

- *Creative economy – Labour relations – Diversity – Conventions*

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The Creative Economy at Work

Kreativ arbeiten: Arbeitskonventionen in der „Kreativwirtschaft“

There are good reasons to believe that the economy is faster and more volatile than ever before, that firms – the typical organisations of the economy – are dissolving, and that the boundaries between the economy and other societal fields are blurring. The argument developed in this paper is based on the assumption that the turn to creativity is both a response to and a result of these processes. In this context, two interlinked questions are pursued. The first section asks how creativity is organised and managed in the fields considered as making up the creative industries (*organising creativity*). After this more general discussion, section two engages more directly with the practicalities of creative work. I chose this focus out of conviction that one can only come to terms with the contemporary economy, if one directs the attention to the question of how creativity is mobilised practically (*how creativity works*).

1. Introduction

The fuzzy label “creative economy” brings together ideas and concepts that mobilise promises of regional economic development and new imaginations as to how urban economies are working. The talents and skills of a highly mobile elite whose life-style preferences have consequently to be taken into account by policy-makers, it is argued, increasingly determine regional economic growth. In the same way as these ideas gathered steam during the 1990s, the economic rather than cultural (understood in a more traditional elitist way) significance of the respective activities came to the fore, culminating in the replacement

of what had been called “cultural industries” by the term “creative industries”. A key moment in this shift had been the so-called Creative Industries Task Force, set up in 1997 by the first Blair Government in the UK (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2002). Underlying the semantic shift from “culture” to “creativity” was the transformation of the respective activities from something that played only a marginal role in regional and national economies to one of the main drivers of economic growth. Having been associated with artistry, individuality and play in the past, and sharply contrasted from the mass culture of an industrial age driven by processes of standardisation and rationalisation, today’s creativity discourse

promises nothing less than the dissolution of the boundaries between culture and economy and a reconciliation of both spheres.

As important as these early developments may have been, the subsequent triumphal march of the creative industries as a means to promote regional economic growth is mainly associated with the name of *Richard Florida*. When *Florida* published and promoted his book “The Rise of the Creative Class” with the telling and ambitious subtitle “...and how it’s transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life” in 2002 he hit the zeitgeist, and the debate developed a life of its own, turning the book into one of the most influential texts about urban and regional development in the last decades. *Florida* and others argue that creativity is the key factor of urban development, suggesting, “that cities should be understood as centres of idea creation and transmission. If this is so, then cities will grow when they are producing new ideas or when their role as intellectual centres is increasing in importance” (*Glaeser* 2000: 83).

To avoid misunderstandings right from the beginning: my intention is neither to privilege the creative industries nor to discriminate other economic sectors as being not creative, but to use the creative industries as a particularly striking example for the wider processes shaping the transformation of industrial capitalism into what *Luc Boltanski* and *Ève Chiapello* (2005) have termed “network capitalism”. This clarification seems necessary with regard to the unproductive standoff between those who enthusiastically celebrate the creative industries (e.g. *Florida* 2002; 2005) and those who disqualify them as yet another neoliberal ploy to daze the minds of the people (e.g. *Malanga* 2004; *Peck* 2005).

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argument developed in this paper is based on the assumption that the turn to creativity is both a response to and a result of these processes. In this context, two interlinked questions will be pursued. The first section asks how creativity is organised and managed in the fields considered as making up the creative industries (*organizing creativity*). After this more general discussion, section two engages more directly with the practicalities of creative work. I chose this focus out of conviction that one can only come to terms with the contemporary economy, if one directs the attention to the question of how creativity is mobilised practically (*how creativity works*)¹.

2. Organising Creativity

Starting from the plausible assumption that the way the capitalist economy is organised has changed (though obviously not beyond recognition, as the label “capitalist” testifies) and that those transformations have material effects, the question is how this affects those modes of organisation which have stabilised the economy in the not-so-distant past. Ever since *Michael Piore* and *Charles Sabel’s* (1984) path-breaking book the answer has been that in order to stay competitive enterprises have to be flexible, versatile and adaptive. Involving as it does a blurring of boundaries between the organisation and that which lies beyond (often termed “environment”) the “new” blue-print of the flexible firm produced a dilemma: The fuzzier the enterprise would become, the stronger was the pressure to stabilise and order.

In what follows I shed light into the organisation of this tightrope walk between simplicity and complexity as an indispensable prerequisite for entrepreneurial success in the context of contemporary capitalism. In going about this endeavour, I seek inspiration from French pragmatic (economic) sociology, in particular the so-called Convention School. Such an approach in my view offers the best way to think through the paradox

between an apparently cohesive organisational veil and the need for diversity in the creative industries. Following *David Stark* (2009) I argue that entrepreneurs and decision-makers in these environments are not successful because they manage to homogenise and to make the organisation flatter. Rather, what is at stake is to be able to keep diverse logics in play and to exploit the resulting friction of their interplay. This holds for situations involving the conduct of others as well as for those involving self-governance, that is, situations when individuals become “entrepreneurial selves” (*Arbeitskraftunternehmer*; *Vofß and Pongratz* 1998).

