PRECARITY AND CULTURAL WORK IN THE SOCIAL FACTORY? IMMATERIAL LABOUR, PRECARIOUSNESS AND CULTURAL WORK

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Transformations in advanced capitalism under the impact of globalization, information and communication technologies, and changing modes of political and economic governance have produced an apparently novel situation in which increasing numbers of workers in affluent societies are engaged in insecure, casualized or irregular labour. While capitalist labour has always been characterized by intermittency for lower-paid and lower-skilled workers, the recent departure is the addition of well-paid and high-status workers into this group of 'precarious workers'. The last decades have seen a variety of attempts to make sense of the broad changes in contemporary capitalism that have given rise to this — through discussions of shifts relating to post-Fordism, post-industrialization, network society, liquid modernity, information society, 'new economy', 'new capitalism' and risk society (see Bauman, 2000, 2005; Beck, 2000; Beck and Ritter, 1992; Beck et al., 2000; Bell, 1973; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Castells, 1996; Lash and Urry, 1993; Reich, 2000; Sennett, 1998, 2006; *Theory, Culture & Society* has also been an important forum for these debates). While work has been central to all these accounts, the relationship between the transformations within working life and workers' subjectivities has been relatively under-explored. However, in the last few years a number of terms have been developed that appear to speak directly to this. Notions include creative labour, network labour, cognitive labour, affective labour and immaterial labour. While such terms are not reducible to each other (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005), their very proliferation points to the significance of contemporary transformations and signals — at the very least — that 'something' is going on.

In this special section we will address that 'something' through a sustained focus on one group of workers said perhaps more than any other to symbolize contemporary transformations of work: cultural and creative workers. In this context it is important to be clear about the object of our analysis. The cultural and creative industries are part of what is commonly referred to as the service and knowledge economy. Writers who stress the role of creativity (as a source of competitive advantage) point to the injection of 'creative' work into all areas of economic life. By contrast, scholars who are interested in the cultural industries point to the growth of the particular industries that produce cultural outputs. These industries have undergone significant expansion in recent years (Pratt, 2007). The two terms — cultural industries and creative industries — are subject to considerable dispute (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, 2007; Lovink and Rossiter, 2007; Peck, 2005; Pratt, 2005, 2008). We regard the term 'creative industries' simply as a political rebranding of the cultural industries following Miege (1989), Garnham (1987) and Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005).

Artists, (new) media workers and other cultural labourers are hailed as 'model entrepreneurs' by industry and government figures (Florida, 2002; Reich, 2000); they are also conjured in more critical discourses as exemplars of the move away from stable notions of 'career' to more informal, insecure and discontinuous employment (Jones, 1996), are said to be iconic representatives of the 'brave new world of work' (Beck, 2000; Flores and Gray, 2000), in which risks and responsibilities must be borne solely by the individual (Allen and Henry, 1997; Batt et al., 1999; Gill, 2007; Jarvis and Pratt, 2006; McRobbie, 1999, 2002; Neff et al., 2005), and, more recently, as we elaborate in this article, they have been identified as the poster boys and girls of the new 'precariat' — a neologism that brings together the meanings of precariousness and proletariat to signify both an experience of exploitation and a (potential) new political subjectivity.

While there has been discussion of the emergence of 'free agents' (Pink, 2001) and of the tensions of the work—life balance (Hyman et al., 2003; McDowell, 2004; Perrons, 2003; Webster, 2004), precariousness, precarity and precarization have recently emerged as novel territory for thinking — and intervening in — labour and life. They come at once from the powerful body of work associated with autonomist Marxist intellectuals in Italy and France, and — importantly — from *post-operaist* political activism, such as that seen in the EuroMayDay mobilizations in the first few years of the 21st century. Precariousness (in relation to work) refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work — from illegalized, casualized and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecework and freelancing. In turn, precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union. This *double meaning* is central to understanding the ideas and politics associated with precarity; the new moment of capitalism that engenders precariousness is seen as not only oppressive but also as offering the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics.

The aim of this special section is to bring together three bodies of ideas — the work of the 'Italian laboratory', including Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Paolo Virno, Franco Beradi and Maurizio Lazzarato; the activist writings about precarity that have appeared in online journal sites such as *Fibreculture* and *Mute*; and the emerging research on creative labour being produced by sociologists and others (Adkins, 1999; Banks, 2007; Batt et al., 1999; Beck, 2003; Blair, 2003; Blair et al., 2003; Deuze, 2007; Gill, 2002, 2007; Gottschall and Kroos, 2007; Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002; Markusen and Schrock, 2006; McRobbie, 1998, 1999, 2003; Mayerhofer and Mokre, 2007; Neff et al., 2005; Perrons, 1999, 2002, 2003; Pratt, 2002; Pratt et al., 2007; Ross, 2003; Taylor and Littleton, 2008a, 2008b; Ursell, 2000;)). It is striking how little connection, until now, there has been between the theory and activism influenced by autonomous Marxists and empirical research (though see de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford, 2006; Ehrenstein, 2006), and it is this that the articles collected here seek to develop, beginning a conversation between the different traditions. Each of these strands constitutes, in a sense, an emergent field that is in process and not yet stabilized (in the manner understood by sociologists of scientific knowledge). The objective here is not to 'apply' one 'perspective' to another, but rather to bring these ideas into a dialogue in which sometimes difficult and challenging 'high' theory, activist politics and empirical research can raise new questions of each other. In what follows we discuss the writings of the autonomist school together with activist writings, in recognition of them as always-already entangled with political movements, and respecting their desire to move beyond a sociological perspective to a more political engagement with the dynamics of power in post-Fordist societies (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Negri, 1979, 1989; Virno et al., 2004). (...)

