| Research Project |
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| **Labour Precarity and Social Cohesion:**<br>**The Case of the Cultural & Creative Industries (LaPreSC)**<br><br><br>**Project Number: 16313** |

| **Deliverable D1.1** |
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| Report: Comparative literature review and theoretical framework with definitions of key concepts/ Month 6 (M6) |

# 1. A genealogy of Labour in the CCIs

Over the last two decades, work in the wider sectors of the economy that are considered *Cultural and Creative* seems to have gained remarkable ground (Comunian & Conor, 2017; McGuigan, 2010; Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Wilson et al, 2020). Work in the Cultural Creative Industries (hereafter–CCIs) has become an economic activity of considerable magnitude and a growing segment of educated professionals see themselves pursuing a career in arts, culture, and creativity. In the advanced capitalist societies of the West, work in CCIs has become an increasingly visible and desirable career path (Adler, 2021; Shaughnessy et al, 2022). Of course, the boundaries between everyday creativity and actual creative *labour* are often blurry, and questions of who qualifies as a professional (or a 'worker') are not straightforward (Cotrell, 2004: 8-14; Tsioulakis, 2020: 27-53; Perrenoud & Bataille, 2017). Additionally, workers in the CCIs operate within large and complex ecosystems of collaboration, what Howard Becker (2008) has termed 'Art Worlds', that make divisions of labour and boundary-drawing between professions notoriously tricky.

Despite this complexity and diversity, however, research among practitioners identifies common characteristics of identification with this work, the means of creative production, and the generated cultural product (Bain, 2005). This has led researchers to argue that creative work lies in an intersection between gift economy and self–exploitation. For Banks (2010), the history of cultural production is very much marked with this eternal tension between artists' need for autonomy and independence and the necessity to serve commercial purposes. Echoing Raymond Williams, he argues:

> Where art and culture promised individual freedom, the economy appeared to provide only collective enslavement to the commercial imperative. Thus, the worlds of art and commerce have long been judged diametrically opposed (Banks, 2007, 6).

Scholars have emphasised a reluctance in some previous literature to analyze *creative workers as workers* (Tsioulakis, 2021)*,* since artistic production has been historically understood as exhibiting characteristics that are opposed to a narrow perception of what we call work – indeed, creative work is 'fun', 'pleasurable', 'independent', and 'self- fulling' (Frith, 2017).

It is no surprise that careers in the CCIs are attractive to members of the educated middle class. Studies have placed this desirability under scrutiny, framing labour in the CCIs as *good work* (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Drawing upon empirical studies, scholars captured the utopian aspirations workers in the CCIs ascribe to their practice. Indicative is the diversity of the terms used to describe the complex nature of creative work that seems to be very much interrelated with their subjectivity, identity, and the psychosocial aspects of their working lives: aspirational labour (Duffy, 2015), love labour (Gregg, 2009; Lynch, 2007; Freidson, 1990), and passionate work (Arvidsson et al., 2010; Sandoval, 2018), terms that capture the intimate and affective aspects of creative work.

However, these terms have also served as the basis for a critique of creative labour. Work in arts, cultural and creative industries is habitually viewed as non–alienating, autonomous, and self-fulfilling (Banks, 2010). CCIs are perceived as prestigious working environments, less formal and formalized, anti–hierarchical, and egalitarian. Value is being extracted via flexible forms of organisation where individuals embrace risk by conducting work with entrepreneurial attributes (Beltran & Miguel, 2014). According to Nicole Cohen:

> […] managers are not required to motivate cultural workers or increase productivity and cultural workers are considered to self-exploit. But identifying self-exploitation, while key to uncovering the myriad ways power operates, can mask true relations of exploitation, almost letting capital off the hook (Cohen, 2012: 146)

Indeed, in recent decades, many public debates have cultivated a utopian depiction of work in the CCIs in the UK. Oakley, for example, observes that work in the CCIs can serve as "a template for new modes of working" (Oakley, 2009:27). The expansion of this economic model in other national contexts meant that these kinds of neoliberal agendas promoted the development and investment in the CCIs and the wider, peripheral creative economy. Those discourses that prevailed within both policy and academic circles in the late 2010s contributed to legitimising these emerging forms of labour exploitation even outside the world of CCIs, by praising the artistic mode of production: flexible, on demand, highly skilled and educated, resourceful, and prone to risk-taking (McRobbie, 2016; Lorey, 2011).

