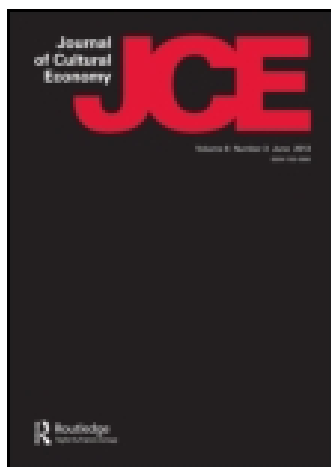


This article was downloaded by: [UNAM Ciudad Universitaria]

On: 29 December 2014, At: 04:32

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Cultural Economy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjce20>

### Introduction: Are We All Cultural Workers Now?

Brett Neilson & Mark Coté

Published online: 18 Dec 2013.



[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Brett Neilson & Mark Coté (2014) Introduction: Are We All Cultural Workers Now?, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 7:1, 2-11, DOI: [10.1080/17530350.2013.864989](https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2013.864989)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2013.864989>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# INTRODUCTION: ARE WE ALL CULTURAL WORKERS NOW?

**Brett Neilson** and **Mark Coté**

Received 30 Oct 2013; Accepted 5 Nov 2013

*Introducing a themed section entitled 'Are We All Cultural Workers Now?', this article explores the relation between precarity and cultural work. It argues that precarity should be understood as an experience rather than a category that allows a mapping of transformations of social class. The article also engages with current debates on cultural work and questions the proposition that changes in this area presage more general shifts in the organisation and exploitation of labour. Finally the piece introduces the four articles that make up the themed section.*

KEYWORDS: precarity; cultural work; labour; global space; biopolitics

The four papers that form this themed section were initially presented as part of a workshop organised in December 2010 by the Centre for Cultural Research (now Institute for Culture and Society) at the University of Western Sydney. The event, an initiative of the Cultural Economy and Globalisation theme within that centre, was staged in a small music venue (formerly a Spanish restaurant) in central Sydney and was entitled 'Are We All Cultural Workers Now? Getting By In Precarious Times'. It featured, apart from presentations by the guest editors and the authors included here, the following speakers: Mark Andrejevic, Sharni Chan, Roy Green, Melissa Gregg, Lian Si, Cameron McAuliffe, Pariece Nelligan, Justin O'Connor, Jennifer Pybus and David Rowe. Although the themes of cultural work and precarity have been a preoccupation of debates about culture, society and economy for over a decade now, the workshop aimed to reassess the terms of the discussion by gaining a sense of the geographical variation of these debates. To this end, it included contributions from North America, China, the UK and continental Europe as well as a series of presentations from Australia. Although the geographical reach of the workshop was limited for pragmatic reasons and it has not been possible to include all of the presentations here, the resulting papers deliver a sense of the diverse qualities and political inflections of the debates surrounding precarity in different metropolitan and continental settings. One paper from the workshop (Pybus 2013) has already been published in *Journal of Cultural Economy* but sits somewhat separately in focusing on cultural work and precarity in the context of online social media and networked spaces. Taken together, the collected papers begin to question grand narratives about the rise of insecure employment being the result of epochal shifts in economy and society and to give a more complex, distributed and empirical snapshot of transformations in work and culture across heterogeneous landscapes of global space and time.

The contributors do not write as representatives of particular locales. Although attentive to material and practical considerations that mark their inquiries, they take up different aspects and angles of precarity: the changes to academic labour, the efforts of

workers' organisations that seek to resist and mitigate precarity, the implications for subjectivity of changing 'social imaginaries' of precarity and the 'hidden injuries' of young working-class men seeking creative careers. The pieces share an emphasis on the experiential dimension of non-standard work and its extension into other aspects of life, but their theoretical and methodological approaches are quite diverse. In this introduction we engage with this emphasis and diversity to plumb the question of the position of cultural work in precarity discourses and actions. Our aim is to elucidate and map existing debates in this area, questioning the capacity of experiences of precarity to yield a coherent class subject and asking what global variations in experiences of precarity tell us about the economic pressures and political hopes invested in this concept.