2.1 *Worlds of creativity, creative worlds*

The so-called Convention School (CS) played an influential role in the pragmatic turn of French scholars away from structuralist approaches in the 1980s and the attempts to surmount traditional binary thinking (micro/macro, individual subject/society etc.) which gave rise to what has been termed “New French Sociology” (*Diaz-Bone* 2009: 268). For CS pioneers, such as *Laurent Thévenot* or *Luc Boltanski*, economical and social worlds are made up of a plurality of modes of coordination. They directed their attention to the conventional forms that support the coordination of action, studying the different forms with which events are framed and evaluated in the context of pervasive uncertainty. The idea is that actors mobilise general moral principles in uncertain situations. They have the competence to recursively refer to “orders of worth”, making judgments about the “quality” of a person or an object and practically structuring the coordination of economic and social processes (*Boltanski and Thévenot* 2006; *Thévenot* 2006). Starting from the assumption that modern economies comprise multiple principles of evaluation (only one, though admittedly crucial, of which is “market rationality”), it would be short-sighted to say that one lived in a “market econo-

my”. What the Convention School offers instead is a way to rethink the traditional division between “moral economies” (values) and market economies (value) (*Stark* 2009: 11).

A perspective informed by conventions, orders of worth and the investigation of often conflicting frames of reference with which to justify decisions and practices in “network capitalism” is particularly useful with a view to the creative industries. Rather than starting with an imagination of our world as a mosaic of clearly limited and demarcated pre-given economic entities (economy, market, firm, individual rational subject etc.), the key question is to understand the processes and operations that qualify persons, work or products as being “creative” and “non-creative” and how the tensions between various frames of reference are mobilised to economic ends.

What appears to set apart the creative industries from the rest of the economy is their proximity to the world of arts. After all this world – called “inspired world” by *Boltanski and Thévenot* (2006) – injects the dose of creativity which is necessary to justify the inscription of a special status to the field. The *logic of creativity*, characterised by an affinity to change and instability, has arguably seen a renaissance following the rise of what has also been termed knowledge economy. Creative workers define their own positive worth by attributes such as spontaneity, illumination, genius, emotion, uniqueness, independence, freedom, chaos, unconventionality and so on. Their world, at least in a general sense, is one of abundance and redundancy (see *Grabher* 1994). Doing creative work is often disturbing, painful and bordering to insanity. It is prone to failure but tremendously rewarding once it succeeds. Creative, artistic output is produced in small series and the value of the product does not necessarily lie in the material value. As a matter of fact the object loses its importance. It becomes only the material agency of meaning. To own it is less interesting than to use it, either for personal pleasure or for economic gain (*Moulier Boutang* 2007: 209).

Against this, a different world is normally positioned in discussions around the creative industries. This is the *market logic* which should not be confused – as pointed out above – with the sphere of economic relations, given that various logics and forms of coordination will play a role in any given moment (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 193f.). It is the world famously associated with *Adam Smith*, a world where the pursuit of individual self-interest, opportunism and egoism miraculously has positive collective effects (invisible hand), a world where *homines oeconomici* rule, socially detached and distanced individuals who go about their natural instincts to buy, get, sell, pay and compete under conditions of scarcity, in a world of prices, deals, contracts and money.

But market and arts are not the only spheres having an imprint on the way the loose field of creative industries is being shaped and performed. For instance, there is the *industrial logic*, associated mainly with the hierarchical business firm. This is a stable and well-ordered world. Inside the enterprise scientific production methods, technical organisational tools and standardised processes create clearly demarcated hierarchies of control in which each individual is given a specific role and is assigned a specific place. The visible hand of the plan – ideally – produces efficient, functional and reliable organisations dominated by professionals, experts and specialists who are involved in technical and social engineering (e.g. Human Resource Management, Total Quality Management). Outside the firm, private corresponds to public planning, materialised in bureaucracy and more traditional forms of government. In the industrial world the key challenge is one of standardisation and codification. How is it possible to measure and evaluate the output of artists and other members of the creative class? How can the work input be calculated in environments where physical working time ceases to be the correct measure?

Another frame, above all in the more institutionally formalised economies such as Germany or Swit-

zerland, is provided by the *logic of craftsmanship*. In those countries the sizeable segment of the labour market regulated by state-sponsored professions and formalised apprenticeship has at least some grip on the creative industries. Even if the custodians of the German “dual system” find it difficult to keep pace with rapidly changing demands in the various areas, for instance, there are codified and standardised regulations putting certain actors in a position of superiority and providing stability for those who have reached higher ranks in the corporate organisations. Just like their counterparts in the rest of the economy, creative craftsmen and craftswomen display a sense of duty and responsibility; they expect respect for formal titles which are reproduced through repetitive ceremonies and rituals. An illustrative example is the realm of music where the protagonists of what is ambivalently termed “handmade music” distance themselves from those scenes relying solely on computers and software (Berndt et al. 2008: 104ff.).

All these rationales, and there are more depending on the precise case to be studied, raise contradictory expectations and demand contradictory measures. Against the logic of creativity a number of criticisms can be voiced. A major issue is the degree to which creativity appears to go hand in hand with emotions, impulsivity and improvisation. This goes against demands for self-control and detachment indispensable for the invisible hand of the market to work and for creative activities to be of commercial value. Those following an industrial model of organisation loath the wastefulness of creative activities, going as it does against the grain of demands for efficiency and productivity, both necessary for creative content to find a market. And those arguing from a craft-like ethos are suspicious of a perceived tendency towards inauthenticity and a preoccupation with appearance instead of substance. What they fear is complete alienation either in the iron-cage of industrial standards and rationalised mass production or in the limitless sea of market forces respectively.