However, more recent critical literature has articulated a backlash against such celebrations and simplifications of creative labour in government policy and academia (Beirne et al, 2017). In portraying the creative subject as an ideal worker, neoliberal discourses promote a new politics of work through buzzwords such as flexibility, resilience and resourcefulness. So, while workers in the CCIs see a potential for conducting meaningful, less alienating labour with an opportunity for self-exploration, policies seek to normalize a model of 'entrepreneurship' whereby individuals are left to care for themselves without safety nets (Tsioulakis, 2020: 139-141; Raunig, 2011; Tarassi, 2018). Addressing this predicament, a rich body of literature on cultural labour has consistently applied critical lenses on those discourses outlining how insecure and precarious labour is in the context of CCIs (FitzGibbon, 2022; Rush, 2022; Miller, 2010). In the interest of self–realisation, workers themselves legitimize self–exploitation to keep up with a competitive, and overly volatile creative market. Work is often subjected to irregular working patterns that are intensive, anti–social, and exclusionary. These problematic features of work in the CCIs under neoliberalism and in the context of individualisation still needs further exploration informed by a locally-sensitive research approach.

The concept of precarity is key to the understanding of work in the CCIs, and hence a core theoretical basis for this project. A unique condition of economic and job insecurity that is endemic to neoliberal capitalism (Standing 2011), precarity is a historically established and

hierarchical form of vulnerability, deeply rooted in contemporary systems of governance (Lorey, 2015; 2019). Isabell Lorey sees precarity as a continuously unfolding process, which she calls 'precarization':

> Precarization means more than insecure jobs, more than the lack of security given by waged employment. By way of insecurity and danger it embraces the whole of existence, the body, modes of subjectivation. It is threat and coercion, even while it opens up new possibilities of living and working. Precarization means living with the unforeseeable, with contingency. (2015:1)

As Lorey argues elsewhere, 'precarization is becoming the motor of productivity' (2019:186), which means that the increased insecurity of labor in different domains of production is used strategically by those who manage the workforce in order to subjugate them to more effective control, increase their workload, and diminish their pay, demands, and benefits.

This is overwhelmingly true in fields of work which are based on 'soft' skills of communication and creativity, such as in the arts and media industries (Lorey 2011:84–86). Precarity deeply affects creative workers by making their entire lives a constant struggle and their future highly uncertain (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Brophy and de Peuter consider that:

> Being precarious means that one's relationship to time is marked by uncertainty, from the part – time on – call retail clerk whose non – work time is haunted by the prospect of being called in to do a shift, to the self – employed copywriter perpetually juggling contracts, rarely declining a contract for fear of a future lull in the flow of income (Brophy & de Peuter, 2007: 182).

The health hazards and the overall wellbeing of creative workers are rarely discussed and most of the times are underestimated (Gross & Musgrave, 2020). Employment in the CCIs is largely intermittent, complex, and physically demanding. Workers in the CCIs are habitually multiple job holders, often having to balance labour in the service industries while pursuing their creative goals in employment that is either under-paid or completely unpaid (Throsby & Zednik, 2011; Shade & Jacobson, 2015; Kostala & Michailidou, 2016). A significant portion of creative workers pursue other activities outside of the CCIs in order to cross – subsidize their creative endeavours. However, their ability to engage in these forms of unpaid labour diminishes as they age towards their mid and late thirties (Brook et al, 2020; Gross & Musgrave, 2020: 34-37), when the lifestyle demanded by work in the CCIs becomes contradictory to life trajectories that include family and caring responsibilities.

Even though we cannot entirely rely on statistical data regarding work in the CCIs, a structural characteristic of creative work is a surplus of skilled over unskilled labour (McKinlay & Smith, 2009) that tends to demonstrate a *vocational restlessness*. In fact, in Western societies there has

been a surplus of individuals that wish to join the CCIs at any cost. Our scope in this project mainly includes creative workers that are employed in performance (music, theatre and dance). This is because work in these sectors is predominantly freelance, project – based, or takes place in contexts of small-scale entrepreneurship. Yet we know very little about the ways individuals cope with the structural uncertainty and flexibility of these sectors and how such enterprises are internally organized.