### What is Precarity?

The term precarity is an import into the English language from French and Italian. Ostensibly, the concept describes experiences of risk and uncertainty associated with insecure patterns of employment from home work to illegalized, seasonal and temporary work, freelancing and self-employment. However, it has also been used by Judith Butler (2004) and others to describe a general state of ontological insecurity or vulnerability specific to the human animal and its relations with others and the environment. The conceptual and empirical distance between these senses of the term seems wide. However, there are important links between them. To put it briefly, the debate points to a tendency for work to colonise more of life. This makes it difficult to draw a hard distinction between those aspects of precarity that apply to work and those that pertain to life as such. Whether it involves being unable to plan a future due to labour insecurity, searching for work through friends and contacts, or the pressure put on leisure and rest by email and other technologically mediated work demands, the claim is that work can no longer be contained by the limits of the working day or other units of temporal measure. Jonathan Crary's *24/7* (2013, 30) is perhaps the most ruthless exposé of 'the relentless incursion of the non-time of 24/7 into every aspect of social and personal life'. But aside from the issue of time, there are wider questions concerning changes to the qualities and attributes of work. Marazzi (2011) points to deep transformations in production processes, moving away from assembly line manufacture to encompass forms of production based in communication, adaptability, the manipulation of affects and the establishment and maintenance of social relations. One reason why work in the cultural sectors of the economy has been central to debates in this area is because it typifies such production as well as having traditionally involved insecure employment practices. However, the theoretical identification of such communicational, affective and relational capabilities with what Marx calls 'species being' (*Gattungswesen*) or the generic capacities of the human animal (Virno 2003) further muddies the line between the precarity of work and the more general fragility of life. It seems that the concept is caught in an inescapable fluctuation between these poles.

Much of the fascination and political appeal of the precarity debates rests on this commutability between the two senses of the term. Movement between the particularity of work and the generality of life raises hope for building a common front of resistance between heterogeneous workforces and labouring subjects. Yet arguments about the shift

of production processes to more communicational or relational dynamics often come under fire for ignoring the global division of labour, and therefore, the conditions under which people outside the developed world work and reproduce themselves (Holmes 2005). They are also frequently accused of ignoring the plight of migrant workers and other populations that have faced high degrees of labour uncertainty both before and after the globalisation and flexibilisation of the economy that has unfolded in the past 30 years (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

There are clear perils in focusing on the new forms of insecurity faced by cultural workers and other labouring subjects in the advanced capitalist economies. Apart from diverting attention from less-privileged workforces that support and even enable the labour of these figures, there is the danger of falling back on welfare and funding models that assume the continued viability of state political and social structures that have been slowly eroded. Too often arguments about precarity approach the historical social state as a norm rather than as an interlude that provisionally balanced capital against state in a national frame (Mitropoulos 2005, Neilson & Rossiter 2008). It is fair to say that many commentators who emphasise the transition to a knowledge economy (Christopherson & Clark 2007) or the emergence of biopolitical production (Hardt & Negri 2009) have thought through these difficulties. Nonetheless there remains the problem of how accounts of precarity can come to grips with the deep spatial disruption that characterises the present global economy and the accompanying fragmentation of legal and social regimes that organise labour. The struggle of trade unions and other established institutions of labour organisation to come to terms with heightened patterns of casualization and precarity is only one sign of this (Mitropoulos 2005).

One prominent attempt to face this problem posits the emergence of a new class subject – the precariat (Standing 2011). This is a term occasionally used by contributors to this themed section, although not necessarily in ways that abide Guy Standing's understanding of the precariat as a '*class-in-the-making*, if not yet a *class-for-itself*' (p. 7). Standing points to a growing disjunction between what Max Weber called status and class, describing the precariat in terms that extend beyond employment insecurity but never encompass the ontological sense of precarity explored by Butler and others. For him, the precariat holds 'a status that offers no sense of career, no sense of secure occupational identity and few, if any, entitlements to the state and enterprise benefits that several generations of those who saw themselves as belonging to the industrial proletariat or the salariat had come to expect as their due' (p. 24). But the precariat is also 'distinctive in class terms' because it does not enjoy 'a bargain of trust or security in exchange for subordination' (p. 8). Standing depicts the precariat as a 'new dangerous class' that is yet 'to solidify' but capable of forging 'a new politics of paradise that is mildly utopian and proudly so' (p. 22, 155). This hopeful vision adapts much of the subjective political potential invested in classical understandings of the proletariat to 'the globalisation era' which 'has resulted in a fragmentation of national class structures' (p. 7). The problem is practical. How can the new class subjectivity of the precariat generate patterns of communication and solidarity that bring radically different types of workers into a common front?

