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The emergent working society of leisure

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Abstract

This paper explores a contemporary trend in the sociology of work and leisure which engages with classic leisure studies concerns about the nature of peoples' uses of time and their relationship to production and consumption. Utilising data from qualitative research into the career biographies of creative industries workers in a small coastal town in England, we posit that we are witnessing an emerging *working society of leisure*. This involves a shift from a consumption to a production focus: 'doing leisure' is now about cultural production. Class remains a major determinant of the leisure experience – the most successful tend to be those with significant external sources of economic and cultural capital. As such, we conclude by arguing that the emergent working society of leisure is neither the social democratic project of classic leisure studies, nor the meritocratic project of liberal democracy, but an inherently classist and exclusionary project of the 'post-work' era.

Key words: leisure society, cultural production, biography, creative industries, work and leisure

Introduction

In this paper, we seek to question the continuing validity of Veblen's (1953) 'leisure society' thesis and Dumazedier's (1967) vision of an accessible leisure society, as explanations of contemporary Western social life. According to Veblen, as societies become more sophisticated, less time is required for basic survival and more time is given to increasingly complex modes of consumption. 'Free' time is the ultimate expression of this thesis, as work – committed time – is replaced by leisure. Thus, the sign of a developing society is one in which 'free' time is increasingly available to the more successful members of that society. Yet, as Schor (1992) and Gershuny (2000) have shown, working time has been increasing (for those in work) over the last 40-50 years, at the same time that productivity has enjoyed unprecedented growth.

Schor's and Gershuny's findings suggest that the idea of a trade-off between work and consumption, understood largely through the medium of time, overplays the value of both consumption and time. As Gershuny (2000) argues, relative wealth gives rise to choice about the types of trade offs that can be made with respect to work and non-work activities (for example, wealthier people deciding to contract out domestic chores as a way of 'freeing' time). The complexity of this changing relationship implies a need to locate 'choice' within the 'leisure society' thesis: to understand that the construction of the work/leisure relationship is too individual to fit within a single metanarrative that values consumption over production.

In seeking an alternative reading of the 'leisure society', we are drawn to Rojek's (2001) construct of 'civil labour'. In arguing that identity formation is a function of choice (and thus not necessarily proscribed by institutions such as class and religion), Rojek suggests that the separation of work from subsistence needs in Western societies has allowed people to develop suites of activities through which they can express their identities. Rojek has termed this mix of activities - which can include paid and non-paid work in addition to leisure - 'civil labour', in recognition of its self-determined (civil) utility (work) in forming and displaying identity. Civil labour, in Rojek's terms, is akin to Locke's (1963) construct of leisure as 'refreshing labour'. Deploying the construct of 'civil labour' provides an explanation for phenomena such as 'down-shifting', in which decisions are made to replace some paid work with other - usually non-paid - activities as a means of achieving a desired 'work-life balance'.

Following Rojek (2001) and Locke (1963), our research question is concerned with how far a contemporary reading of the ‘leisure society’ is related to the balance of work activities (paid and unpaid) in which people participate, rather than in the amount and type of leisure that they consume. We suggest that this productivist orientation can be identified as the emergent ‘*working society of leisure*’, a society in which leisure is composed of self-determined work and where, in place of the old work/leisure divide, there is a continuum of work practices that throughout people’s lives offer a mix of social, psychological and financial rewards. We recognise that, just as Veblen’s leisure society was exclusive, the *working society of leisure* is equally so. For flexibility cuts both ways: highly skilled and motivated labour can benefit from new, often state-supported, opportunities in ways that are simply not available to those without access to these skills and their associated financial and cultural capital.

We investigate the emergence of the *working society of leisure* through a biographical study of 35 creative workers living and working in Hastings, a small coastal town in South East England. While the biographies of these workers are far from uniform, they have in common a vocation to ‘merge’ their work and leisure lives into a single labour project: to do their leisure through work. They thus share a lifestyle that is high in cultural content but often so low in pecuniary benefits that they can only live it through subsidisation from another source (part time work or wealth generated prior to committing themselves to civil labour). These workers do not work long hours for high reward and its conspicuous consumption opportunities. Rather, they are in the vanguard of what we characterise as the emergent *working society of leisure*, where the extrinsic rewards of paid employment have given way to a form of ‘civil labour’ dominated by the intrinsic rewards once reserved for ‘free time’ activities (Gorz,

1982, 1983; Newman, 1983; Rojek, 2001). As such, we argue that we may indeed be progressing towards a new form of 'leisure society' that is characterised by the consumption of both time and money in new modes of production. We observe, however, that utopian ideals of a leisure society for all remain as distant as ever, with access to the *working society of leisure* still regulated by class constraints such as the availability of cultural and economic capital.