So far, from what our previous research (Tsioulakis, 2020; 2021; Karakioulafi, 2015; 2022) has highlighted, the majority of creative workers are engaged in cultural activities that are inadequately paid or unpaid, living off erratic incomes from various self–funded projects or earning a living from privately funded schemes. Contemporary arts in Greece seem indeed to operate without strategic institutional support. The apparent absence of the State reinforces the perceptions of 'freedom' and 'independence' creative workers ascribe to their work, perpetuating the common belief that artistic creativity exists outside of the market, yet it is also experienced as debilitating. The aim of this study is, thus, to explore creative subjects as workers in the CCIs and map how these artistic worlds of production that are typically occupied by freelancers and small firms/collectives (AMKE) manage to keep afloat in a volatile, relatively small, unregulated, Greek market. Creative workers are seen to develop coping strategies and defence mechanisms that allow them to adjust to the realities of working in the CCIs. They often force themselves to work under pressure as 'this is how you can make it in creative arts' (McRobbie, 2011). Therefore, the axis formed between self-realisation and self-exploitation serves as a vehicle to describe how creative workers become so dedicated and emotionally invested in their creative endeavours that they push themselves physically and emotionally to the limit. How does creativity become the basis for exploitation (Lovink & Rossiter, 2007), despite its recognized potential to offer avenues for individual or collective fulfilment?

The working lives of the independent performers and technicians under neo-liberalism will be explored regarding the ways they pursue self-realisation through their artistic practice under precarity. While these are general features of creative work, we should not overlook that work in the CCIs encompasses different fields of cultural production. Even though there is a tendency to group together dissimilar creative sectors, it is highly unlikely that workers in those sectors exhibit the same employment characteristics. We argue that each sector illustrates particularities and divergences, that span even within the same creative method (for example music or dance). For that reason, we call for more informed research on work in CCIs in order to comprehend and critically analyse the different facets that freelance work, self-employment, and project-based work can take in those domains. We, therefore, seek to ground our understanding of creative work by exploring the processes of casualisation and insecurity that cut across working lives in the CCIs by paying attention to the particularities of each creative field. Drawing on the literature outlined earlier, through a combination of qualitative and

quantitative research, with an emphasis on ethnography and grounded observation, we set out to explore the following key processes:

- The hybridisation of working arrangements: how does it expand and complexify occupations in the CCIs?
- The blurring boundaries between work and non-work: how do they affect the participants' experience and the ability to pursue a career in the CCIs for creative workers from different social backgrounds?
- The intensification of labour patterns: "the pattern of the market becomes the pattern of work" (Pitts, 2016): how does this process translate into everyday circumstances and conditions?
- Autonomy and independence: neo-liberal subjectivities vs emancipated professionals? How does this dichotomy affect working ideologies in the CCIs and how do practitioners shape their identity and strategies as a response to these contradictions?

## 2. From education to careers: strategies, networks, boundaries/ definitions

### 2.1 Education as a pathway to skills and careers

A challenging factor in accounting for the experience and delineating the pathways of practitioners in the CCIs is the diversity of education and training that feed into successful careers. This is partly because, as John Baldacchino (2013; 2014) has argued, arts education and careers in the CCIs are not straightforwardly linked, but rather asymptotic and even antithetical. According to Baldacchino (2013), while arts education (and any skills-acquisition) creates autonomist possibilities, the reality of CCIs careers favours productivism that is measurable through industrial data. This creates a complicated landscape where the trajectory between a skills-based education, often focused on artistic merit, and career-building efforts is not linear. In fact, Hennekam and Bennett show that 'lack of alignment between initial education and training and the realities of CIs work, together with the need for life-long learning, adds significantly to the precariousness of creative work.' (2017: 75)