Perspectives from labour history suggest the need to grasp the heterogeneous array of labour relations and arrangements that make up the history and present of capitalism in its global scope. The work of Marcel van der Linden (2008), for instance, argues that free wage labour is only one of many ways in which capital transforms labour power into a

commodity, bringing into view a much wider and more inclusive concept of the global class of workers than that delivered by the notion of the proletariat. Although van der Linden privileges the investigation of what he calls subaltern workers – chattel slaves, share-croppers, small artisans, ‘coolies’ and the like – his arguments can equally be trained on a concept like the precariat. It is not merely a matter of the fragmentation of institutions of labour organisation or the challenges of communication and translation that beset efforts to unite precarious workers across income levels, legal statuses, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, geographical locations and practices of mobility. Rather it is a matter of conducting an analysis that begins with difference rather than feigning to invent or discover it. Central to such an approach is the recognition that the production of political subjectivity is implicated in the production of global space and time (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013). This means accepting that the ‘precariat as a new term of struggle runs into an old trap if it aims at a quick unification or creation of a dominant social actor’. Taking seriously the hierarchies and diversity that characterise contemporary labour entails that ‘nobody should simplify precarization as a new identity’ (Frassanito Network 2005). This, in turn, implies understanding precarity as an experience rather than as an ‘empirical object’ or ‘concept that can be applied to map out the changing nature of class’ (Shukaitis 2013, p. 656). The frame of precarity can be useful in shaping inquiries and struggles, but if emerging subjects lack connection to the conditions around them it can become an empty form of declaration or prophecy.

In the above quote from the Frassanito Network – a loose collective of European migration activists that assembled in the wake of a protest that facilitated the escape of detainees from a camp in Southern Italy in 2003 – we encounter a term not so far used in this introduction: precarization. It is worth briefly dwelling on this notion, which points to an ongoing process in which ‘the whole ensemble of social relationships seems to be on the move’ (Frassanito Network 2005). In the work of Isabell Lorey (2012), precarization is a process that describes not merely mounting forms of labour insecurity but a mode of governance based in the production of subjects whose central preoccupation is insecurity. Extending Foucault’s arguments on biopolitics, the history of political sovereignty, Marxist notions of reproductive labour and feminist critiques of masculine independence, Lorey positions precarization as a new form of power that extends and destabilises the modern legitimation of government through the promise of protection and security. This allows her to question the perspective of sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu (1998) and Robert Castel (2003) who fear that collective resistance in the context of precarity is impracticable. ‘Understanding precarization as *governmental*’, she writes, ‘makes it possible to problematize the complex interaction of an instrument of governing with economic exploitation conditions and modes of subjectivation in their ambivalence between subjugation and self-empowerment’. Lorey (forthcoming) seeks alternatives to political mobilizations that find their basis in fear and insecurity, arguing that these only augment the securitization agendas that have dominated political affect and rationality for the last decade. This means considering precarization in its ‘ambivalently productive moments’ and cultivating ‘techniques of self-government’ that provide ways of ‘dealing with what is incalculable, with what cannot be measured and not be modularized, with what eludes a government through insecurity’. In their engagement with concrete contexts of precarity and precarization, the articles that make up this themed section grapple with such ambivalently productive moments.

## Cultural Work in the Division of Labour

There remains the question of the status of cultural work in debates about precarity and the future of work. The title of this introduction and collection of essays – *Are We All Cultural Workers Now?* – is provocative. In forcing a yes or no response, it tests the limits of the proposition that cultural work is paradigmatic of more general changes to labour. Earlier we explained that this claim is often made in respect of the long-standing insecurity of cultural labour or with regard to claims about the communicational, affective and relational capacities that inform work across a variety of economic sectors. To these perspectives, we can correlate two divergent understandings of cultural work, which for convenience we call the sectoral approach and the anthropological approach. As will become clear, we consider the first of these as too narrow and the second as too wide. Far from seeking a *via media* or dialectical resolution between the two, we aim to provide some parameters for the essays which follow, which tend to examine the precarity of work in the cultural sectors of the economy from an anthropological perspective.