2.2 *Opportunistic networking and arbitrage*

According to *Boltanski and Chiapello* (2005: 345) the flexible organisational forms being best able to cope with these conflicting demands are enabled by what is termed “connexionist logic”. In the emerging world of network capitalism these are associated with aspects and concepts such as mobility, projects, versatility or loose ties. From the point of view of the connexionist logic, a new key figure emerges in sectors such as the creative industries who is neither employed manager nor self-employed entrepreneur: The “networker” assembles and participates in temporary collective projects that give him/her access to resources without the drag of the supervisory obligations which characterise the work of managers in more stable organisations. The key to success in these constellations is not to share information and contacts with the team, but rather to exploit accessible resources and to acquire social capital which will provide an advantage vis-à-vis other members in the project team. The networker is successful whenever the output of project work is attributed to him/her and associated with his/her name (*Boltanski and Chiapello* 2005: 359). In the connexionist world, therefore, the crucial role of collectives (communities of practice, project teams, personal networks etc.) and the *networking* involved to mobilise and assemble these entities is no end to itself, rather, the key to economic success is to systematically exploit these networks.

A key feature of network capitalism is the internalisation of the various strands of critique into the discourse of capitalism which were waged against its industrial predecessor. In the context of this paper the “artistic critique” (*Boltanski and Chiapello* 2005: 419) is of particular importance. This refers to accusations leveled against the alienating nature of capitalism driven by a desire for liberation, autonomy and authenticity. In economic fields such as the creative industries, which operate in turbulent organisational environments

and where there is profound uncertainty about what can be considered vital resources, contending frameworks and logics turn into valuable organisational resources. Frictions between the logic of the market and the logic of creativity or other logics are no longer only regarded as problematic and destructive, the key entrepreneurial skill rather being the “the ability to keep multiple principles of evaluation in play and to benefit from that productive friction” (*Stark* 2009: 5f.). Success in the creative industries, in other words, to a large degree depends on the ability to organise diversity, involving the reproduction and the sharpening of social boundaries. Successful players in the creative industries, it seems, therefore have to be “opportunistic networkers” being able to extricate themselves from one-dimensional loyalties to a single organisation (*Boltanski and Chiapello* 2005: 377). In a sense, there are striking similarities to the figure of the arbitrageur known from the world of finance. In turbulent and liquid financial markets profits are realised by exploiting and in so doing reproducing infinite discrepancies of valuations on both the demand and supply sides. As *Donald Mackenzie* (2007) argued, the arbitrageur is a kind of border guard policing boundaries between economy and society, or between a “creative” and a “non-creative” economy for that matter.

There are obvious downsides of “arbitrage trading” and the need of the arbitrageur to multiply connections: Arbitrage depends on being one step ahead, being able to spot and exploit different interests. Other actors have to be kept in the dark; they have to feel separated and different while being an indispensable part of the game. This ambivalent status is maintained by the selective mobilisation of the different logics outlined above and results in disciplinary regimes and labour relations that govern through diversity and discipline though the commodification of difference (see below). What has changed since *Boltanski and Thévenot* have first published their findings in the late 1980s and early 1990s is a shift in emphasis from understanding the differ-

ent logics as reducing uncertainty and as stabilising towards an acceptance that they cause instability and create uncertainty instead.

Given that the key organisational challenges are diversity, individual solutions and context dependence, the creative industries literature rejects traditional theories and mobilises with the network a third mode of governance in addition to plan and market. In more sophisticated contributions the boundaries between firm and market are getting increasingly blurred, the “integrated firm” turning into the “network firm” and markets into “consumption, distribution and production networks”. In these discussions, heterarchy has become the new organisational blue-print (*Hedlund* 1986). With regard to the creative industries *Gernot Grabher's* work on project ecologies in the software and advertising industry is a case in point (*Grabher* 2001, 2002).

In this literature the understanding of organisations as patterns of ties and the focus on the diversity of organisational forms has helped to better understand what is going on in knowledge-intensive areas such as the creative industries. This notwithstanding, however, “the” organisation often still appears as a black box, emphasis being put on understanding how different institutional contexts give rise to different organisational ecologies and how these contain and stabilise situations of uncertainty and volatility. Against this, critics such as *Stark* (2009: 26) argue that it is the “heterarchical organisation of diversity” not the “diversity of organisation” which is at stake. In rapidly changing constellations, the challenge for individual and collective actors is not how to produce stability, but to (re)create the possibility for dissonance, disjuncture and difference, and to exploit the frictions which result from their interplay. To put it with *Stark* (2009: 10), the task is to “move from studying the institutions in which economic activity is embedded to analysing the actual evaluative and calculative practices of actors at work”. Such an understanding completes

the shift from the firm as category to firms as bundles of practices and material arrangements, and – to quote *Theodore Schatzki* (2006) – is primarily interested in organisations “as they happen”.

3. How Creativity Works

“Is there a unified definition of the organisational field of creative industries and do those working in this field share common work organisation, employment relations, motivation and purpose?” The answer to this question, put forward by *Alan McKinlay* and *Chris Smith* (2009: 3), cannot be anything else than negative. Too fragmented and differentiated are the various activities lumped together under the creative industry label to justify attempts to paint a coherent picture. Participants to the academic debate dealing with labour issues therefore move away from a sectoral approach (e.g. looking at advertising or music as “industries”) and turn to those who do creative work, sharing “certain features of innovation, risk, uncertainty, performativity and differentiation” (*McKinlay* and *Smith* 2009: 4) in contrast to labour in more traditional fordist mass production. It is here, of course, where *Florida's* position differs markedly from those academic and popular contributions (i.e. creative industry reports) that adopt a narrow sectoral perspective.