Even within the separate 'scenes' that this project is attempting to map, pathways to skills acquisition are hugely divergent. In theatre, for example, based on research in the Italian setting, Serino (2020) argues that the cultural capital (cf Bourdieu, 1986) necessary for entering the profession can be acquired through different pathways and valued through a complex web of legitimacy and recognition, where 'special skills and experience [do not have] a real counterpart in a formal system of credentials' (2020: 203). In music, educational pathways diverge based on several factors including the music genre, the region where the artist is based, their class and economic means, and other identity attributes. In classical music, for example, educational

milieu can be quite institutionalised (Cottrell, 2004: 34-44), but are also heavily dependent on gender and class (Bull, 2019), whereas popular music education differs significantly between metropolitan and peripheral settings, as well as national contexts and historical periods (Tsioulakis, 2020: 30-36; Green, 2002). Looking at primarily DIY popular music scenes in the UK, Andy Bennett argues that practitioners' competency is 'grounded in knowledge and practical know-how acquired through participation in music and style-based youth cultures' (2018: 140). In the field of dance education, Higdon and Stevens (2017) showcase that undergraduate university students in England see their educational pathway as a transition between gaining physical competence and developing 'employability' skills. Elaborating on the process of auditions and hiring in contemporary dance, Sorignet (2004) poses that the criteria walk a fine line between assessing technical skill and market needs, even though the latter are denied rhetorically by choreographers. Overall, what emerges is a complex picture of different educational settings and skills, some cultivated through institutionalised training while others acquired 'on the job', which shapes professional settings where practitioners have to co-operate based on very little shared knowledge and competencies.

With the increasing professionalisation of cultural production, there has been effort from state stakeholders to streamline, standardise, and marketise arts education, including through Higher Education Degrees (Leung & Bentley, 2017; Banks & Hemondhalgh, 2009). As Taylor argues, 'Institutions of higher education across the world have become alert to the educational and research significance of the cultural and creative industries social factory' (2014: 192). This has been coupled by an increasingly vocal call from arts students to be provided the opportunity to cultivate professional skills and understandings of the industry as part of their vocational or creative training (Ball, 2002). However, as Murray and Gollmitzer (2012: 426) argue, 'how the educational system answers such calls while at the same time meeting expectations to produce well-rounded graduates through universal humanist learning is difficult but increasingly seen as a core input in economic productivity.' Furthermore, typically the CCIs develop at a pace that is much faster than formal educational curricula. As a result, 'different temporal practices between industries and universities make it problematic for the latter to develop complex skill sets in students at the speed at which they are required by the former.' (Leung and Bentley, 2017: 158)

## 2.2 Building a career: strategies and success

The diversity and unevenness of educational/training pathways to creative work, also affects strategies of career development, which are again multifaceted and marked by disjunctures. Compared to other professional milieux where practitioners can reasonably expect that securing full-time employment can provide them with relative stability for the foreseeable future, work in the CCIs is characterised by such precarity and temporariness (short-term contracts, freelancing, multi-jobbing etc.) that professionals have to continually create employment opportunities for themselves and engage in rapid and continuous adaptation (De Peuter, 2011;

2014; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Isabell Lorey (2011) goes as far as to label creative workers as 'virtuosos of freedom'. These virtuosos, Lorey attests, are

> engaged in extremely diverse, unequally paid project activities and fee-paying jobs, and consider themselves entirely critical of society. Sometimes they do not want a steady job at all; sometimes they know it is something they can only dream about. Yet such cultural producers start from the assumption that they have chosen their living and working conditions themselves, precisely to ensure that they develop the essence of their being to the maximum in a relatively free and autonomous manner. (2011: 84)

To make things more complicated, the conduct of (actual or aspiring) practitioners in the CCIs includes such a wider range of activities, paid and unpaid, that it is hard to decipher whether work that one engages in is thought of as a career 'strategy', or even conceptualised as 'labour' at all. Christina Scharff reminds us that career strategies in cultural work are highly individualised, where 'there is no management, but instead an ethos of individual, creative effort, [and where] cultural workers may only have themselves to blame for the failures and difficulties they experience at work.' (2017: 14; cf Banks, 2007; McRobbie, 2016) As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 13) propose, in the creative industries, 'the line between paid and unpaid work, between "professionals" and "amateurs" is often blurred' and where '[i]t is not unusual for unpaid work to provide the basis of a reputation that allows people to turn professional'.

