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The spark in the engine: creative workers in a global economy

Ursula Huws

Ursula Huws is professor of international labour studies at the Working Lives Research Institute at London Metropolitan University, UK, the director of Analytica and the editor of this volume.

ABSTRACT

Introducing this volume, this paper summarises the contents and offers an analysis of the place of creative work in a global economy, focusing in particular on the restructuring of global value chains and the commodification of knowledge in a process which simultaneously opens up the possibility for new creative tasks for some workers whilst deskilling others. It concludes with a discussion of the contradictions that this presents for creative workers who may be offered a choice between disappointing their own creative aspirations or collaborating in their own exploitation.

Nice work if you can get it: the mercurial career of creative industries policy

Andrew Ross

Andrew Ross is Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University in the USA.

ABSTRACT

Driven by the belief that culture-based enterprise can be promoted as a driver of economic development, governments all over the world have developed policies aimed at boosting their creative industries. These policies ought to present some new, long-term opportunities for cultural workers, but in practice they seem more likely to universalise the traditionally precarious work profile of artists. Focusing on the career of creative industry policy in the UK, the USA and China, this paper calls for an assessment of its model of job creation from the standpoint of quality of work life.

The new knowledge aristocracy: the creative class, mobility and urban growth

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ABSTRACT

Many policy-makers, particularly in North America, have been seduced and influenced by the ideas of Richard Florida, who suggests that cities and regions can be economically revitalised if they make themselves attractive to the mobile and talented 'creative class'. This

suggests that economic growth is caused by an influx of such people. This paper argues that it is more plausible to suggest the reverse – that the ‘creative class’ is attracted to economic growth and that Florida’s theories have the unintended consequence of justifying the investment of considerable public resources in support of the lifestyle choices of this already privileged class, in effect sustaining a new knowledge aristocracy at the expense of the immobile majority.

Creating a sustainable future? the working life of creative workers in Vienna
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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the sustainability of work arrangements in Vienna’s creative industries. Based on a survey of over 900 people who work in five sub-sectors (advertising, architecture, graphics/design/fashion, film/video/broadcasting and multimedia), it finds that there is significant pressure on those working in these industries. This results mainly from the fact that most are self-employed and consequently their guarantee of future work is insecure and they lack strategies to develop their own micro-businesses. The respondents have, however, developed coping strategies to deal with these pressures. In general, therefore, those with a high risk strategy in combination with high levels of work autonomy are more satisfied than creative workers who are employed and have a steady income but little decision-making freedom. Despite this, issues such as social security raise doubts about the future sustainability of their work. Further information about the project can be found on www.forba.at/kreativbranchen-wien.

Sunset in the west: outsourcing editorial work from the UK to India– a case study of the impact on workers

Simone Dahlmann and Ursula Huws

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study carried out in a large academic publishing and printing house. Interviews were carried out in both locations with senior and middle management, workers and trade unionists to gain their perspectives on the outsourcing of typesetting

and editorial work from the UK to India. In Britain, 'working in publishing' traditionally represented a prestigious and highly sought-after career for graduates with high skills, both generic and occupation-specific. This paper explores the shock experienced by these workers when faced with the prospect of losing their jobs to the Indian labour market and argues that the outsourcing of skilled work in an increasingly globalised labour market introduces new forms of precariousness even to highly qualified workers with diverse skills. However the study also finds that the workers in India who are taking over these tasks are not experiencing the benefits previously enjoyed by their British counterparts. On the contrary, on the evidence of this case study, their jobs too are highly insecure. It concludes that the qualitative effects of offshore outsourcing on employment are more important than quantitative impacts.

'Suits' and 'creatives': managerial control, the expropriation of fun and the manufacture of consent

Bob Hughes

Bob Hughes is a senior lecturer in Interactive Media in the Publishing Department at Oxford Brookes University in Oxford, UK.