Such a perspective avoids the overtly reductionist separation of work activities between creative and repetitive and allows a more differentiated account. There is a burgeoning body of literature, for instance, that illustrates that the world of repetitive and manual work has changed considerably, too. Even at the most unlikely margins of the global economy, for instance in so-called “third world” sweat shops or at the sites of the increasingly global commercial cleaning industry, everyday work is saturated with new forms of governing practice in addition to “tested and tried” disciplinary technologies. And while manual workers are increasingly subject to new human resource management

technologies in the name of creativity, many creative workers toil in environments that bear a surprising resemblance to the shopfloors of southern assembly plants or the interior of commercial cleaning sites. What the sharp line between creative and “non-creative” work does is to veil from the view the extent to which relatively more creative and relatively more repetitive tasks often go hand in hand in the whole economy, not seldomly merging in the same body. The dichotomy is therefore a useful sleight of hand, allowing observers and decision-makers to focus on the “positive” side of the contemporary economy and hiding from view the extent to which everything hangs together. And given that this “discursive purification” is particularly easy and successful in economic fields more naturally regarded as being “creative” than others, this provides another reason to turn the attention to that odd entity termed “creative industries”.

As argued in the preceding section, there are good reasons to believe that the economy is changing to an extent to justify distinguishing it from earlier constellations – without losing sight, of course, of the problems associated with those periodisations: That what is “new” in the contemporary economy has not fallen out of the blue sky and rather is part of a discontinuous historical process which is far from producing a coherent form. And that what is “old” in earlier constellations has not disappeared, the situation perhaps being better described as an ongoing process of (dis-)articulation which produces rugged social landscapes of work.

3.1 *Qualculate and be creative: the world of Human Resource Management*

Daily work experiences of software programmers, advertising agents or fashion designers are neither immune against nor the sole playing ground of those wider processes that have dramatically transformed the way we work. Still most frequently put

together under the label “flexibilisation” these involve the erosion of the certainties and stabilities surrounding the working life during the era of “state-organised capitalism” (Fraser 2009) in the decades following 1945. In so-called industrialised societies this epoch consolidated and stabilised a form of work as ideal societal norm that defined work as (1) skilled (as opposed to unskilled), (2) workplace-based (separated from the household), (3) contractual (that is, exchanged on the market), (4) dependent (as opposed to self-employed), (5) money-waged, (6) state regulated, and of course (7) male (Offe 2000: 495). In so doing, a broad middle segment of the population in stable, full-time and life-long employment was produced, the “standard employment relationship” (*Normalarbeitsverhältnis*) providing a norm which drew sharp borders between the insiders and outsiders of state-organised capitalism.

The treacherous stability of this form of work was subsequently shattered as flexibilisation processes (volatile working time, polyvalence and multitasking, spatial mobility etc.) did away with tested and tried certainties (see Berndt 2010). In the German context, observers have coined the term *Entgrenzung* (de-bordering), depicting the blurring of social and spatial boundaries in daily work, including the dissolution of stable individual identities and their stable connections to class, gender, generational and occupational positions (Gottschall and Voß 2003: 11f.). Flexibilisation and *Entgrenzung* of work and the resulting individual uncertainties are part and parcel of far-reaching changes in the global economy and the organisational forms designed to cope with these changes:

“[In] an increasing number of areas, many firms literally do not know what products they will be producing in the not so distant future. To cope with these uncertainties, instead of concentrating their resources for strategic planning among a narrow set of senior executives or delegating that function to a specialised department, heterarchical firms embark on a radical decentral-

isation in which virtually every unit becomes engaged in innovation” (Stark 2009: 21).

A corollary of these changes is the supplementing of the hierarchical with the heterarchical firm and the rise of network forms of governance discussed in the preceding section. Heterarchy means to approach firm hierarchies or market interdependence between firms from a network perspective. It refers to an organisational structure in which a given element is simultaneously expressed and given ambiguous form in multiple crosscutting networks (Stark 2009: 31).

Returning to the creative industries, there is evidence that many activities in this “sector” are articulated in an environment of considerable volatility and uncertainty. Empirical studies have shown, for instance, that turnover and employment changes in firms engaging with the production and distribution of software, video games, music, movies, advertising campaigns and the like are more extreme during the business cycle (see Berndt et al. 2008). In the market for creativity a particularly difficult tight-rope walk has to be performed between the need for standardisation of products and processes on the one hand, and the need for flexibility and new ideas on the other. The governance of the tension between stability and change is of course nothing new and at the centre of any capitalist activity. However, it is undoubtedly greater in constellations where industries operate in an environment of accelerated change and volatility. In wide parts of the creative industries the key question is therefore how to create the sort of organisational structures and work environments which allow and frame the creativity needed to perform in dynamic markets.

The “new spirit of capitalism”, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) chose to call it, that is, the contradictory mobilisation and skillful entanglement of a connexionist logic with other ways in which to make sense of the economy, is less the work of academics but rather the result of the

joint effort of practitioners of various practice disciplines. What the socio-technology of Supply Chain Management has achieved in the wider economic sphere (i.e. taking the place of the neo-classical conceptualisation of the market; Busch 2007), new instruments to manage “human resources” have done in the organisational realm. The latter shift occurred roughly during the early 1980s and has been termed “cultural turn” in the critical management and organisation studies literature (e.g. du Gay 1997; McKinlay and Starkey 1998; Schoenberger 1997; Thompson and Findlay 1999). In a nutshell, proponents waved good-bye to Taylorian optimisation of labour power, stressing the “whole” human being instead. The worker should immerse herself fully into the production process, feel at home in her company and identify with her work. Work was no longer the necessary means to fulfil oneself in private life, it produced meaning in itself and became part of the constitution of life projects.