This article is divided into three parts. In the first we introduce the notions of precariousness, precarity and precarization in the context of contemporary autonomist Marxist writing. A number of key terms or themes will be examined — e.g. notions of immaterial labour, the social factory and multitude. In the second the politics of the precarity movement is discussed. In the final part of the article we turn to the growing body of empirical research on creative labour, and highlight several key themes of this work which overlap and resonate with autonomist thinking. These are themes relating to the importance of *affect, temporality, subjectivity and solidarity*. We raise questions and present the following articles in the spirit of beginning a dialogue, some themes of which include: how might the autonomist preoccupation with temporality speak to the experiences of timepressured cultural workers? Does the autonomist emphasis upon the affective dimensions of work contribute to an understanding of creative labour? How might empirical studies of the experience of cultural work speak to autonomist arguments about emergent subjectivities in these fields? What kinds of political organization and resistance are likely to emerge in these profoundly individualized fields, and might precarity offer a point of articulation and solidarity? A short conclusion then draws this introductory article to a close.

Autonomist Marxism and the Multitude

The account of capitalism proposed by autonomist Marxists (see for example Hardt, 2005; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Lazzarato, 1996, 2007; Murphy and Mustapha, 2005b; Virno et al., 2004; Virno and Hardt, 1996) differs in several key respects from classical Marxism. It rejects the notion of history as a linear progression through a series of different stages, leading to the final and inevitable collapse of capitalism, brought about by declining rates of profit. In place of an account of the power of capital, it stresses the autonomy and creativity of labour, and workers' power to bring about change. From this perspective, capital never shifts of its own accord; workers' movements are the stimulus of development. Rather than seeing wage labourers as (merely)

victims of capital, autonomists highlight their role as protagonists, in a view of capitalism in which a dialectical logic gives way to a revitalized emphasis on the *antagonism* of capitalist relations (though not understood in simple binary terms).

Work or labour has been a pre-eminent focus of autonomist writing and activism, and is understood as representing the central mechanism of capitalism. Autonomist theorist Harry Cleaver defines capitalism as 'a social system based on the imposition of work with the commodity form' (2000: 82), a system in which life is arranged around, and subordinated to, work and becomes the grounds of its mode of domination (Weeks, 2005). Given this understanding, autonomist Marxists do not call for more work, for the right to work or even for less alienated work, but point to the *refusal of work* as a political — potentially revolutionary — act. This is because, as Negri argues, to refuse work is fundamentally to challenge capitalism: 'the refusal of work does not negate one nexus of capitalist society, one aspect of capital's process of production or reproduction. Rather, with all its radicality, it negates the whole of capitalist society' (Negri, 1979: 124).

Autonomist writers are critical of some Marxists for their failure to appreciate the significance of work as constitutive of social life, and for their tendency to romanticize labour. Negri notes that it is sometimes treated as if it were 'a title of nobility' rather than the central mechanism of capitalist domination. He indicts other socialists for their commitment to 'productivism', seeing it both as a retreat from critical analysis and from utopian imagination. For Negri, the refusal of work is both 'a demand and a perspective' (Weeks, 2005: 109ff.). Refusal was a central tenet of *Operaismo*, the Italian workerist movements of the 1970s, alongside the 'leading role thesis' and the 'strongest link strategy', which held that the critique of capital should start from working-class struggles and that energy be focused on the strongest parts of proletarian movements (rather than the weakest links of capital). As a practice, such a challenge may include slacking, absenteeism, wildcat strikes and acts of refusal or sabotage within the workplace, and it articulates an alternative to productivist values in an affirmation of what Kathi Weeks calls 'hedonist Marxism': 'our propensity to want more — more time, freedom, and pleasure', and a 'vision of life no longer organised primarily around work' (Weeks, 2005: 133). This captures autonomists' emphasis on the positive, constructive aspects of refusal, and on a kind of politics which is not only designed to change the future, but also, in its very practice, to bring into existence new ways of being, living and relating. In this sense it echoes the ideas of the situationists (Debord, 1994; Vaneigem, 1972). This is Negri's idea of communism as a 'constituting praxis'. As Hardt and Negri put it in *Empire*: 'the refusal of work and authority, or really the refusal of voluntary servitude, is the beginning of a liberatory politics. . . . Beyond the simple refusal, or as part of that refusal, we need also to construct a new mode of life and above all a new community' (2000: 204). Other autonomists characterize this as 'exit' or 'exodus' — again highlighting less the negative aspects of such terms but rather the capacity to 'reinvent' the rules of the game and 'disorient the enemy' (Virno, 1996).

The *dynamism* of autonomist accounts of capitalism is striking. As Dyer-Witheford (2005) vividly argues, it is 'a story of escalating cut and thrust, a spiral attack and counter-attack':

> Capital attempts to expropriate the inventive, cooperative capacity of workers, on which it depends for production of commodities. But labour resists. The spectre of subversion drives capital on a relentless 'flight to the future', expanding its territorial space and technological intensity in an attempt to destroy or circumvent an antagonist from whose value-creating power it can never, however, separate without destroying itself. (2005: 137)

From this perspective, the working class is 'not just made, but incessantly remade, as *its contestation brings on* successive rounds of capitalist reorganisation' (Dyer-Witheford, 2005, our emphasis), which in turn generate new strategies and tactics of struggle. Hardt and Negri argue that, in the most recent phase of these ongoing cycles of attack and counter-attack, the industrial militancy of the European and North American working class brought forth a devastating 'reply' from capital, in which all the forces of state repression, transnationalization and technological development were deployed to decimate organized labour. The era of Fordist, industrial production was all but destroyed and the mass worker was replaced by the 'socialized worker', bringing into being a new epoch in which the factory is increasingly disseminated out into *society as a whole*. Tronti (1966) writes of the 'social factory' and Negri of 'firms without factories' or the 'factory without walls'. From this perspective labour is deterritorialized, dispersed and decentralized so that 'the whole society is placed at the disposal of profit' (Negri, 1989: 79). It is further argued that the state, in turn, has shifted from a planner-state based on Keynesian economic principles to a 'crisis

state' or 'neoliberal' state which, as Michael Hardt (2005: 10) argues, 'does not mean a reduction in economic and social interventionism, but, on the contrary, a broadening of social labour power and an intensification of the state's control over the social factory'. This is both more intense and more globally dispersed, as centralized programmes of imperialist expansion give way to 'a decentred, transnational regime of production and governance' (Murphy and Mustapha, 2005a: 1).