Career strategies in CCIs might include simply frequenting arts scenes to be 'seen' as a participant (Tsioulakis, 2022: 38-41), in industries where 'Social interaction and its commodification can be found at the centre of the entertainment industry's production process' (Turrini & Chicchi, 2013: 520). But more often than not, career strategies compound to taking on more projects than one can reasonably bring into fruition, simply because of uncertainty around whether work will be available in the future (Bastani et al, 2021; FitzGibbon, 2022). This often includes an expansion into non-arts work, in order to complement income, cultivate a wider range of skills, and pursue steadier employment (Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Survival strategies in the CCIs also demand increased mobility, within and across national borders, forcing cultural workers into 'nomadic forms of existence' (Turrini & Chicchi, 2013: 521).

Despite the individualisation of cultural and creative labour, dictated by the relentless competition that is inherent to the precarity of those professions, collectivism also emerges as a coping mechanism and strategic pursuit. In those instances, forging cooperative environments within cultural work can create 'an environment that is conducive to compassion and solidarity and encourages further forms of co-operation to emerge.' (Sandoval, 2018: 126) Processes of linking and assemblages of cultural labour also expand to topological expansions, whereby multiple locations, especially in the periphery outside of urban centres of production, facilitates

added value and increased opportunities (Brennan-Horley, 2010). This is encapsulated in what Shannon Garland (2019: 29) calls 'phatic labour': 'the cultivation of social networks for themselves as practices of sociality, but which simultaneously serve as the grounds upon which resources can be moved and transferred.'

Even when a pathway into employment (however precarious) has been secured, ideas of what can be considered 'success' in such a volatile working environment differ significantly among practitioners and settings. As Mark Banks (2010) reminds us, discourses of professional accomplishment in the arts grapple in complex and contradictory ways with ideals of autonomy and commercial success, and ultimately with agency and compromise. Furthermore, as Hans Abbing (2002) has powerfully argued, success in the arts does not equal economic affluence or even security, since the arts economy is 'exceptional' in its combined reliance on state subsidies, private donations and marketized income, much of which is incompatible with artists' own criteria of artistic 'quality'. Ultimately, 'success' is judged by criteria that are often self-contradictory, and oscillate between concepts of 'reputation', payment rates, viability of employment, and maximised range of opportunities (Tsioulakis, 2020: 43-49).

## 3. Class and gender inequalities in creative work

Despite celebratory discourses that see CCIs as diverse, egalitarian and inclusive, studies have documented that they remain fiercely inequitable. A wide range of literature has explored the patterns of disadvantages and exclusion rampant in CCIs through the lenses of gender (Villarroya & Barrios, 2022; Curran-Troop, 2023; Gill, et al, 2017; Duffy, 2015), social class (Hesmondhalgh 2018; Bull, 2019), race (Saha 2018, Nwonka & Malik 2018), age (Gross and Musgrave, 2020; Campbell, 2020) and disability (Hadley, 2020). In fact, the idea of fair and diverse CCIs has been actively deconstructed by empirical studies that aim to see beyond the façade of their pioneering, cool, and bohemian character.

In the field of CCIs, there has been a lack of data which would be able to robustly challenge their perceived egalitarian nature and the myth of meritocracy (Littler, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2016). In a survey that was conducted in 2018 (Brook et al., 2018) aiming to map social inequalities in the CCIs, the majority of respondents demonstrated a strong belief that the sector is meritocratic, suggesting that hard work and talent are very important to getting ahead. It is no surprise that among the responders, the highly paid segment that withholds the most influential positions in CCIs tends to demonstrate stronger faith in meritocracy.

As section 2 discussed, entry into CCIs is often regulated by invisible barriers, since training and qualifications are often unrecognised or inconsistent. Indeed, creative workers tend to represent a very skilled but vastly diverse workforce in terms of employment qualifications. Given, therefore, that pathways into CCI careers are multiple and unchartered, the field is marked by longstanding patterns of exclusion including among other factors social class, race, and gender. According to Brook et al. (2021: 501), recent literature has made 'crucial

interventions to explain how the structural inequalities outlined in research on creative and cultural work are rendered as secondary or irrelevant in the language of practice and policy for the CCIs'. They particularly examine the work of Malik and Nwonka (2018) on how frameworks of diversity have made the recognition of racial discrimination much harder. Similarly, through Gill (2014) and McRobbie (2007), they identify a similar pattern in how CCIs often render sexism unintelligible, through a rhetoric of 'post-feminism' that obscures inequities and preserves typologies of labour division that perpetuate sexism.