The claims advanced by protagonists of this form of work are strongly refuted by scholars working from a broadly Marxian perspective. Seen from their angle, the new paradigm is nothing more than a very powerful ideology, allowing capitalists to discipline workers under the guise of “new” labour relations. There is no doubt that this view provides answers to the question of why workers are playing the game rather than simply resisting their immersion in a nebulous discourse of autonomy, responsibility and creativity. However, even critics point out that there is more to it than a mere ideological veil over hard capitalist class relations. “It is tempting to dismiss outright the idea of a cultural turn when applied to work organisations”, argued Thompson and Findlay (1999: 162f.), “[b]ut it would be a mistake.”

The irreconcilable opposition echoes the stand-off between creative industry enthusiasts and skeptics discussed earlier in this paper and is equally unproductive. Just as there is a new quality in the way wide parts of the economy are

organised, there is a profoundly different way to manage labour and labour relations. Echoing what *Michel Callon* (e.g. *Callon et al.* 2002: 196) has termed “economists in the wild”, the world of creative and autonomous work is shaped by the normative prescriptions and the practical knowledge of applied sociotechnologies. Amongst these, the discipline of what has come to be known as “Human Resource Management” (HRM) arguably is of particular importance. Not playing a particular prominent role in the corporate organisation before, HRM turned into a key organisational device in the mid-1980s, above all after portfolio theory was introduced from the financial world. This turned a highly subjective instrument into a powerful tool for strategic planning (*Vormbusch* 2008: 9). Today, human resource specialists have the ears of top executives when it comes down to questions of strategic planning, moving “from behind-the-scenes staff work to leading the company in suggesting and changing policies” as a US Government report has it (US Department of Labor 2010: 1).

The rise of HRM or people management as it is called in the HRM-consultancy industry has a lot to do with the changing economic environment and the uncertainties arising from this, above all in knowledge-intensive areas such as the creative industries. Insofar as individual knowledge and creativity, and the social networks of the workforce replaced hard assets such as technologies or production processes as key factors deciding about economic success, traditional management tools declined in importance. Because of the non-calculability of these resources, there was an urgent need to develop different means of evaluation. The solution was provided by HRM: It is the individual worker, his/her skills and his/her social connectivity that is becoming ever more important. What HRM does is to stand for a new way of valuing employees and of systematically unfolding their individual working capabilities. What the integration of portfolio theory did was to transform HRM into a calculative tool being

able to mediate between hard (codified, transferable) and soft (implicit, experiential) knowledge. Yet, importantly, the aim is not to simply transform the latter into the former with the help of measurement. Rather, the tool of the human resources portfolio is used to divide workers’ performance between results (“hard”) and competencies (“soft”), in so doing linking achievements in the past with expectations and promises for the future (*Vormbusch* 2008).

This is a perfect example of what *Callon* and *John Law* (2005) term “qualculation”, individual capabilities being qualified and calculated along parameters such as individual impact, motivation, initiative and passion (“Do you see yourself as somebody who is really pulling somewhere?” “What do you think, where are you at the moment?” “Where would you like to be, say, in one year’s time” etc.) (*Vormbusch* 2008: 8ff.). The human resource portfolio is widely used in the more formalised corporate sectors of the creative industries, such as advertising (the self-styled “global communication company” *Saatchie & Saatchie* once even owned *Hay Group*, a US-American HRM-consultant) or software and computer services and opens up relative performances and relative capabilities of all participating actors to a managerial gaze thereby further increasing the malleability of employees. This holds for members of the corporate organisation as much as for those of project teams. In the same vein, *Drepper* (2008: 3200) critically comments on the use of concepts such as potential analyses or 360 degree feedbacks, of coachings and trainings, all taking for granted and addressing the malleability of the *networker*. The message of all these sociotechnological tools is clear: A calculative space opens up, inscribing practices of self-evaluation and self-reflection and inducing those subject to it to continuously figure out how to further improve oneself. In larger organisations human resource experts actively guide these processes, providing assistance as “employee welfare managers” or “work-life-

managers”, while smaller companies may only mobilise the logic of HRM indirectly.

It is important to repeat, however, that the turn to culture with a view to the business enterprise is less about homogenisation. The rationale is to provide a frame allowing organisational stakeholders to integrate and utilise diversity, above all in areas such as the creative industries.

3.2 *Divide and rule: diversity and (im)mobility*

HRM is a perfect tool for mobilising and harnessing the tensions and frictions arising from the different logics present in any given organisational constellation. Creativity flourishes in diverse settings, settings where creative superstars work side-by-side with the creative-industrial proletariat and are supported by all kinds of “low-skill” services; settings where “true” craftsmen and -women look down to those who use all-too-easy technological devices (e.g. music industry, photography); and settings of course which are stratified according to gender, age, ethnicity and class. The way these various differences are getting (re)produced and reworked differ from the past, as the absence of open and clearly visible organisational hierarchies arguably leads to subtler though no less forceful ordering processes. Accordingly, both creative work and careers in the CI are gendered, occupational positions being selectively coded as masculine or feminine (see for example *MacRobbie* 2002; *McDowell* 1997), and the “de-bordered” and flexible character of work playing out differently for different women and men. In some parts of the industry ethnic and/or national difference is valued more positively than in others. Workforces in the video game industry, for instance, bring together specialists from around the world, and *Florida* celebrates cultural diversity as indicator for “creative cities”. And there are issues of class, as the sizeable ranks of those creative workers testify who labour under precarious working conditions.