It is not difficult to discern similarities between autonomist accounts of contemporary capitalism and analyses of post-Fordism (Piore and Sabel, 1984), and in particular the work of the Regulation School (Aglietta, 1979; Lipietz, 1992). Moreover, the periodization adopted by many autonomist intellectuals resonates with several other perspectives in identifying the mid 1970s as a key moment (Harvey, 1988; Jameson, 1991), the site of a temporal shift in capitalist organization. What distinguishes autonomist ideas from these other accounts are two linked themes: first the optimism of this perspective, most notably the resistance to seeing the shift as a terminal blow to the working class, and second the focus on subjectivity. As long ago as the early 1970s Negri posed the question: 'What is the working class today, in this specific crisis, no longer merely as objects of exploitation, but the *subject of power?*' (1973: 105, emphasis added). In more recent writing Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) focus on the potentialities and capacities of the new post-Fordist proletariat, revisioned to fit their conceptualization of the dispersed social factory, as *multitude*, operators and agents. The notion of multitude, in particular, emerges as a key term for thinking class composition for this new (dispersed, fragmented, individualized) moment, in a way that maintains a stress upon collective forms of subjectivity and politics: 'Multitude is meant to recognize what the class formation is today and, in describing that class formation, to recognize forms of its possibilities of acting politically' (Hardt, 2005: 96).

Informational Capitalism and Immaterial Labour

Perhaps the autonomist term which, more than any other, may be expected to make a significant contribution to understanding the nature and conditions of creative work is that of 'immaterial labour', 'where labour produces immaterial goods such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 292). Lazzarato (1996: 133) argues that the concept refers to two different aspects of labour:

> On the one hand, as regards the 'informational content' of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers' labour processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labour are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication). On the other hand, as regards the activity that produces the 'cultural content' of the commodity, immaterial labour involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work' — in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms and, more strategically, public opinion. Once the privileged domain of the bourgeoisie and its children, these activities have since the end of the 1970s become the domain of what we have come to define as 'mass intellectuality'.

Autonomist writers stress dual processes — on the one hand the 're-Taylorisation' (Galetto et al., 2007) or 'proletarianisation' (Del Re, 2005) of cultural and intellectual work, and on the other the transformation of all work such that it is increasingly dependent on communicative and emotional capacities. As Cristina Morini (2007: 40) puts it: 'cognitive capitalism tends to prioritize extracting value from relational and emotional elements'. The notion of *affective labour* has achieved greater prominence in recent years as autonomous Marxists emphasize the significance to capitalism of the production and manipulation of affect. This is related to a shift in capitalism understood by Hardt and Negri (2000: 291) as 'informationalization' — the notion that lives are increasingly dominated by technologies: 'Today we increasingly think like computers, while communication technologies and their model of interaction are becoming more and more central to labouring activities.' This is leading, they argue, to a 'homogenization of labouring processes' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 290). However, neither Lazzarato nor Hardt and Negri conceive of immaterial labour as purely functional to capitalism, but also see it as providing potential for a kind of spontaneous, elementary communism. Their writing emphasizes its double face — on the one side the shifts and intensification of exploitation brought about by the acceleration of information, and by Empire's search for ways of realizing 'unmediated command over subjectivity itself' (Lazzarato, 1996: 134), but on the other the release of a social potential for transformation, largely attributable to its affective dimensions and the opportunities for human contact and interaction. This has some echoes of Marx's ideas about the contradictory nature of capitalism. For autonomists, too, capitalism's potential destruction is im-

manent to it. Indeed, nothing is outside — 'there is only trade or war', as the political slogan has it (quoted by Foti in Oudenampsen and Sullivan, 2004). However, Hardt and Negri say more than this. For them, workers' use of technology *exceeds* the capacity of capital to control it (and them):

> Co-operation, or the association of producers, is posed independently of the organisational capacity of capital; the co-operation and subjectivity of labour have found a point of contact outside the machinations of capital. Capital becomes merely an apparatus of capture, phantasm and an idol. Around it move radically autonomous processes of self valorisation that not only constitute an alternative basis of potential development but also actually represent a new constituent foundation. (Hardt and Negri, 1994: 282)

A number of criticisms have been raised of the notions of informational capitalism and immaterial labour. The image of a society dominated by knowledge and information work is seen by some as too redolent of the language used by prophets of capitalism and management gurus (Dyer-Witheford, 2005); it also meshes inappropriately with Bell's (1973) liberal formulation of post-industrial society which underpins the work of Castells (1996) and Florida (2002). Moreover, the stubborn materiality of most work seemingly represents a riposte to autonomist claims; just as assertions about 'virtual society' and the 'death of distance' (Cairncross, 1998; Coyle, 1998; Quah, 1999) led to a resurgence of interest in place that highlighted the clustering and embeddedness of Internet companies in specific locales (English-Lueck et al., 2002; Indergaard, 2004; Perrons, 2004b; Pratt, 2000, 2002; Pratt et al., 2007), so too the emphasis upon immateriality calls for a response that highlights the persistence of all-too-material forms of labour — even the zeros and ones that make up the Internet's codes have to be written, and entered, by someone, somewhere.