## 3.1 Social class and regional inequalities

Despite the meritocratic discourses appearing in official reports that celebrate economic contribution, recent research suggests that the CCIs are unevenly accessible for the less privileged (Dent, 2020; Stokes, 2017). Research has illustrated patterns of inequity, where those from the most privileged backgrounds enjoy a head-start even before entering the CCIs by investing in education and training, and later being able to afford the luxury of extended periods of unpaid internships that are now required to enter the CCIs (Banks, 2017; Gill, 2018; Oakley & O'Brien, 2016). These phenomena reinforce and reproduce class/income inequities that by extension become endemic in the CCIs and eventually normalised and invisible.

Randle et al. (2015) study of the social composition of the UK film and television industries demonstrates that the milieu does not reflect the diversity of the population, and the industries still remain 'white, male, and middle-class' (see also Christopherson, 2009; Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). Employing Bourdieu's framework of habitus and symbolic capital, they map the factors that contribute to middle-class privilege in the CCIs: Cultural capital becomes solvent through the exemplification of institutionalised education and class markers such as accent. Social capital self-perpetuates its potency through networking, in an industry where 'who you know' becomes a currency for advancement. Finally, economic capital affords aspiring CCI workers the flexibility to pursue the right opportunities while engaging in unpaid work without worrying about a steady wage. As a result, Randle et al (2015) illustrate that the most socially accepted forms of habitus combined with a social field where symbolic capital translates into employability and success, offer privilege to those who come from more affluent backgrounds. This does not mean that the class ceiling cannot be bent, but even when workers manage to succeed despite these circumstances, class inequity persists as a barrier (O'Brien et al, 2016; Bull, 2019). This inequity is more evident in the higher strata of decision making (and income) within those industries.

Similarly to class background, regional access and representation is also a factor of inequality (Chapain & Comunian, 2010; Sanchez-Moral et al, 2014). In Greece in particular, data depicting the national picture become more questionable when we consider regional inequalities (Ανδίκος et al., 2016) as the most recent mapping that was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture shows how disproportionately creative businesses in Greece are clustered

in the urban centres, particularly in Athens. This has been similarly reported in international case studies (Brennan-Horley, 2010; Chapain & Sagot-Duvauroux, 2020; Lingo and Tepper, 2013). Aspiring CCI workers from the periphery find themselves short-changed with less educational opportunities, much more limited outlets to showcase their creativity, increased barriers to access metropolitan industries, and a rampant snobbery with regards to regional identity characteristics.

## 3.2 Gender inequalities

In the analysis of barriers and structures of inequality, gender is a factor that cuts across the creative workforce, often excluding women from (or hindering their participation in) meaningful job opportunities and what can be considered as 'good work' (see section 1). Longstanding debates on gendered discriminations have explained the structural characteristics of creative work that reproduce inequalities. These accounts pay attention to the increasing insecurity and precarity of the labour market, augmented by a culture or working long hours, for low pay, and an inability to plan long-term (Christopherson, 2009; Gill et al., 2013; Gill & Pratt, 2008). In combination with prevailing sociocultural attitudes that assign caring responsibilities predominantly to women, these endemic challenges of the CCIs become barriers with significant gendered dimensions. Moreover, evidence from analyses of work in new media (Banks & Milestone, 2011a), design and fashion (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2016; Reimer, 2016), shed light on the ways new forms of work also rely on longstanding gendered practices and mechanisms that tend to reproduce inequalities.

Recent works have shown that patterns of gender exclusion go beyond the structural features of creative work and are seen to be extending to social representations of the artist – entrepreneur. In particular, the subjectivity of the middle–class, cisgendered, heterosexual, white male is favoured in discourses of professional success (Reimer, 2016). This mythical subjectivity is seen to be resilient, resourceful, networked, and flexible when operating in 'meritocratic' industries. So, the literature suggests, while long–standing patterns of inequalities remain untouched, new ones emerge to compound precarity and exclusion (Bielby, 2009).