While these differences are nothing new and their persistence perhaps little surprising, there are discussions in the literature arguing that their precise role in the creative industries and in network capitalism more generally differs starkly from the industrial era. According to anthropologist *Anna Tsing* (2009: 150), in contemporary capitalism diversity has ceased to be something added on, external to the economy and part of a different sphere alternatively called “society” or “culture”. This was the dominant logic of territorial or state-organised capitalism, the hegemonic formation of the postwar era, where the territorial nation-state actively sought to steer the economy, social questions were framed predominantly in distributive terms, and social divisions were viewed primarily through the lens of class. “The effect of this class-centric, economic imaginary”, argues *Nancy Fraser* (2009: 101), “was to marginalise, if not wholly to obscure, other dimensions, sites and axes of injustice”.

The main reason for the changing role of diversity has arguably been the growing social and spatial complexity of production, distribution and consumption outlined earlier. As those organisational constellations giving rise to “project ecologies” and loose networks are far more difficult to control than individual firms, the traditional solution of relying solely on stabilisation via standardisation can no longer be a viable option. This is another reason for the more indirect and subtle way in which to organise creative work.

It is this new quality of asymmetric capital-labour relations which is taken up by the critics of the creativity discourse. The turn to creativity offers individual subjects a seductive script: Who would not prefer to belong to a creative elite, above all if he or she works in insecure and relatively modestly paid employment contexts? Scholars such as *Jamie Peck* therefore point to the negative sides of the harmonious rhetoric about creativity and talent. According to *Peck* (2007), the image of the creative worker is based

on an extremely atomised form of human capital, only superficially papered over with positively associated terms such as “talent” or “community”. And *André Gorz* (2004: 23; my translation) observed nothing less than a “total mobilisation of capacities and talents, including feelings and emotions”, directly connecting his diagnosis with creative activities by pointing to the development of artistic virtuosity at work. What the creativity discourse does is to promise to surmount nothing less than the classical opposition between labour productivity and work identity.

Although some authors rightly criticise the alienating effect of this script, it would be shortsighted to solely reduce the mechanisms at work to class difference. Other dimensions of diversity play a crucial role here, too. At the same time as various socioeconomic differences are mobilised in order to produce creative content, such positions are getting reproduced in the performances of identities through which participating actors (firms, managers, creative stars, creative workers etc.) seek to demonstrate their own positive worth. *Boltanski and Chiapello* (2005: 442) observe a parallel process of “increased commodification of certain qualities of human beings”, that is the selective mobilisation of the way in which individuals make sense of their work and of themselves for economic ends, be it the desire to do exciting creative work (even if this may not be the case), the mobilisation of representations and imaginations of particular tasks as being “female” or “male” or any other dimension of diversity. “Commodification of diversity” is an indispensable part of the current hands-off management style as those immersed in project work have indeed been freed from the alienating assembly work of the industrial era, have seen their level of responsibility enhanced and enjoy the recognition of their ability to act autonomously and creatively. Whether these great expectations are met is the question of course, as creative workers trade greater autonomy with insecurity, intensification and pressure at work, and often relatively

low wages, the fragmentation of the “work-force” additionally seeing to it that there are hardly any means to collectively fight for improvements (*Boltanski and Chiapello* 2005: 430).

It is here that geography plays a prominent role beyond the undisputed fact that the processes discussed so far take place somewhere, come to the fore most strongly in urbanised settings and play out differently in different regions. Successful harnessing of creativity via the commodification of diversity crucially depends on spatial mobility. Or to be more precise, it depends on the production and economic utilisation of mobility differentials, a constellation where “some people’s immobility is necessary for other people’s mobility” (*Boltanski and Chiapello* 2005: 362). Creative workers who possess knowledge and skills that are extremely specialised but unspecific enough to allow transferability can easily move from one firm, one city or one country to the next. They are regarded as almost indispensable in the corporate worlds of activities such as advertising, fashion design, software programming etc. The social capital acquired by these “creative superstars” presupposes physical mobility. It is a well-established insight in economic geography and other disciplines interested in questions of knowledge generation and transfer in a globalised economy that the social capital necessary to acquire the status as broker and arbitrageur of knowledge circulates very poorly, if people do not circulate with it. It is of crucial importance therefore to create temporary instances of co-presence, to attend meetings, conferences etc. in person (see *Glückler* 2006). But this is only half of the (geographical) story. The well-documented janus-faced role of mobility at the heart of capitalism (i.e. the insight that while capitalism is unthinkable without circulation, movement and exchange, those mobilities are a constant source of irritation and threat to its existence; see *Harvey* 1981, 1982) has arguably attained a new quality in a connexionist world. Resulting in a particularly strong tension between the distant and the proximate, and the glo-

bal and the local, this makes the knowledge and creative elite all the more dependent on people who remain in place and provide necessary services for the key players (*Boltanski and Chiapello* 2005: 362f.; see also *Masse* 1997).