A further point of critique — taken up by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (this issue) — relates to the elision of *differences* within this account. While it might be true that most work today is in some sense impacted by information and communications, the grandiosity of such a claim obscures profound differences between different groups of workers — between, for example, the fast food operative with a digital headset or electronic till in their minimum wage McJob, and the highly educated, well-paid cultural analyst. Both are touched by the 'information revolution', to be sure, but is the 'interactivity' or 'affectivity' deployed in their work sufficient grounds for treating them as similar kinds of labouring subject? Put into a global perspective, the argument is even harder to sustain. George Caffentzis broke with other autonomists on this issue, pointing out that Hardt and Negri's account was told from the perspective of male white and Northern subjects, and accusing them of celebrating cyborgs and immaterial labour while ignoring the contemporary renaissance of slavery: 'the computer requires the sweatshop, and the cyborg's existence is premised on the slave' (Caffentzis, 1998, cited in Dyer-Witheford, 2005: 149). This opens up the need for a careful consideration of what relationship cultural (or creative) workers may/may not have with 'informational' workers. There is already a critical literature regarding the tendency to analytically frame manufacture and services as a dualism (Walker, 1985). Moreover, Hesmondhalgh (2002) stresses the importance of symbolic production to the distinction of cultural work from other work. Finally, we need to be cautious about extrapolating the modes and forms of activism of these groups given their different formations and orientations. Clearly, a range of empirical work is figured here.

Operaismo to Precarity

Notwithstanding these criticisms, autonomist Marxist writings have proved attractive and inspirational to many scholars and activists eager for a critique of, and alternative to, post-Fordist capitalism. In the last decade precarity politics has become one of the inheritors of the *Operaismo* movements in which many autonomists were involved. Like the autonomist writing discussed so far, precarity draws attention to both 'the oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism' and the 'potentialities that spring from workers' own refusal of labour' and their subjective demands (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005: 1). The notion embodies a critique of contemporary capitalism in tandem with an optimistic sense of the potential for change. Initially organized around struggles over labour, *precarietà* designated all forms of insecure, flexible, temporary, casual, intermittent, fractional or freelance work. Precarity became a collective platform and rallying point for the post-Fordist proletariat. As Neilson and Rossiter put it, in terms which echo Negri: 'At base was an attempt to identify or imagine precarious, contingent or flexible workers as a new kind of political subject, replete with their own forms of collective organization and modes of expression' (p. 2). However, precarity politics quickly expanded to encompass a variety of struggles, including those relating to migration, citizenship, LBGT and feminist movements. Activism 'transformed precarietà from being, in the main, an economic category addressing new forms of occupation and

labour relations, to a more open instrument of struggle, enabling resistance and the re-imagination of contemporary politics, lives and subjectivities' (Andall et al., 2007: 4)

The precarity movement has been notable for the sheer energy and inventiveness of its attempts to interrupt the flow of transnational capital. Precarity activism is often 'creative activism' (De Sario, 2007), which uses theatre, cinema, music and stunts to effect political change, deploys visual tools and images extensively (Mattoni and Doerr, 2007) and also draws on situationist-inspired strategies of '*detournement*' (Fantone, 2007). Alongside the mass mobilizations of the EuroMayDay demonstrations, which began in Milan in 2001 and had spread to 18 different European cities by 2005, actions included *derives* (Makeworlds Festival, 2001), precarity ping-pong and incursions by the invented saint San Precario into supermarkets, fashion shows and film festivals. Marcello Tari and Ilaria Vanni (2006) document the 'life and deeds' of this subversive trans-gender saint, patron of precarious workers, whose celebration day — on 29 February — was designed to draw attention to casualization and flexploitation and the takeover of life by work, and to create 'lines of flight according to need, personal inclination and group affiliation' (Tari and Vanni, 2006: 6).

It is useful to think of the precarity movement as geographically and temporally specific. Its origination in Western Europe is significant, as is its association with the politics of 1970s Turin. As many have argued, 'on a global scale and in its privatized and/or unpaid versions, precarity is and always has been *the standard experience of work in capitalism*' (Mitropoulous, 2005: 5, emphasis added; see also Frassanito Network, 2006). As Neilson and Rossiter argue (this issue), it is Fordism and Keynesianism that are the exception, both spatially and temporally, thus the emergence of precarity movements in Western Europe may have their foundation in the 'relative longevity of social state models in the face of neoliberal labour reforms', which meant that conditions experienced by most people, in most places, most of the time during the history of capitalism appeared newly harsh and brutal. For the same reasons precarity politics also (arguably) has a generational specificity, centred around people in their twenties and thirties — the 'precarious generation' (Bourdieu, 1999) identified by many (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998) as disproportionately affected by risk and insecurity compared to the previous generation, and with little expectation of work security.

Some have argued that precarity politics are also temporally specific. The precariat is to post-Fordism what the proletariat was to the industrial age, argues Alex Foti (in Oudenampsen and Sullivan, 2004; see also Raunig, 2007). Neilson and Rossiter 'date' the movement more carefully, asking whether and how its ascendance in the first few years of the 21st century may be connected to the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the subsequent US-led wars on Afghanistan and Iraq. Is this timing mere coincidence or do the mobilizations around precarity tap into more general insecurities and concerns about 'seemingly interminable global conflict'? (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005). This also raises questions about the ways in which the notion may relate to Judith Butler's (2004) discussion of 'precarious life', which has been articulated as an ontological, existential category founded in questions about who counts as human, what is recognized as a grievable loss, and the development of relational ethics. Might the growth of precarization also be connected to the growth and development of the worldwide web and the huge expansion of the cultural industries and cultural production — both areas which are characterized by the degree to which they presume precarious labour?

Debating Precarity
Some of the objections raised to autonomist ideas have also become animated debates within precarity politics. There has been contestation about who best exemplifies the experience of precarity. Laura Fantone (2007: 9) critiques what she sees as the 'imaginary subject' at the heart of precarity politics: the 'single, male, urban artist or creative worker, idealised as the vanguard of the precariat', who is often counterposed to the implicitly more 'backward' and less radical figure of the 'suburban housewife'. This is tied to an accusation of both Eurocentrism and androcentrism which makes 'different precarities' less visible (Vishmidt, 2005). While women have almost always done 'immaterial and affective labour, often with little recognition in both fields', precariousness is only discussed 'at the moment when the Western male worker began feeling the negative effects of the new post-industrial flexible job market' (Fantone, 2007: 7). As the movement has widened in response to such criticisms, other figures said to be emblematic of precarity include the undocumented migrant, female care workers, or sex workers (Makeworlds Festival, 2001; Mezzadra, 2005).