The Leisure Society Revised

As Sylvester (1999) asserted, throughout much of recent history 'leisure' has been viewed as the cornerstone of 'the good life', with work having little more than utilitarian value. As Veblen (1953) argued, this limited 'leisure' to a class of society that did not need to engage in work to the exclusion of other aspects of their lives, in the process aligning the 'leisure society' with a theorisation of consumption (Gershuny, 2000). It is only the relative affluence of the mass worker that has challenged this relationship (Rifkin, 1995), although Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt (1967) have questioned the extent to which affluence leads to, or is correlated with, changes in lifestyles.

For Rojek (2001), the issue is not about consumption, but a more political concern, about the decline of the socialist alternative to the capitalist economy. Where once the dividend of automation was going to be the triumph of freedom and well-being over the subjugation of work (Gorz, 1982, 1983), it is now clear that no such universal panacea was on offer, and that the ubiquitous 'leisure society' has fragmented into a highly divided society structured around access to work. As Sennett (2007) and

Ravenscroft and Gilchrist (2005) have argued, this structure divides increasingly around skills, flexibility and entrepreneurship, what Seltzer and Bentley (1999, 1 et seq) have termed “weightless work” in a “weightless economy”. As Rojek (2001) has observed:

Looking back, postindustrial society theory was remarkably optimistic about the [Q]uietist nature of the social and economic consequences of automation. It assumed that part of the high revenues enjoyed by corporations would be transferred to governments to support flexible and all-encompassing systems of public education and welfare. This was necessary in order to minimise social conflict and economic injustice. However, the institutional details of this transformation were rather nebulous. (p. 121)

Rather than this symbiotic relationship between production and welfare, Gershuny (2000) has suggested that the symbiosis is much more between production and consumption: that specific levels and types of consumption require particular patterns of work. As a result, socio-economic development is premised on changes in both the distribution of work and the distribution of non-work time and consumption, such that “... a high-value-added society must collectively develop new high-value-added occupational specialities and matching new high-value-added consumption habits” (Gershuny, 2000, p. 29). This relationship is at the crux of recent socio-economic change: an increasing demarcation between the highly skilled core of the labour force and the increasingly disengaged periphery, who are marginal to both the increase in work and the increase in consumption opportunities (see Schor, 1992; Seltzer and Bentley, 1999; Sennett, 2007).

For those with access to this increasingly exclusive socio-cultural system, ‘leisure’ is not so much freedom from labour, but freedom for refreshing labour (Locke, 1963).

Refreshing labour involves fostering a single coherent 'labour life' that involves sufficient paid labour to fund elements of unpaid 'civil labour' lifestyles. Marx (1993) made a similar separation between materially necessary work (the kind required for survival and the maintenance of society) and creative work (needed for achieving higher human capacities): "thus leisure is spent laboring freely in the production of creative works done for their own sake" (Sylvester, 1999, p.29).

This construct of leisure as refreshing (or civil) labour offers a new prism through which to view the leisure society; one in which leisure has moved beyond exchange and denotational value (Bramham, 2002) to a 'post-affluent' life politics (Etzioni, 2004) in which people downplay material well-being in favour of a greater emphasis on their quality of life. While certainly remaining classed, to the extent that only those with sufficient capital can take the step from necessary to creative labour, this 'post-work' shift is not part of the use-exchange-denotational shift implied in the original leisure society. Rather, it reflects a paradigm shift in which the bifurcation between production and consumption is replaced with a continuum of productive and consumptive labour opportunities through which individuals have and deploy multiple statuses (Gershuny, 2000).

The place of leisure on this continuum varies according to individual circumstances and demands. Those with high cultural and economic capital will have more flexibility to balance their creativity with their pecuniary requirements than will those with lower levels of capital (see Nixon & Crewe, 2004; Van Parijs, 1995). However, even those with low levels of cultural and economic capital have the potential to take up some aspect of constructive or creative work; as Locke (1963) argued, the barrier

to undertaking constructive or creative work is neither time nor money, but the disposition and will of the individual to invest their time (and possibly their money) on such work. Thus, for example, many creative and cultural workers struggle to earn a living from commissions, but find other ways of funding their lifestyle, often through paid work in the service sector (Svejenova, 2005; Szivas & Riley, 1999).