Being unable to fully engage in entrepreneurial labour practices that demand holding multiple, flexible job roles and immersing themselves in continuous networking activities to secure those opportunities, women's choices are usually constrained by the nexus of issues associated with motherhood and other duties of care (Stokes, 2017). A lack of consistent interventionist policies naturalizes women's predicament to have to 'choose' between career and family. Without denying the centrality of motherhood to women's career trajectories, Rosalind Gill (2014) also encourages an exploration of more subtle sexist practices that operate below the radar. However, as the 'discourse of flexibility and creative freedom has been allowed to mask some fundamental inequalities and discriminatory practices' (Banks & Milestone 2011: 73), the

nature of gender inequality in entrepreneurial forms of work becomes elusive, and as a result difficult to articulate convincingly.

This section provides the basis for understanding the importance of looking at working lives in the CCIs through the lens of class, gender and other factors of exclusion and inequity. Despite the prevalent celebratory meritocratic discourse, the CCIs remain an unequal field for those who do not belong to the white-middle-class-male-heterosexual group. Acknowledging the literature explored thus far, our project seeks to address the following questions:

• To what extent are cultural and creative occupations 'inclusive' and 'meritocratic' if the demographics of its workers, their social origins, and their networks appear relatively homogeneous and imbalance in their representation?

• How does the exclusivity and structural inequity within CCIs affect the generated creative output? Can an industry dominated by hierarchical, middle-class and white/male/heteronormative privileges create culture that speaks for or to a wider demographic?

## 4. Collectives, campaigning and resistance vs individualized strategies

As Conor, Gill, and Taylor (2015: 13) have noted, the cultural and creative industries have witnessed a decline in the presence of strong unions, collective workers' movements and campaigning advocacy bodies. Workers in the CCIs tend to operate largely ununionised as their work is project-based, intermittent, and ephemeral (Umney & Coderre-LaPalme, 2017; Tsioulakis, 2020: 160). The absence of organized resistance tends to exacerbate precariousness as well as informal forms of employment in a context where individualised strategies prevail (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017). In the same wavelength, Angela Mc Robbie (2002) argues that the decline of radical democratic demands and collective forms of organisation is induced by the absence of traditional workplace set–ups that foster strict top–down hierarchies, clear and detailed job descriptions, and secure employment, through the emergence of the "no-collar workplace" (Ross, 2003). McRobbie further proposes that 'network sociality' serves as the structural principal of the organisation of artistic and cultural production. This is a field whereby individuals see themselves as their own agents who survive through their engagement with ephemeral modes of sociality that are rapid and transactional. The concept of working sociality is not new, as Andrea Wittel (2001) first coined this term in an attempt to link the working lives of contemporary creatives to a wider process of labour restructuring and deregulation that result in a process of fierce individualisation.

Echoing Boltanski and Chiappelo (2005), from the late 1970s and onwards, the elasticity of work has led to the erosion of professional and collective identities, leading to the decline of trade unionism. Precarity, indeed, diminishes the impetus for engagement in any act of political mobilisation, since it cultivates fierce competition that undermines collective demands.

Indicative is the case of intermittent workers in the entertainment industry including a wide variety of technicians, audiovisual engineers, and artists who are constantly under the strain of securing the next contract. Researching creative work in the intersections between live entertainment, cinema, and audiovisual production, Jérémy Sinigaglia observes:

> The shift to collective action, and then maintaining engagement, is highly correlated to how intermittent workers perceive their own circumstances. As mentioned above, intermittent workers' careers are marked by uncertainty, including the inability to anticipate the middle- or long-term changes to their situation. This situation (the most common) does not have much impact on mobilization, as workers have learned more or less to "make do." But as soon as the risk of losing entitlements becomes real and appears likely (for example, workers know they only have six days to demonstrate the five contracts needed to renew his or entitlements), the attitude toward engagement changes considerably. In other words, when precarity is no longer a synonym for routine but indicates a decline in personal circumstances (precarization), participation in protests is called into question (Sinigaglia, 2007, 25).

Hence, creative workers are often prone to social withdrawal and the employment of highly individualised coping strategies, since collective forms of organisation seem obsolete, outdated, and inadequate in the battle against the prevalence and totality of neoliberal capitalism (Shane, 2013; Percival and Lee, 2022). Precarity additionally triggers individualisation as creative workers are not equally affected by the harsh working conditions that prevail within the creative sectors of the economy. As argued earlier, the subjective experience and repercussions of precarity are shaped by intersectional markers and depend on the line of work, sector, and employment status of a given individual.