Another debate concerns solidarity across difference. As a site for mobilizations across a variety of issues, locations and experiences, the precarity movement has sought to make connections between diverse groups — artists and creatives, factory workers, undocu-

mented migrants, sex workers, students, etc. The Milan-based organization Chainworkers, for example, attempted to organize both 'chainworkers' (workers in malls, shopping centres, hypermarkets and logistics companies) and 'brainworkers' (members of the 'cognitariat', programmers and freelancers). Alex Foti (in Oudenampsen and Sullivan, 2004) argued that while the former are always 'on the verge of social exclusion', the latter 'might make above-standard wages but if they lose their job they are thrown into poverty' — and thus pointed to *potential solidarity* between them. The appeal of the notion of precarity is precisely in this potentiality, yet it also produces tensions common to all forms of transversal politics: how to deal with differences, how to find 'common cause', how to build solidarity while also respecting the singularity and specificity of the very different experiences of (say) janitors, creatives and office temps? At its best, precarity activism can be a politics of articulation in the Gramscian (see Gramsci, 1971) sense, requiring no pure or authentic subject as its model and resisting the temptation to collapse different experiences of precariousness into a singular form, with a unitary cause, but rather respecting differences and articulating them in struggle. Nevertheless, this politics of articulation (Hall, 1985, 1988, 1990; Laclau, 1979; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) of contingent foundations (Butler, 1992), still leaves everything to fight over. Not least is the question of whether there are *grounds* for such solidarity in a global frame characterized by enormous disparities in wealth and power. Would it *actually* be in the best interests of 'the maquiladora worker to ally herself with the fashion designer?' asks Angela Mitropoulos (2005), pertinently. Do they have common cause or identity of interests? What are the distinct modes of exploitation in operation? Can their different interests be articulated? Then there are questions about what kinds of power dynamics these very different locations/subjectivities might produce within the movement, and the very real challenges of building connections between actors who are positioned in radically different ways. Mitropoulos demands:

> If the exploitation and circulation of 'cognitive' or 'creative labour' consists, as Maurizio Lazzarato argues, in the injunction to 'be active, to communicate, to relate to others' and to 'become subjects' then how does this shape their interactions with others, for better or worse? How does the fast food chainworker, who is compelled to be affective, compliant, and routinised, not assume such a role in relation to the software programming 'brainworker', whose habitual forms of exploitation oblige opinion, innovation and self-management? (Mitropoulos, 2005: 91)

Finally, there have also been debates about the aims (and complicities) of precarity activism and, particularly, the extent to which the movement may look to the (nation) state to attenuate the worst features of the experience of post-Fordist capitalism. Social policies, social welfare and public services (to the extent that they continue to exist) operate on an older social logic which is 'the antithesis of the speed, innovation and flexibility' which are demanded of workers (Fantone, 2007: 6). Should the state provide an 'income of citizenship' or 'income of existence' (Fumagalli and Lazzarato, 1999) for these precarious and insecure times? Feminist precarity activists Sconvegno (Galetto et al., 2007) argue that the movement is situated between on one hand deadening and obsolete calls (from older trade unions) for a return to 'permanent employment' 'all the way to your pension', and the spectre of 'total lack of protection and rights' on the other. In this context, some have argued for a 'social income' or for 'flexicurity'. For others, however, this faith in the state is regarded as problematic, reinforcing securitization agendas and the erosion of civil liberties (particularly in the post 9/11 period). More profoundly, it is seen as resting upon a somewhat naïve understanding of state—capital relations (a position developed by Neilson and Rossiter, this issue). Again, the issue raises significant questions for precarity as a political project.

Precariousness, Precarity and Creative Labour
When Raymond Williams (1976) articulated his two great conceptions of culture — one based on a hierarchy of value and the other on the more anthropological understanding of culture as 'a way of life' — he left little room for consideration of cultural work (or culture as work). As Andrew Ross (Lovink and Ross, 2007) has noted, this is not surprising given the 'labourist' context in which Williams was working in 1960s and 1970s Britain; his aim was to open up a new direction for thinking culture.

Nevertheless, Williams could not have anticipated that artists, writers, filmmakers, designers and others would, only a few decades later, have come to take centre stage as a supposed 'creative class' endowed with almost mythical qualities (Florida, 2002).

> As paradigms of entrepreneurial selfhood, 'creatives', as they are now la-
> belled, are the apple of the policymaker's eye, and are recipients of the kind
> of lip service usually bestowed by national managers on high-tech engineers
> as generators of value. Art products are the object of intense financial specu-
> lation; cultural productions are top hit-makers in the jackpot end of the
> economy; 'cultural districts' are posited as the key to urban New Prosperity;
> and creative industries policy is embraced as the anchor of regional develop-
> ment by governments around the world on the lookout for a catch-up industrial
> plan. In the business world, creativity is viewed as a wonderstuff for trans-
> forming workplaces into powerhouses of value, while intellectual property —
> the lucrative prize of creative endeavor — is increasingly regarded as the 'oil
> of the 21st century'. (Ross, p. 32)

As Ross makes clear, creative workers and the cultural or creative industries more
generally are imbued with an extraordinary range of capacities, which relate to wealth
creation, urban regeneration and social cohesion (Gill, 2002, 2007; Pratt and Gill,
2000; Pratt et al., 2007). The notion of a creative class has been roundly critiqued
elsewhere (Peck, 2005; Pratt, 2008), as has the use of the creative industries in po-
licy discourse, particularly in the context of the 1990s UK New Labour government
(Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; McRobbie, 1998, 1999, 2003; Pratt, 2005).
Here, though, our focus is on the claims that artists and creatives are 'model entre-
preneurs', the ideal workers of the future. In recent years a number of qualitative and
ethnographic studies have examined the lives of artists, fashion designers, television
creatives and new media workers, and this research has raised critical questions about
the much vaunted flexibility, autonomy and informality of these domains. A clear and
largely consistent picture of creative labour has emerged from this research, particu-
larly that focused on the 'new' micro-businesses in the cultural industries — what
Ulrich Beck (2000) refers to as 'me and company', Leadbeater and Oakley (1999) dub 'the
Independents', and Ross (2003) explores as the 'industrialisation of Bohemia'.