Creative workers and the emergent ‘*working society of leisure*’

It has been argued that creative workers are in the vanguard of the *working society of leisure*, because work patterns in the creative industries are thought to “... form the model for the refashioning of the conduct of work in other areas of employment” (Nixon & Crewe, 2004, p. 130). In the UK, the ‘creative industries’ comprise advertising, architecture, the art and antiques markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2008). In her work, McRobbie (2002) drew attention to the hybrid nature of creative work and the ways in which it ‘disrupts’ what she sees as the established divisions between work and leisure, with the culture derived from the latter being used to form identities in the world of work. The creative industries are thus a key economic policy area for recent governments in the UK (see, for example, Work Foundation, 2007; Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2008), particularly in promoting progression routes between education, training and work, and in encouraging workers to develop ‘life skills’ that ensure that they are ‘flexible’ in their approach to the labour market.

The promotion of the creative industries has been particularly attractive in small towns and cities that have suffered from industrial job losses but have been unable to attract new service sector opportunities. Many city authorities, in North America as well as the UK, have unproblematically accepted the blueprint provided by Richard Florida (2002, 2004) in designing cultural policies and regeneration initiatives to develop technology, talent, and a tolerant culture in order to attract a young and mobile ‘creative class’ that can deliver wider social and economic development (see Aitchison & Evans, 2003; Miles & Paddison, 2005; Ward & Taylor, 2004). For example in the UK, the Government vision is that within 10 years, local economies such as these will be driven by creativity, with an expanded range of jobs, clear routes into creative careers and “‘real choice’ in terms of people’s jobs and “work-life balance”” (DCMS, 2008, p. 4). Our study, in one such small town that has been subject to a range of initiatives to support the development of the creative industries, seeks to understand how far creative workers have been able to exercise the types of choice implied by the official rhetoric and, as a result, experience the new ‘*working society of leisure*’. Specifically, this study seeks to identify creative workers who have been able to develop a sustainable creative lifestyle, and to examine how they have achieved this condition.

The Setting: Hastings, UK

The site of our case study is Hastings, a town of 80,000 inhabitants on the coast of East Sussex, England, about 50 miles south east of London and equidistant between Brighton and the main English Channel port at Dover. Probably still best known as the site of the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the town has been a popular seaside tourist

resort and an important fishing port. With both industries in steep decline over the last 30 years, it is now the most deprived town in South East England (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004), with some families experiencing four generations of unemployment. Informed by a “Floridian” vision of creative development (Florida, 2002, 2004), the town has undergone significant public investment in the creative industries, particularly digital media and broadcasting (see Church, et al, 2007), and now boasts a small university centre. External communications have been improved, including high speed broadband and good rail links to London and along the coast to Ashford (with direct rail connection to Continental Europe) and Brighton (an established cultural centre with a buoyant local economy). While being typical of many small seaside towns, Hastings has the advantage that it is relatively close to London and to the Channel ports. Because of its recent history, it also has cheap (by South East English standards) housing, industrial and commercial property to buy or rent.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved in-depth interviews with 35 creative industries workers. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique in order to capture responses from people at four different career stages: those looking for work (predominantly young people reaching the end of formal education); early careers (mainly younger people starting out on their creative careers); established workers (those with a minimum of five years’ experience of full time work in the creative sector); and second career workers (people who have retired from a first career to develop their ‘hobby’ into a new career, and some – mainly women – who have

swapped unpaid domestic labour for a creative career). Local electronic message boards and websites of relevant groups and associations (the Arts Forum, the Chamber of Commerce, the university, the local arts college, specialist local business forums) were utilised and a general call was made that explained the project and invited research participants to come forward. The sample, which had an even gender mix, ranged in age from 16 to 65, with the modal age range being 41-50 year olds. Most had acquired further or higher education qualifications (the further education qualifications were largely vocational and related to specific creative sectors, while the higher education qualifications were more varied and less vocational), with only three of the (employed) participants having a history of direct entry into work from school. The majority interviewed were incomers to Hastings, with a mean of eight years residency in the town.