What we call the sectoral approach defines cultural work as the labour that occurs within a particular sector of the economy: the cultural sector. The question thus becomes one about the borders of this sector and the ways in which it relates to other sectors of the economy. As we shall see, there is a confusing multiplicity of ways to map these borders and relations, and the question about where to draw the limits of cultural work is far from clear.

This difficulty is compounded when cultural work is absorbed into contiguous or wider categories such as the creative industries, the cultural and creative industries, or, to recall the policy terminology used in China, the creative cultural industries. Hesmondhalgh (2012) argues for a separation between cultural and creative industries on the basis of a wide survey of policy documents. But it is possible to locate definitional models that blur this distinction. The London-based Work Foundation (2007) offers a diagram that identifies a core of creative fields that leads out in a series of concentric circles to cultural industries, creative industries and the economy at large. What unites these fields is the production of 'expressive value', which is defined as the creation of 'new insights, delights and experiences' that 'add to our knowledge, stimulate our emotions and enrich our lives' (p. 19). What separates them is more perplexing. Outputs in the creative core, for instance, are described as having 'a high degree of expressive value', while those in the cultural industries merely involve 'acts of origination of expressive value' (p. 4, 19). Sectoral differences in this model seem more a matter of degree than of kind.

There are also other issues to be taken into account, for instance, the way in which the distinction between formal and informal work cuts across the divides of the cultural and creative sectors. Likewise, the question of how cultural and creative industries extend into the wider economy is vexed. Richard Florida (2002), in his controversial arguments about the 'creative class', includes legal and medical professionals in this social group. Does this mean that doctors and lawyers are cultural workers? What about financial traders? Or what about those workers in sectors that supply and make possible the pursuit of cultural work in its more narrowly defined forms – e.g. those who write software code or those who manufacture computers and other hardware items?

It appears difficult to draw any firm border around the category of cultural work, and this indeed makes a sectoral definition contested and provisional. Posed in this context, the question 'Are we all cultural workers now?' seems less about the expansion of the cultural sector over time or its tendency to attract or incorporate ever more workers.

Rather it seems a question about a definitional expansion in which many kinds of work that were previously not classified as cultural have become recognised as such.

By contrast, an anthropological approach to cultural work suggests that all work is cultural because it occurs in a cultural context. From this perspective, the sectoral approach is limited because it works with an impoverished definition of culture that is restricted to fields of expressive production. Working from a wider understanding of culture as a 'way of life', the anthropological approach poses another series of problems about the relation of culture to economy: problems concerning the constitution of value, the role of cultural identities and differences in economic processes, the rhetorical construction of economic authority, struggles over which practices can be considered economic and so on.

The problem with this approach from the point of view of the question we are posing – 'Are we all cultural workers now?' – is that it renders it a non-question or perhaps merely a rhetorical question. This is because all workers – let's say garbage collectors, prime ministers, air traffic controllers, sex workers and park rangers – are, in this perspective, cultural workers. When they are at work, as when they pursue other aspects of their lives, they are embedded in cultural situations that involve relations between people or the working of the tension between culture and nature, in ways that are anthropologically significant. Labour itself becomes an anthropological category since it raises the question of the 'anthropogenesis' of the human animal at the same time as it becomes a category of subjectivity and agency in the production of value. Working at this level of generality can obscure not only the division of labour that identifies certain forms of work as cultural in the sectoral sense, but also that which takes a spatial or scalar partitioning of the world as the basis for tracking connections and disconnections between different kinds of labour experiences and processes.

This brings us to another feature of the articles collected in this themed section: their different international provenances. Needless to say it would be possible to augment perspectives from Australia, North America, the UK and continental Europe with interventions from other parts of the world. The meme of precarity has spread to discussions of labour politics in Latin America (Giorgi 2013), Africa (Barchiesi 2011), India (Cross 2010) and Japan (Allison 2013). Importantly, it has also provided an analytical tool for explorations of the Arab social uprisings that rocked the world in 2011 (Achcar 2013). In other contexts, such as China, there is growing awareness of labour insecurity, especially among the young, but its analysis attracts a conceptual idiom that does not necessarily share the subjective and political implications associated with arguments about precarity. Work on China's 'ant tribe' by Lian Si (2009), a participant in the workshop from which this collection springs, is an example of this. Lian takes the urban condition of China's ant tribe – university graduates from rural China and second-tier cities who cannot find work in the country's largest metropolises – as a social problem to be addressed by government policy. Such an approach does not trace a privileged connection to cultural work but it does register the analytical variation to which understandings of precarity can be subject in different geocultural settings.