Studies have highlighted a number of relatively stable features of this kind of work:
a preponderance of temporary, intermittent and precarious jobs; long hours and bulimic
patterns of working; the collapse or erasure of the boundaries between work and play;
poor pay; high levels of mobility; passionate attachment to the work and to the identity
of creative labourer (e.g. web designer, artist, fashion designer); an attitudinal
mindset that is a blend of bohemianism and entrepreneurialism; informal work environ-
ments and distinctive forms of sociality; and profound experiences of insecurity and
anxiety about finding work, earning enough money and 'keeping up' in rapidly changing
fields (Banks, 2007; Banks and Milestone, in press; Batt et al., 1999; Caves, 2000;
Christopherson, 2002, 2003; Christopherson and van Jaarsveld, 2005; Gill, 2002, 2007;
Jarvis and Pratt, 2006; Kennedy, in press; Kotamraju, 2002; McRobbie, 2002, 2003, 2006,
2007b; Milestone, 1997; Neff et al., 2005; O'Connor et al., 2000; Perrons, 2007; Richards
and Milestone, 2000; Ross, 2003; Taylor and Littleton, 2008a; Ursell, 2000). Struc-
turally, research has also pointed to the preponderance of youthful, able-bodied people
in these fields, marked gender inequalities, high levels of educational achievement,
complex entanglements of class, nationality and ethnicity, and to the relative lack of
caring responsibilities undertaken by people involved in this kind of creative work
(in ways that might lend support to Beck's arguments about individualization as a 'com-
pulsion', the drive in capitalism towards a moment in which subjects can work unfettered
by relationships or family; see also Adkins, 1999).

There seem to be a number of potentially productive areas of overlap or resonance be-
tween research on cultural labour and the ideas of the Italian autonomist school and
the precarity activism discussed so far. To our mind they coalesce around concerns with
affect, temporality, subjectivity and *solidarity*. Thus we will consider each of these
briefly to open up some possibilities for dialogue.

Affect
One of the most consistent findings of research on work within the creative industries
is that it is experienced by most who are involved with it as profoundly satisfying and
intensely pleasurable (at least some of the time). A vocabulary of love is repeatedly
evinced in such studies, with work imbued with the features of the Romantic tradition of
the artist, suffused with positive emotional qualities (von Osten, 2007). Research
speaks of deep attachment, affective bindings, and to the idea of self-expression and
self-actualization through work. Indeed, such characterizations are so common that
McRobbie (forthcoming) argues that we might dub this kind of labour 'passionate work'.

In this context, autonomous Marxists' emphasis upon 'affective labour' might be thought to offer a way of engaging with this, connecting such emotional investments with 'work as play' to wider transformations within capitalism — as well as the possibility to intervene in them. Yet does it? One of the problems with the notion of affective labour, which was alluded to earlier and is discussed in Hesmondhalgh and Baker's article (in this issue), is the bluntness and generality of its definition. Designed to improve upon and narrow down 'immaterial labour', it lacks conceptual coherence and ends up collapsing entirely different kinds of work and experience. If *all* work has affective dimensions then what does it mean to say that any *particular* job involves affective labour? By what criteria might we distinguish between the hospice nurse and the back-room computer programmer? It is clear from empirical research on work in the cultural field that such labour calls on a whole range of different kinds of affective work (Kennedy, 2008). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (this issue) attempt to unpack some of the emotional skills and qualities involved in work on a TV production, and they also contrast the autonomists' focus on affective labour with Hochschild's (1983) earlier work on (gendered) emotional labour. Perhaps even more troubling than the rather general conceptualization of affective labour in autonomists' thinking is the work the notion of 'affect' itself is called upon to do in their account of contemporary capitalism. As in so much autonomous Marxist writing the notion has a double face — it speaks on the one hand to the extent to which emotions, feelings, relationships are 'put to work' in post-Fordist capitalism, and on the other to the immanent human cooperative capacities and potentialities that may be set free by such labour. However, the former assertion, we contend, is made sotto voce in the context of their loud affirmation of the potentially transformative and transgressive nature of affect. Affect appears largely in its more pleasant guises — solidarity, sociality, cooperativeness, desire — and, importantly, as (largely) always-already transgressive. What this emphasis misses is both profoundly important to understanding cultural labour and for their account of contemporary capitalism. First, it occludes all the affective features of cultural labour that do not involve affirmative feelings. It misses, for example, the fatigue, exhaustion and frustration that are well documented in studies of cultural work. It misses also the fears (of getting left behind, of not finding work), the competitiveness, the experience of socializing not simply as pleasurable potential, but as a compulsory means of securing future work (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2002; Ursell, 2000). Above all, it misses the anxiety, insecurity and individualized shame that are endemic features of fields in which you are judged on what you produce, 'you are only as good as your last job', and your whole life and sense of self is bound up with your work (Blair, 2001). These are not incidental features of the experience of cultural labour; they are toxic, individualized but thoroughly structural features of workplaces that include television production companies, fashion and web design houses, and (not least) the neoliberal university.

These (unpleasant) affective experiences — as well as the pleasures of the work — need to be theorized to furnish a full understanding of the experience of cultural work. To be fair, sociological research (our own included) has fallen short in this respect too, preferring to oscillate between polarized accounts which stress different features of the experience rather than producing an integrated understanding. But what is clear from the emerging research is the urgency of *thinking these together* — a prospect which seems to be foreclosed, rather than opened up, by the autonomists' take on affect.