A biographical approach to data collection was selected. This is a resurgent method in social research (Ladkin, 2004) that has been popularised by the turn toward narrative analysis and the movement toward deconstructing personal lives in order to solicit information about memory, identity, and belonging (Sedgley, Pritchard & Morgan, 2006). Biography and the means through which it is constructed is a growing field of sociological concern. Researchers are seeking to understand how people tell stories about their lives, how narratives are produced, and the connections between individual lives and their representations to broader social and cultural contexts.

There are two principal approaches to biographical research: behavioural studies, which are often applied to constructs of 'career development', typically within commercial settings such as tourism (Ladkin, 2000; Ladkin & Riley, 1996; Riley &

Ladkin, 1994); and interpretivist studies, which explore the subjective meanings of individual action within social contexts such as sport and leisure (see Huq, 2006; Thornton, 1995; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). We have sought to engage with both these approaches, by capturing biographies through the behavioural approach and interpreting them through a grounded approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to help us identify the subjective meanings attached to the biographical incidents being described. While retaining the empiricism of tourism studies, therefore, we have reinterpreted the construct of 'career development' away from its linear vocational associations towards what we have termed a 'creative career' that encompasses both necessary and creative labour. This aligns with established work in the field of leisure studies, especially Stebbins' (1992, 1997) construct of the 'social worlds' (Unruh, 1979, 1980) encountered through serious leisure pursuits, and more recent work on civil labour and life politics (Rojek, 2001).

The interviews, conducted between November 2006 and February 2007, were semi-structured, to allow biographical self-narratives to emerge. The interview discussion guide covered the following themes: social and educational background; broad career path; professional development activity and further skill acquisition; approaches to creativity and innovation; relationships to clients and markets; use of self-help groups, networks and business hubs; lifestyle choices and their impact on work; residential migration behaviour; and attitudes to key actors in the local creative and cultural economy. The mean interview time was 54 minutes and all interviews were digitally recorded.

The interviews were transcribed for analysis (with the names of the interviewees changed to maintain confidentiality), which followed a 'constant comparison' method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This involved coding the data and identifying phenomena with categories. The process is one of oscillation and escalation. The researcher moves between data and concept, discretely naming elements of the data in order to build an accurate picture for theoretical elaboration. However, more abstract concepts, derived from the wider literature, are referred to and applied in order to make sense of the data. By constantly comparing the data match to existing knowledge, and each transcript to emergent themes collected from the other interviews, the researcher is able to escalate the knowledge gathered from raw data to a picture that can inform more abstract theorisations and general social relationships and processes. Following Glaser and Strauss' (1967) method of axial coding, the research team met on several occasions and discussed the causal conditions, intervening contexts and possible consequences surrounding the identified phenomena (see also Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These meetings enabled the identification and elaboration of significant hypotheses and tentative conclusions which derived both from the interview data and the analytical/theoretical background of the researchers.

Findings

The four categories used for the sampling frame proved appropriate for the analysis, with distinctions being drawn between the workers at different stages of their 'creative careers'. The pre-entrants were generally hopeful about their choice of career; they wanted to work in the industry and were looking forward to it. However, their initial experiences were poor, with few jobs available, little feedback from

prospective employers and an increasing frustration that, like most of their parents, their labour lives were going to be defined by part time and low paid work. Those in their early careers experience the same mix of emotions; they are happy to be working and developing their creativity, but they are also becoming aware of how hard it is to generate a sustainable income from their work. The more established workers no longer face the same issues, they recognise the economic limitations of Hastings and have found markets elsewhere that have allowed them the choice about how to develop their civil labour activities. Those embarking on a second career are, in many respects, similar to the pre-entrants: they hope that their new career choice will yield the civil labour that they desire, but they are increasingly concerned that Hastings may not be a suitable location for this.

Pre-entrants: frustrated yet hopeful

Ten young people hoping for careers in the creative industries were interviewed. Some, like Oona, were still at college, while others had completed their courses and were now looking for work, sometimes (like Mandy) using seasonal tourist employment as a ‘stop-gap’. All of those interviewed had grown up in Hastings and had family in the town. Despite many of the interviewees coming from families that had little experience of secure paid work, all interviewees hoped to find full time paid work for which their training had prepared them. They also talked about the need to earn an income to help support their parents and families – a need that had often been influential in their choice of intended career.