In emergency situations, like the example of COVID–19 (De Peuter et al., 2023; Shaughnessy et al, 2022; Comunian & England, 2020), many casual and precarious workers joined organized movements as they found themselves outside of employment and ineligible for financial support even in those rare cases when it became available (Karakioulafi, 2022; FitzGibbon & Tsioulakis, 2022; Tsioulakis, 2022). During this period, alongside their vanished income, CCI workers also lost reference to a significant aspect of their identification (as performers or 'creatives' more widely) and access to experiences of collective creativity. This created a vacuum that was partially replaced by participation in collective, trade-specific organising and campaigning, both virtually and – when possible – through visceral physical presence (Ballandina, 2021). What should be noted, however, is that participation in collective organizing and activism tends to be more present among workers who do not find themselves in extreme positions of either debilitating precarity or unwavering security and accomplishment (Sinigaglia, 2007).

Literature that stems from the study of neoliberalism, subjectivation, and precarity and which often draws on neo–Foucauldian approaches of 'governmentality' (Lorey, 2015; 2019; Athanasiou, 2018), understands individualised coping strategies as 'workers' tendency to accept and reproduce for themselves the precise conditions of their subordination' (Banks, 2007: 42). For example, Christina Scharff's (2016) study of neo–liberalism and emerging entrepreneurial subjectivities among female, classically-trained music professionals' foregrounds various possible contours of entrepreneurial identity where the self is articulated as a terrain and instrument of business:

- Constantly active and still lacking time
- Embracing risk, learning from knock–backs and 'staying positive'
- Surviving difficulties by adopting a 'positive' attitude
- Hiding injuries
- Negotiating competing discourses
- Disavowing inequalities
- Anxious, self–doubting, and insecure
- Competing with the self
- Establishing boundaries and blaming 'others'

Indeed, self–blaming in the CCIs prevails as workers see themselves as an unlimited resource of creativity that should be constantly utilised and mined. Qualitative researchers have captured these psychological discourses that emphasize self–management strategies while devaluing collective organisation and action. This context of uncertainty, highly individualised work, ephemeral project-based collaboration, income inequality, and blurry boundaries between paid and unpaid labour, promotes a silent consensus that maladies and complaints must be kept quiet. This is not only due to the potential repercussions of vocalising dissent (loss of income, black-listing etc.) but also because of the risk of upsetting the optics of 'professionalism', which often requires workers in the CCIs to appear able to bear the burdens creative labour (Tsioulakis, 2022; Tsioulakis, 2020: 57-60) leading to a prevalent toxicity of 'positivity'. After all, as Sara Ahmed (2021) has powerfully shown, complaints are acts of defiance and dissent, that carry potentially grave repercussions for those who voice them, especially when they do so from a subaltern position.

Despite these structural barriers, workers in the CCIs still manage to create networks and form collectives, creating cracks in the absolute dominance of the entrepreneurial ethos through ground-up 'communities of care' (Campbell, 2022; Simms & Dean, 2015; Dean, 2012) From small–scale solidarity actions such as helping a fellow artist or sharing tips on how to deal with a demanding producer, to more organised responses and endeavours of resourcing, creative workers seem in search of ways of engaging with one another through social values and principles that would enable them to improve their working conditions (FitzGibbon &

Tsioulakis, 2022; Sandoval, 2018; Strauss & Fleischmann, 2020). In this effort, creative workers forge constellations of care and mutual support, that though not always explicitly political, carry seeds of resistance that have the potential to develop into more conscious political action (as was the case with the emergence of the pandemic).

Mindful of the above debates in the literature, our project seeks to ask:

- How can creative workers create space and structures for reflection on union growth, campaign development and collective organizing in a highly competitive context?
- How can unions create awareness and promote forms of organized resistance that is relevant for the newcomers in the CCIs?
- What other constellations and communities of resistance can have potential impact on collective working conditions in the CCIs? How can they be maintained and supported and what is/should be their relationship to organised unions?

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