ABSTRACT

Human skill poses a perennial problem to capitalist enterprises. This paper suggests that they have discovered, in the concept of 'creativity', a new weapon in the war on skill which simultaneously generates consent, sanctifies the use of inexperienced and expendable labour, and gives the manager even more power to control the worker while acting out the role of parent and protector. Creativity (as understood by modern managers) is an ineffable quality which 'we know when we see' – i.e. its existence and value are in the gift of the (managerial) beholder. Helpless and powerless, it is especially apt to be found amongst the young and innocent. This paper draws on Michael Burawoy's study of 'Manufacturing Consent' in an engineering shop in the 1970s, and the author's own experience of working as a 'creative' in advertising agencies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Make like a man: the demands of creative work, gender and everyday life

Bettina-Johanna Krings

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a study in the multimedia sector in Stuttgart, Germany, this paper argues that the living and working conditions of women have adapted strongly to the traditional breadwinner concept and that this change has major consequences for general social and cultural development. The study concludes that a historical shift from 'maternal spaces' to the breadwinner model is a sign of deep changes in the reproductive sphere. It analyses the temporal organisation of work-life balance and finds that, although women have gained access to some highly-skilled positions in the labour market which have granted them new forms of autonomy and independence, they have also been exposed to new forms of stress.

These pressures are experienced in a range of different ways both by childless women and those with children, leading to a variety of strategies for managing daily life, each of which entails some losses, as well as gains. Although a critique of the modernisation of working cultures has been opened up, this paper argues that in order to explain the societal impacts of these changes there is a need for further exploration of both the perception and the quality of the losses experienced by women in these change processes.

Who are the fairest? ethnic segmentation in London's media production

Ashika Thanki and Steve Jefferys

Ashika Thanki is a researcher currently employed as a fieldworker by the Red Cross

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ABSTRACT

London is a global media city where over 30 per cent of the workforce is from black and ethnic minorities. Yet only seven per cent of those in media production come from these minorities, and they are concentrated in lower level and non-mainstream jobs. The authors argue that the anachronistic survival of institutional racism is not simply about the survival of a discriminatory 'monoculture'. While racism is enabled by the major casualisation of the industry, it is also functional, helping to defend a stable process of elite formation and defence in a key area of capitalist ideological production. This racism is about power and the authors' research into why ethnic minority professionals quit London's media production sector also explains how this power imbalance deters resistance.

Rethinking progressive and conservative values: Spain's new economy workers

Armando Fernández Steinko

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on interviews carried out with workers in the new economy in Madrid, this paper argues that the dichotomy 'individualism versus collectivism' is inadequate to describe their value systems. It proposes instead an alternative typology based on distinctions between 'personal' and 'organic' values and 'diversified' and 'non-diversified' interests. The development of these values is placed in the context of the specific history of industrialisation in southern Europe, which, along with eastern Europe, differs significantly from that of the economies of northern Europe which industrialised earlier and whose working classes developed different models of solidarity.

Divided they stand: Hollywood unions in the information age

Catherine McKercher and Vincent Mosco

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to increase labour power, trade unions representing communications and creative workers in North America have pursued a form of convergence, merging with each other and restructuring themselves along similar lines to their employers. This paper examines the issues surrounding labour convergence by taking up the failed merger between the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. It finds that, although the leaders of both unions supported the merger, the particular characteristics of the unions, including their culture, sense of craft identity and the lived experience of members, derailed the effort.

Immaterial Fordism: the paradox of game industry labour

Leif Schumacher

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ABSTRACT

In different ways, Marxist autonomist, regulation school, and neoliberal theories all claim that work in the new economy is increasingly characterised by high levels of creativity, cooperation, and innovation, albeit accompanied by uncertainty and a relentless pace of work, introducing a new form of labour that differs fundamentally from past forms. This paper does not disagree with the proposition that capital is currently in the process of intensifying its search for more efficient value extraction. However, through a case study of lawsuits launched against the video game company Electronic Arts regarding its labour practices, it argues that the change in the nature of knowledge work and immaterial labour has been overstated by the adherents of these three schools and that what we are witnessing is not so much a replacement of traditional Fordist practices by post-Fordist ones as a new fusion of the two forms.

Review: Richard Barbrook's *The Class of the New*

Christoph Hermann

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