The question is whether such variations can be mapped over the geopolitical boundaries implicit in the notion of the international division of labour or even what Toby Miller et al. (2008) call the new international division of cultural labour (NICL). The former is a concept stemming from classical political economy and in particular the notion of comparative advantage elaborated by David Ricardo in his writings on trade. The latter is adapted from the concept of the new international division of labour developed by Fröbel et al. (1980). These authors point to displacement of production from developed to less



developed countries with a resultant deindustrialization of wealthy nations and an intensified global competition for product and labour markets. In the vision of Miller and colleagues, this provides a means of drawing attention to global inequalities and patterns of exploitation in the production of cultural goods and services, for instance, in the practice of shooting Hollywood films outside of the USA.

The precarity approach questions the possibility of containing such divisions and practices of exploitation within international boundaries. It is not simply a matter of discovering conditions of precarity in the cultural and creative sectors of cities like Delhi or Shanghai that match the patterns identified in places like New York or Melbourne. Nor is it sufficient to point to the increasingly linked and generalised digital space in which much cultural work unfolds. Rather it is a question of deep spatial disruptions that unsettle the international division of labour and unmoor the commodity form of labour power from a national system of averages that sets the value of the wage (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013). Precarity arises with the detachment of labour from such wage setting systems and their correlate processes of dispute and arbitration. If this has effects on the subjective and experiential levels, it also produces what Andrew Ross (2008) calls the 'new geography of work'. Ross points to the fragmentation of practices of international solidarity and outlines the new challenges that labour organisation must face if it is to reach across borders and diverse geographical scales. In analytical terms, there is a need to take the heterogeneity of labour and global space as an unavoidable starting point and to conduct detailed ethnographic and empirical studies adequate to the material and economic conditions at hand. This is the challenge that the articles that make up this themed section confront.

### Map of the Themed Section

The papers that follow present the manifestations of precarity across diverse scenarios of cultural labour. The first article, 'Academics, Cultural Workers and Critical Labour Studies' by Ros Gill identifies academics as a critical object of study for generating new ways of thinking about power, privilege and exploitation. By foregrounding the transformation of the university, wherein a new form of academic capitalism has emerged amidst the marketisation and instrumentalisation of knowledge, Gill draws out strong parallels with cultural and creative workers writ large. There has been a marked casualization of the academic work force. The increasing norm of temporary contract work is one clear manifestation of the general shift in higher education, of the 'university as a business'. In turn, this has facilitated increasing stress levels, exacerbated by time compression under ever-heavier teaching and research demands. In part, this is seen in the intensification and extensification of the expected communicative capacity of academic labour. The most obvious manifestation is through email and other modes of online communication with students and colleagues, which are often addressed in non-standard working hours. Gill further identifies the more general societal trend of audit culture and surveillance, from the electronic tagging technologies applied in the criminal justice and detention system to the GPS monitoring of delivery personnel and the surveillance of call centre workers. What links these examples is the monitored quantification of productivity. She notes that there is a panoply of new metric assemblages that increasingly micro-monitor academic labour. Finally, Gill stresses that these measures worsen existing inequalities along lines of race, gender and class. She concludes by restating the links between precarity in academic labour with the more

general decay in favourable and stable working conditions. She also stresses the need to take a 'psychosocial perspective' to better understand the affective embodied experiences of academic labouring subjects. Only then will the breadth and depth of exploitation be revealed, in turn enabling a revived critical labour studies.