Second, these ideas rest upon a view of affect that appears baffling to those outside the Nietzschean/Deleuzian tradition from which much autonomist writing draws. It is conjured as a pre-subjective intensity, which exists outside signification, and can exceed power relations and break through them, offering a glimpse of a better world, with new ways of being and relating. Yet why, we might wonder, is affect assumed to be autonomous? How can its essential transgressiveness be defended? How can it be said to exist outside relations of power, as if it were sealed in some pure realm that capitalism cannot reach to taint and corrupt? How, in sum, can it be claimed that affect is somehow outside the social? To be sure, affects can be mobilized in anti-capitalist struggles, as Hardt and Negri have argued (see also Terranova, 2004). Every activist involved in any kind of political organization knows this — it is about 'hearts and minds' after all. But this is a very different proposition from the suggestion that affect is — somehow — alwaysalready transgressive (for alternative formulations see: Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2008; Tyler, 2008a, 2008b).

In autonomist writing, affect is called upon partly to critique what is understood as Foucault's overemphasis on the reach and scope of power. Hardt counterposes 'biopower from below' in arguing for an affective dimension which evades, resists and exceeds the new modalities of control. There is not space here to fully elaborate a critique of this position, but we would echo Hemmings' powerful interrogation of the 'affective turn', in which she argues that affect 'often emerges as a rhetorical device whose ultimate goal is to persuade "paranoid theorists" into a more productive frame of mind' (2005:

551). Its affirmatory focus gives little space to affects which, far from resisting or transgressing, seem to collude and reproduce. Where is the ugliness of racism and hate crime, for example? Little space seems allowed for affects that are normative or disciplinary, binding us into structures and relations that may, in classical Marxist terms, not be in our real interests. In relation to understanding cultural labour it leaves us with no way of grappling with the role played by affect in generating consent (or even passion) for working lives that, without this emotional and symbolic sheen, might appear arduous, tiring and exploitative. Moreover, the autonomists' very selective focus on affect does not help to illuminate the 'self-exploitation' that has been identified as a salient feature of this field (McRobbie, 2002; Ross, 2003), and in this respect Foucauldian-inflected accounts appear more compelling in their ability to make sense of how pleasure itself may become a disciplinary technology.

Temporality

When read through the concerns of the recent 'turn to labour' in cultural studies, one of the autonomists' most compelling arguments relates to the takeover of life by work. This is understood by autonomist writers and activists not through the familiar liberal notion of 'work—life balance' but through the radical contention that we all exist in the 'social factory'. 'When we say "work" in cognitive capitalism, we mean less and less a precise and circumscribed part of our life, and more and more a comprehensive action' (Morini, 2007: 44), in which the whole life experience of the worker is harnessed to capital.

For autonomists this claim is largely understood in terms of *time*. Thus it is not so much that work extends across different *spaces* (the home and, with mobile devices, almost everywhere), but that the temporality of life becomes governed by work. Papadopoulos et al. (2008) argue that precarity is a form of exploitation which operates primarily on the level of time, evaporating distinctions between work and leisure, production and consumption. Moreover, in the 'participation economy' of Web 2.0 (Rossiter, in Delfanti, 2008) 'free time' becomes 'free labour' (Terranova, 2000) as people produce and upload content for Facebook, Bebo and YouTube, modify games for giant multinational corporations and leave data trails that are 'informational goldmines' on Google and Safari, etc.

These arguments accord profoundly with the findings of research on cultural work. Time emerges powerfully from such accounts as problematic and difficult in many respects. First, much research points to the extraordinarily long working hours of cultural workers — which are often considerably in excess of working-time agreements and exert heavy costs on — or even prohibit — relationships outside work with friends, partners, children (in ways that are unevenly affected by gender and age). Second, research has pointed to the significant disruption caused by stop-go 'bulimic' patterns of working, in which periods with no work can give way to periods that require intense activity, round-the-clock working, with its attendant impacts on sleep, diet, health and social life (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2006, 2007b; Perrons, 2002, 2007; Pratt, 2000). Moreover, in some industries (for example fashion and the computer games industry) 'crunch times' are becoming more and more normalized (de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford, 2006), such that working hours previously only expected as a collection went to show or a game came to publication become increasingly routinized as part of the job. As McRobbie (forthcoming) argues, this gives rise to health hazards of a different kind from the workplace accidents of industrial work: there may be fewer burns and severed limbs, but the injuries of this highend creative labour include exhaustion, burn-out, alcohol and drug-related problems, premature heart attacks and strokes, and a whole host of mental and emotional disorders related to anxiety and depression (see also Gill, 2009, on the hidden injuries of the neoliberal university).

The blurring of work and non-work time is another feature of cultural labour which seems to fit with autonomist accounts. Research shows that many cultural workers — especially young people — frequently make no distinction between work time and other time. However, while autonomists tend to figure this in terms of the colonization of life and suggest refusal, 'tarrying with time' (Tsianos and Papadopoulos, n.d.), or Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey, 1985), or the slow movement (Leung, forthcoming) as possible modes of resistance, the empirical literature points to a more complicated and ambivalent picture. Long hours and the takeover of life by labour *may* be dictated by punishing schedules and oppressive deadlines, and may be experienced as intensely exploitative, but they may also be the outcome of passionate engagement, creativity and self-expression, and opportunities for socializing in fields in which 'networking' is less about 'schmoozing' the powerful than 'chilling' with friends, co-workers and people who share similar interests and enthusiasms. Not all cultural workers, it seems, share Hardt and Negri's critique of productivism! Sometimes networking may be 'compulsory sociality' (Gregg, 2008) required to survive in a field; at other times it may be pleasurable 'hanging out'

(Pratt, 2006). Often, of course, it is both. It seems to us that the *meanings* which cultural workers give to this should be central — and this is one area where a productive dialogue could be established between autonomism and sociological work on cultural labour.

Subjectivity

As we noted at the start of this article, one of the things that distinguishes the work of Lazzarato, Hardt, Negri, Virno and others from much other social theory — including other Marxist writing — is its emphasis upon subjectivity. Perhaps more than any other body of scholarship it has been concerned to connect changes in the organization of capitalism to transformations in subjectivity, and this represents, in our view, a bold and important project which resonates with and complements the research of some sociologists and critical psychologists — particularly those concerned with the subjectivities demanded by contemporary neoliberal capitalism (Brown, 2003; McRobbie, 2007a, 2007b; Rose, 1990; Walkerdine et al., 2001).

