2009) Self as enterprise dilemmas of control and resistance in Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*. *Theory Culture & Society* 26(6): 55–77.
- McRobbie A (2016) *Be Creative*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Miller P and Rose N (2008) *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Moisander J, Gross C and Eraranta K (2018) Mechanisms of biopower and neoliberal governmentality in precarious work: Mobilizing the dependent self-employed as independent business owners. *Human Relations* 71(3): 375–398.
- O'Flynn G and Petersen EB (2007) The 'good life' and the 'rich portfolio': Young women, schooling and neoliberal subjectification. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 28(4): 459–472.
- Perlin R (2012) *Intern Nation*. London, UK: Verso.
- Petriglieri G, Ashford SJ and Wrzesniewski A (2019) Agony and ecstasy in the gig economy: Cultivating holding environments for precarious and personalized work identities. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 64(1): 124–170.
- Potter J and Wetherall M (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Raffinsoe S, Gudmand-Hoyer M and Thaning MS (2016) Foucault's dispositive: The perspicacity of dispositive analytics in organizational research. *Organization* 23(2): 272–298.
- Read J (2009) A genealogy of homo-economicus: Neoliberalism and the production of subjectivity. *Foucault Studies* 6(1): 25–36.
- Ross A (2017) Working for nothing: The latest high-growth sector? In: Armano E, Bove A and Murgia A (eds) *Mapping Precariousness, Labour Insecurity and Uncertain Livelihoods: Subjectivities and Resistance*. London, UK: Routledge, 189–198.
- Scharff C (2016) The psychic life of neoliberalism: Mapping the contours of entrepreneurial subjectivity. *Theory Culture & Society* 33(6): 107–122.
- Siebert S and Wilson F (2013) All work and no pay: Consequences of unpaid work in the creative industries. *Work Employment and Society* 27(4): 711–721.
- Smith C and McKinlay A (2009) Creative industries and labour process analysis. In: Smith C and McKinlay A (eds) *Creative Labour: Working in the Creative Industries*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Storey J, Salaman G and Platman K (2005) Living with enterprise in an enterprise economy: Freelance and contract workers in the media. *Human Relations* 58(8): 1033–1054.
- Svejenova S (2005) 'The path with the heart': Creating the authentic career. *Journal of Management Studies* 42(5): 947–974.
- Terkel S (2003) *Hope Dies Last: Keeping the Faith in Troubled Times*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Terranova T (2013) Free labor. In: Scholz T (ed.) *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Townley B, Beech N and McKinlay A (2009) Managing in the creative industries: Managing the motley crew. *Human Relations* 62(7): 939–962.
- van Dyk S (2018) Post-wage politics and the rise of community capitalism. *Work, Employment and Society* 32(3): 528–545.
- Walters W (2012) *Governmentality: Critical Encounters*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- Weiskopf R and Munro I (2012) Management of human capital: Discipline, security and controlled circulation in HRM. *Organization* 19(6): 685–702.

Ewan Mackenzie is a Research Associate at Newcastle University Business School, UK. His research has examined the socio-political aspects of work, especially in public and cultural sectors

amidst the politics of austerity. He has also published in *Organization Studies* on the topic of power and subjectivity under a 'lean' regime. He is interested in the intersection of neoliberal rationalities and everyday working life, and the possibility and necessity for alternatives in light of present-day social, economic and environmental crises. [Email: ewan.mackenzie@newcastle.ac.uk]

Alan McKinlay is Professor of HRM at Newcastle University Business School, UK. He has published extensively on business, management and labour history, including books and articles on Ford Motor Company, Motorola and knowledge management. He draws heavily upon the social theory of Michel Foucault, particularly the idea of governmentality. He is currently researching the changing nature of work, employment and careers in the creative industries. His most recent book, with WW Knox, is *Jimmy Reid: A Clyde-built Man* (Liverpool University Press, 2019). [Email: alan.mckinlay@newcastle.ac.uk]