The next article, 'Confronting Precarity in the Warhol Economy: Notes from New York City' by Greig de Peuter, presents a 'metropolitan laboratory of precarious labour politics', a spectrum of experiments in strategies and organisational form, corresponding to the workforces in arts, media and culture. Specifically, de Peuter examines the destandardized labour conditions making up 'the Warhol economy', the glossy social life of creativity, from high-fashion parties and stars to art openings. What is the substance behind this normative cultural economy? De Peuter finds not only endemic precarity, cultural workers who are lowly paid, unpaid, anxious and always on, but a number of creative, collective and critical responses. For example, there is the Model Alliance, which seeks to ameliorate conditions of near indentured servitude experienced by most models who grace the catwalks and glamour pages. In the art world, WAGE (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) and Arts & labour address the exploitative conditions that plague not only artists but also the handlers who set up their exhibits, the receptionists who greet the gallery-going throngs and the adjunct academic staff who culturally valorize the work. It is his examination of the Freelancers Union for independent cultural workers that may be most illustrative of a larger shift, given its focus on 'new mutualism' which is evidenced by its favouring of political lobbying and insurance provision over collective bargaining per se. De Peuter frames these heterogeneous movements as part of an emerging recomposition of labour politics which are constitutive of the changing composition of capital. He concludes by suggesting subjectivities, sites, political imaginations and organisational form as key sites for future research into how labour is not only inhibiting the corrosive conditions of precarity but imagining and enacting labour beyond the standard employment relationship.

Next is Annalisa Murgia's 'Imaginaries of Precarity in Italy: Collective and Individual Stories, Social Imaginaries and Subjectivities' which examines the possibilities of elaborating a new collective imaginary of precarity and claiming new rights. She identifies very broad shifts underpinning precarity common to all the articles herein: an expanding service industry, loss of stability, centrality of affective relationality and communicative skills, continued diffusion of technology, 'feminization' of work, and the elision of work-life, professional-private, and production-reproduction barriers. Murgia identifies affect as a key dynamic animating precarity. She situates new forms of labour in what she calls 'the passion trap' by which promises of work-related passion and pleasure are experienced largely as sorrow and pain. Despite this, her research shows that many precarious workers, especially in the so-called knowledge economy, retain a sense of beauty and importance for their work. Murgia makes a case for a conceptual shift, from work precarity to social precarity, a more general existential phenomenon. She presents a highly developed, politicised response outlining in detail the Saint Precarious Network. These cultural actions are a *détournement* of popular tradition, involving statues and artefacts carried in processions of creative protest and mobilised prominently in May Day Parades in conjunction with broader tactics. She emphasises how this movement looks to narrate and perform a community into existence. She follows this example with her qualitative research, which takes a biographical and narrative approach. These individual stories reveal how unstable work corrodes the collective imaginary. They demonstrate further the individualising consequences of segmentation between protected and represented workers (standard contract) and poorly

protected and under-represented workers (non-standard). Murgia concludes that scholarship would benefit from examining workers' spheres of life as continuous transition between work and non-work, as precarious conditions make clear the need for the concrete acquisition of full citizenship rights beyond those afforded by standard work.

The final article of the themed section, 'Creative Accommodations: The Fractured Transitions and Precarious Lives of Young Musicians' by George Morgan and Julian Wood focuses on young men with creative aspirations that go largely unfulfilled in their working lives. By focusing on young men from the working-class suburbs of Sydney, this article highlights an occluded contradiction in the creative economy: how does it address modes of creativity that do not easily square with its specific demands for agile entrepreneurship? This article draws on life history interviews, mobilising narrative research that demonstrates the difficulties of conscripting creativity, even by an economy predicated on doing so. In part, what Morgan and Wood reveal is a basic incompatibility in the biographical imaginary of a creative career for working-class youth. On the one hand, they illustrate the extreme difficulty squaring a bohemian subjectivity with an economy that purportedly valorizes creativity, in part because the demand for entrepreneurialism clashes with non-conformist subjectivities. As such, these are tales of exile from creative industries and the subjective responses taken up in the face of difficult transitions. They also reveal that for many the siren song of the creative economy leads to not only frustrations and lack of fulfilment, but also fails to break with the drudgery that so dearly underwrote the stability of the labour conditions of their parents. Among other things, these findings suggest that public policy should be adjusted to recognise the structural difficulties many creative types face in making the identity reconstruction necessary to be adequate to the demands of versatility and agility endemic to the creative economy.

Overall, then, these articles suggest that precarity is a condition not only of labour but of life. Implicit, then, is the need for the study of cultural economy to further its attention to the nexus between the specification of economic action and the biopolitical constitution of society. Precarity, as such, acts as a cypher for the continued elision of culture, labour and life.