Yet there are tensions within autonomist thinking about subjectivity, which relate — like those around affect — to the productive and affirmatory focus of their work. On the one hand there is a concern with capitalism's attempt to exercise control over not simply workers' bodies and productive capacities but over their subjectivity as well. Lazzarato (1996: 135) contends that 'the new slogan of Western societies is that we should all "become subjects"'. He argues: 'Participative management is a technology of power, a technology for creating and controlling "subjective processes".' This seems to accord with a Foucaultian tradition of analysis interested in new forms of governmentality (Miller and Rose, 2008).

On the other hand, however, autonomist writers are concerned to stress emergent subjectivities, the possibilities of resistance, the features of subjectivity that exceed capitalist control and regulation. They argue that one's subjectivity does not arise from one's position in the class structure but is produced when the contemporary regime of labour becomes *embodied experience*: subjectivity is not a facticity, it is an imperceptible departure (Papadopoulos et al., 2008). The point of departure of the new social subject is not immaterial production as such but its materialization in the subject's flesh (Negri, 2003).

We would contend, however, that subjectivity is always *mediated* by the meanings which people give to their experience — even 'materialization in the flesh' (which we would understand as embodied ways of knowing) is not, in our view, outside culture. Thus, to understand emergent subjectivities, to understand what Marx would have thought of as the difference between a class in itself and class for itself, centrally requires attention to the meanings cultural workers themselves give to their life and work — not merely, we must stress, for the sake of sociological completeness, but in order to found a political project. Without this, how to account for not only the refusals, but also the compliance, the lack of refusal? To put it back to autonomist writers in a more Deleuzian-infused language, we need to understand not only the possible becomings, but also the *not-becomings*.

Moreover, these tensions generate issues similar to those we raisedabout affect: namely, how is it that parts of subjectivity can resist, evade or exceed capitalist colonization? In addition, they point to a fundamental epistemological question: if contemporary forms of capitalist organization demand 'cooperativeness', 'participation', 'creativity' and other practices that are also — simultaneously — said to be features of an elementary spontaneous communism, then how can one distinguish between those instances that might make capitalists quake in their boots and those which are indices (on the contrary) of capitalism's penetration of workers' very souls? By what kinds of principled criteria might we differentiate between the radically different meanings of apparently similar practices? These are important questions that autonomist writing does not seem to resolve.

Solidarity

Finally, however, it seems to us that one of the most important — yet largely implicit — contributions that autonomists' thinking and precarity activism might make to this field is in putting questions of cultural labour, political economy and social justice on the agenda. The lack of trade unionization both cause and outcome of industries that are individualized, deregulated and reliant upon cheap or even free labour, with working hours and conditions (particularly among freelancers and intermittents) that are largely beyond scrutiny.

This situation has been scandalously ignored by the academic fields of media and cultural studies, which have — with notable exceptions — woefully neglected cultural production, or at times have become caught up in the hyperbole of fields such as web design or fashion, believing their myths of 'coolness, creativity and egalitarianism' (Gill, 2002). In the context of the silence from most scholars about cultural labour, autonomist thinking and activism makes a major contribution in focusing on the role of work in capitalism and drawing attention to processes of precarization and individualization. Moreover, in resisting a purely sociological account in favour of an emphasis upon the political potentials of immaterial labour, this work points to the possibility of change, of re-imagining life and labour, of creating new forms of solidarity.

Conclusion

This article has examined the contribution that autonomous Marxism has made to theorizing the experience of 'immaterial' cultural labour in post- Fordist capitalism, and has pointed to the new forms and practices of politics that are mobilized around the precariousness that is said to be a defining feature of contemporary life. Autonomous Marxist ideas have provided inspiration to many seeking a principled left critique of contemporary capitalism, and their ambition and sweep is little short of extraordinary. The ideas have restored a dynamism to accounts of capitalism and accorded workers a leading role in effecting change, with an affirmatory emphasis o n the potentialities created by new forms of labour. The focus on the dispersal of work beyond the factory gate and the dissemination of capitalist relations throughout the 'social factory' makes a major contribution to social theory, and the autonomist attention to subjectivity and to new or potential solidarities is also valuable.

In this article we have brought autonomist writings together with activist ideas about precarity as a key feature of contemporary experience. For some, the figure of the artist or creative worker has been emblematic of the experience of precarity: negotiating short-term, insecure, poorly paid, precarious work in conditions of structural uncertainty. As we have noted, however, this is contested and precarity might be better thought of as a political rallying point for a diverse range of struggles about labour, migration and citizenship. When juxtaposed with the growing body of empirical research on cultural work, however, the autonomist tradition has both added insights and thrown up tensions. The notions of 'immaterial labour' and 'affective labour' that are so central to this work are rather ill-defined and not sharp enough to see the ways in which cultural work is both like and not like other work. Moreover, the emphasis upon affect as positive, transgressive potential has made it difficult for autonomist writers to see the other roles affect may play — not simply in resisting capital but binding us to it. A fuller understanding needs to grasp both pleasure and pain, and their relation to forms of exploitation that increasingly work through dispersed disciplinary modalities and technologies of subjecthood.

The autonomist and activist focus on refusal and resistance raises questions about the relative absence of labour organization within many cultural workplaces (the film industry being an obvious exception), and this represents a significant contribution. However, to understand this requires a closer analysis than the autonomists provide — one that can engage with the specificities of different industries, workplaces and locations, and attend to the meanings that workers themselves give to their labour. To argue this is not to reinstate 'mere' sociology against the autonomists' explicitly political engagement (though we are not so happy with the 'mere') but to argue, on the contrary (and with a debt to Marx), that this emphasis is necessary not only to understand but also to *change* the world.

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