In the creative industries those less mobile services include the local craft-like expertise which is enlisted case-by-case by the global players in the respective field. A particularly good example is advertising. Large advertising and communication agencies employ local recording studios, experts for audio branding and identities, web designer and so on. But place-bound services necessary for the mobile creative elite to “work” additionally includes more profane and even less visible activities. The turn to creativity in wide parts of our economy would be impossible without low-wage personal services such as cleaning, catering or security, an aspect of the contemporary economy still totally neglected by policy-makers, above all in our cities. It should be added that necessary, low-cost support does of course regularly include the integration of distant know-how. The video game industry, for instance, makes extensive use of offshore partners scattered around the world (*Berndt et al.* 2008).

It is the necessity to maintain mobility differentials, the need for less mobile place-bound skills and the corresponding deprivation of a sizeable part of the “creative” class from valuable resources that prompted *Boltanski and Chiapello* (2005: 363) to speak of an exploitation of the immobile in relation to the mobile. What is more, an acknowledgement of the necessary interdependencies between relatively more mobile and immobile actors unmasks as shortsighted those who criticise claims of a new quality of capitalism. These critics often point all too quickly to limited evidence of new forms of organisation and a persistence of standardised labour relations, and socially and spatially stable personal constellations in the creative industries (e.g. *Abel and Pries* 2007; *Mayer-Ahuja and Wolf* 2007).

4. Conclusion

In this paper I advanced two interrelated arguments. First, there is growing evidence that we witness a revolution of the organisation, a revolution that partly dissolves the organisation “as we knew it”, marking the preliminary endpoint of a transformation which turned bureaucracy and assembly line into an open network of information, communication and production. The proud phrase of the 19th century – working means production – is increasingly being replaced by the motto ‘working means communication’ (*Baecker* 2003: 18). This is why principles and modes of operation formerly almost exclusively known from the realm of arts have become more important within many sectors of the economy (*Moulier Boutang* 2007). Yet, this shift at the same time occurs in a market society context, that is, there is a corresponding pressure to be marketable and profitable. The crucial question therefore is how creativity is organised and managed, and it is here that a more differentiated account, inspired by the Convention School, offers answers that go beyond some of the stylised discussions in the literature. This crucially includes the acknowledgement that it makes little sense to treat the creative industries as an exceptional case. Rather, the processes and mechanisms observable in those segments of the economy that are normally lumped together under this label are part and parcel of the wider transformation from industrial into network capitalism. It is a key characteristic of the present era that the tensions and contradictions discussed above are not simply regarded as irritations to be papered over with organisational means, but as productive tensions which can be mobilised economically. This is in contrast to industrial or state-organised capitalism which thrived around more stable constellations, with businesses organised mainly around class differences and clearly demarcated functional hierarchies. Second, I directed the attention to the question

of how creativity is mobilised practically inside the new organisational constellations typical for the knowledge economy. Emphasis was put on everyday creative work and the role of diversity in the creative industry. In so doing, I hoped to advance an argument about labour that goes beyond stylised confrontations between optimists like *Florida* who uncritically celebrate creative work and critics who caution the enthusiasts by pointing to widespread instances of routine work, stable employment, formal hierarchical structures and direct control in the apparently flexible knowledge economy. Against this I discussed the ambivalent role of difference, both in its social as well as its spatial manifestation. Articulated contingently, various dimensions of difference give rise to figurations of labour that blur the lines between self-fulfillment and social mobility on the one hand and exploitation on the other. It should be added, however, that the hands-on approach necessary to manage and harness creativity obviously has its risks. Although irritations and disruptions are not likely to destroy the system, they present openings for criticism and oppositional mobilisations. It is because of this that social diversity and im/mobility are both the precondition for success in network capitalism as well as a constant source of irritation and threat to its existence.

Note

¹ This paper is a conceptual intervention, informed by own research findings. These stem from empirical work on the 2008 Creative Economy Report Frankfurt (*Berndt et al. 2008*) and the ongoing research project "Creative Politics: The Emergence of a New Field of Urban Governance in the Age of Neoliberalism" (together with *Pascal Goeke* and *Peter Lindner*; funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). The paper has greatly profited from discussions with *Pascal Goeke*. His comments and thoughts have helped me to sharpen the argument. However, responsibility for the content is of course entirely mine.

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this shift at the same time occurs in a market society context, that is, there is a corresponding pressure to be marketable and profitable. The crucial question therefore is how creativity is organised and managed. Inspired by the convention school I advance a differentiated answer to this question. This crucially includes the insight that the processes and mechanisms observable in those segments of the economy that are normally lumped together under the label “creative economy” are part and parcel of the wider transformation from industrial into network capitalism. It is a key characteristic of the present era that tensions and contradictions are not simply regarded as irritations to be papered over with organisational means, but as productive tensions which can be mobilised economically. Second, I direct the attention to the question of how creativity is mobilised practically inside the new organisational constellations typical for the knowledge economy. Emphasis is put on everyday creative work and the role of diversity in the creative industry. In so doing, I advance an argument about labour that goes beyond stylised confrontations between optimists who uncritically celebrate creative work and critics who caution the enthusiasts by pointing to widespread instances of routine work, formal hierarchical structures and direct control in the apparently flexible knowledge economy. Against this I discuss the ambivalent role of difference, both in its social as well as its spatial manifestation. Articulated contingently, various dimensions of difference give rise to figurations of labour that blur the lines between self-fulfilment and social mobility on the one hand and exploitation on the other. I conclude with the observance that attempts to manage and harness creativity are not without risks. Irritations and disruptions present openings for criticism and oppositional mobilisations.