## REFERENCES

- ACHCAR, G. (2013) *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, Trans G. M. Goshgarian, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- ALLISON, A. (2013) *Precarious Japan*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- BARCHIESI, F. (2011) *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa*, State University of New York Press, Albany.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1998) 'Job insecurity is everywhere now', in *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, Trans R. Nice, The Free Press, New York, pp. 81–87.
- BUTLER, J. (2004) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Verso, New York.
- CASTEL, R. (2003) *L'insécurité sociale: Qu'est-ce qu'être protégé?* [Social Insecurity: What is to Be Protected?] Seuil, Paris.
- CHRISTOPHERSON, S. & CLARK, J. (2007) *Remaking Regional Economies: Power, Labor, and Firm Strategies in the Knowledge Economy*, Routledge, New York.
- CRARY, J. (2013) *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Verso, New York.
- CROSS, J. (2010) 'Neoliberalism as unexceptional: economic zones and the everyday precariousness of working life in South India', *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 355–373.

- FLORIDA, R. (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, Basic Books, New York.
- FRASSANITO NETWORK. (2005) 'Precarious, Precarization, Precariat?' *This Tuesday: Logs on Migration, Labor, Transnational Organizing*, Available at: <http://thistuesday.org/node/93>.
- FRÖBEL, F., HEINRICHS, J. & KREYE, O. (1980) *The New International Division of Labor*, Trans P. Burgess, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- GIORGI, G. (2013) 'Improper selves: cultures of precarity', *Social Text*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 69–81.
- HARDT, M. & ANTONIO, N. (2009) *Commonwealth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- HESMONDHALGH, DAVID. (2012) *The Cultural Industries*, 3rd edn, Sage, London.
- HOLMES, B. (2005) 'Continental drift, or, the other side of neoliberal globalization', *Interactivist Info Exchange*, 27 Sept., Available at: <http://interactivist.autonomedia.org/node/4689>.
- LIAN S., ed. (2009) *Ant Tribe: A Record of Inhabited Villages of Chinese Graduates* (Chinese: 蚁族 : 大学毕业生聚居村实录). Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin.
- LOREY, I. (2012) *Die Regierung der Prekären* [The Government of the Precarious], Verlag Turia + Kant, Wien.
- LOREY, I. (Forthcoming) *The Government of the Precarious*, Trans A. Derieg, Verso, London.
- MARAZZI, C. (2011) *Capital and Affects: The Politics of the Language Economy*. Trans G. Mecchia, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles.
- MEZZADRA, S. & BRETT, N. (2013) *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- MILLER, T., GOVIL, N., MCMURRIA, J., MAXWELL, R. & WANG, T. (2008) *Global Hollywood 2*, 2nd edn, BFI Publishing, London.
- NEILSON, B. & ROSSITER, N. (2008) 'Precarity as a political concept, or, fordism as exception', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 25, no. 7–8, pp. 51–72.
- MITROPOULOS, A. (2005) 'Precari-us?', *Transversal*, Available at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704/mitropoulos/en>.
- PAPADOPOULOS, D., STEPHENSON, N. & TSIANOS, V. (2008) *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the Twenty-First Century*, Pluto Press, London.
- PYBUS, J. (2013) 'Social networks and cultural workers: towards an archive for the prosumer', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 137–152.
- ROSS, A. (2008) 'The new geography of work: power to the precarious?', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 25, no. 7–8, pp. 31–49.
- SHUKAITIS, S. (2013) 'Recomposing precarity: notes on the laboured politics of class composition', *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 641–658. Available at: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/contribution/13-3shukaitis.pdf>.
- STANDING, G. (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, Bloomsbury, London.
- VAN DER LINDEN, M. (2008) *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History*, Brill, Leiden.
- VIRNO, P. (2003) *Quando il verbo si fa carne: linguaggio e natura umana* [When Word Becomes Flesh: Language and Human Nature], Bollati Boringhieri, Torino.
- WORK FOUNDATION. (2007) *Staying Ahead: The Economic Performance of the UK's Creative Industries*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, London.

**Brett Neilson** (author to whom correspondence should be addressed), Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia. Email: [b.neilson@uws.edu.au](mailto:b.neilson@uws.edu.au).

**Mark Coté**, Digital Culture and Society, King's College London, London, UK. E-mail: [mark.cote@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:mark.cote@kcl.ac.uk).