Summary: The Creative Economy at Work

This paper makes two interrelated arguments. First, there is growing evidence that we witness a revolution of the organisation, marking the preliminary end-point of a transformation which turned bureaucracy and assembly line into an open network of information, communication and production. This is why principles and modes of operation formerly almost exclusively known from the realm of arts have become more important within many sectors of the economy. Yet,

Kreativ arbeiten: Arbeitskonventionen in der „Kreativwirtschaft“

In diesem Artikel entwickle ich zwei miteinander verbundene Argumente: Das erste bezieht sich auf die tiefgreifenden Veränderungen, die mit dem Übergang von hierarchischen Organisationsformen zu offenen Informations-, Kommunikations- und Produktionsnetzwerken einhergehen. Im Zuge dieser Veränderungen gewinnen in weiten Teilen der Wirtschaft Normen und Handlungsprogramme an Bedeutung, die früher allein

dem Kunst- und Kultursektor vorbehalten waren. Diese Verschiebung findet jedoch gleichzeitig in einem Kontext statt, der von Markt- und Profitlogiken beherrscht wird. In diesem Spannungsfeld stellt sich vermehrt die Frage, wie Kreativität organisiert und kontrolliert werden kann. Aus einer konventionstheoretischen Perspektive zeige ich, dass die damit verbundenen Mechanismen und Zusammenhänge nicht auf die Bereiche der Ökonomie beschränkt sind, die gemeinhin mit dem Label „Kreativwirtschaft“ adressiert werden, sondern wesentliche Elemente des Übergangs von einem industriellen zu einem „vernetzten“ Kapitalismus insgesamt sind. In der gegenwärtigen Epoche werden Konflikte und Widersprüche nicht länger als störende Irritationen betrachtet, die mithilfe geeigneter organisatorischer Mittel zu beseitigen sind. Stattdessen gelten sie als produktive Spannungen, die sich ökonomisch in Wert setzen lassen. Im Anschluss daran frage ich zweitens danach, wie Kreativität innerhalb neuer organisatorischer Konstellationen praktisch gefördert werden kann. In den Mittelpunkt rücken hier die alltägliche kreative Arbeit und die Rolle von Diversität in der Kreativwirtschaft. Auf diese Weise ist es möglich, über die wenig produktive Konfrontation hinauszugehen zwischen jenen Beobachtern einerseits, die „kreative“ Arbeitswirklichkeiten unkritisch zelebrieren, und jenen, die diese Verhältnisse im Kern als hierarchisch, entfremdend und ausbeutend wahrnehmen. Stattdessen wird auf die ambivalente Rolle von Differenz verwiesen, sowohl in ihrer sozialen wie in ihrer räumlichen Ausprägung. In kontingenter Weise aufeinander bezogen bringen unterschiedliche Differenzdimensionen Arbeitsverhältnisse hervor, bei denen die Grenzen zwischen Selbsterfüllung und Ausbeutung zunehmend verwischen. Ich beende meine Ausführungen mit der Beobachtung, dass Versuche der Förderung und Inwertsetzung von Kreativität mit Risiken einhergehen. Die damit verbundenen Irritationen und Brüche bieten Raum für Kritik und die Formulierung von Gegenstrategien.

Résumé: Travail créatif – des conventions de travail dans l'économie créative

Dans cet article, j'ai développé deux arguments liés: Le premier se réfère aux transformations profondes qui s'accompagnent de la transition des formes hiérarchi-

ques de l'organisation vers des réseaux ouverts d'information, de communication et de production. Dans le cadre de ces transformations, des programmes d'action et des normes économiques – qui étaient autrefois réservés seulement aux secteurs d'art et culturels – prennent de l'importance. Cependant, ce changement se déroule parallèlement dans un contexte qui est dominé par les logiques du marché et du profit. Dans cette tension, il est notamment question de l'organisation et du contrôle de la créativité. Du point de vue conventionnel et théorique je montre que les mécanismes et les relations ne se limitent pas aux domaines de l'économie, qui se sont couramment attachés à l'étiquette « économie créative », mais ils sont un élément essentiel de la transition d'un capitalisme industriel vers un capitalisme en réseau. À l'époque présente, les conflits et les contradictions ne sont plus considérés comme des irritations dérangeantes qu'on a besoin d'éliminer à l'aide des moyens organisationnels. Au lieu de cela, ils sont des tensions productives qui peuvent se mobiliser économiquement. Deuxièmement, je demande comment la créativité peut être encouragée au sein des nouvelles constellations organisationnelles. Le travail créatif quotidien et le rôle de la diversité dans l'économie créative sont stigmatisés dans cette partie. Il est ainsi possible de déborder la confrontation productive entre les observateurs qui célèbrent les réalités de travail créatives sans critique et ceux qui perçoivent ces conditions essentiellement comme hiérarchiques, aliénantes et exploitantes. Au lieu de cela, je fais référence au rôle ambivalent de la différence, tant dans l'accentuation sociale que dans l'accentuation spatiale. En rattachant d'une manière contingente, des différentes dimensions de différences fournissent des emplois qui brouillent de plus en plus la frontière entre l'épanouissement et l'exploitation. Je termine mes remarques avec l'observation que les tentatives de l'encouragement et de la mobilisation de la créativité sont accompagnées de risques. Les irritations et les ruptures résultantes ouvrent une discussion critique et la formulation des contre-stratégies.

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