Yet they found it hard to find work. Some felt that, in part, this was indicative of a culture in Hastings that assumed that work was not available, particularly for those born and raised in the town. Norman's claims were typical in this respect:

“I don't feel like I have to work. I want to work. ... You know I wanna do this. What's the point moaning about it when you can actually go and do it. Well people moan about not doing this, but when you go to work you have money. Complaining, that's what gets on my nerves. You can actually do it. But in Hastings it seems like everyone either doesn't wanna do it or they can't do it. They're either stopping you because you haven't got the qualifications, or stopping you because you smoke too much, or you drink. Stupid things like that really.” [Norman, 18, unemployed craft worker]

This sentiment was echoed by other interviewees, many of whom felt that they had been misled – by schools, colleges and careers officers, for example, into believing that there were creative jobs available and that they would be suitably qualified to get those jobs. Yet, as Len stated, the routes into work were no different to those open to their parents and their friends who had not achieved any qualifications:

“Most of the jobs I've had are from people my mum and dad know, but I've applied for I don't know how many jobs, but they keep saying no....A few of my mates have got jobs, but it's only from people their mum and dad know. Most of my mates aint got jobs. ...I would actually do anything just to earn a bit of cash.” [Len, 20, unemployed craft worker]

Similarly, Mandy, a former art student, knows that she can get part time and seasonal work through friends, but that these jobs will help her develop her artistic skills and career. For those without contacts there was little work, certainly full time or leading to a career, with many respondents claiming that part time work, even in their chosen

profession, carries with it a number of bureaucratic problems that limit its attractiveness:

“It’s only casual work down here. You don’t get permanent jobs. You get some agencies, I know people who go to the agencies and they just take them two days a week, three days a week, their [unemployment] benefit stops so they have to pay everything themselves. When an employer takes you on just one or two days a week, it’s not worth you going. That’s why I am not happy about these jobs.” [Norman, craft worker]

Quentin, the owner of a small graphic design business in Hastings, recognised this scenario, claiming that the potential for jobs existed, but the training was not currently available:

“You get to a stage where there are not enough staff trained for those businesses. They need to expand and start out-sourcing stuff to China and to other countries. That’s what we need to retain in this area. We need skilled workers and work. We’re really fortunate here because we’ve got six colleges and universities locally that are producing the students that have the technical skills but don’t have the jobs to go to.” [Quentin, 46, graphic designer]

As the comments of the interviewees suggest, the ideals of work in the creative sector soon fade, to be replaced by a wish to work in any job that will pay some money. For these interviewees, the creative sector promised a lot, particularly an escape from decades of industrial and service sector decline in Hastings. Yet it failed to deliver. Their experiences of job seeking were little different to those of previous generations, while ideas of choice in determining the components of their civil labour had no bearing at all on their current or expected future lives.

Early Careers: conspicuous lifestyles and consumption

In contrast to the pre-entrants, most of the early career interviewees were new to Hastings, or had been away to university and had previous creative experience, often in London. To these people, the creative industries had a strong allure, promising autonomy, self-expression and enjoyment and the collapse of binary distinctions between work and leisure as both become necessary sources of personal satisfaction. Burchill and Raven's journalistic commentary on the nature of modern Brighton (a thriving neighbour of Hastings) neatly satirises this allure. They wrote of new media workers:

...most of them are in their twenties and thirties, have closely cropped hair or heavy metal ponytails, wear Carhartt T-shirts and combat trousers, brandish iPods, go 'travelling' (never on holiday) somewhere in Asia for a couple of months a year... (Burchill & Raven, 2007, p. 68).

Whilst this caricature generalises somewhat, there is a kernel of truth to the description. Contained inside Hastings' Creative Media Centre (a creative business incubator) were many such figures. Graham, a graphic designer who was three years into the start-up of a small business, matched the description perfectly. Conspicuous consumption, seen through his dress, purchase of gadgets, and hairstyle, was a part of his creative persona. Yet, there was a deeper sense of the merging of production and consumption lifestyles: being a graphic designer meant that Graham could indulge his love for travel and his subcultural interests. Travel was not undertaken for relaxation or enjoyment per se, but was integrated into his work as a fact-finding mission or "road trip" where visual elements of the international cities he visited would eventually be played out in his designs. Furthermore, his vocational choice meant he

could still pursue his interests in skateboarding. He did this through producing some designs for boards and maintaining a website for a small distributor. However, this was not conceived as work, nor a fully-commercial affair: “I don’t really get an income off it ... it will pay for the decks to be printed which is quite big ... and then I’ll just get a few decks out of it for free...” [Graham, 25, graphic designer].

Other new entrants recognised that the need to survive financially meant that they had to find a balance between their creative work and turning their creative skills to utilitarian functions. For example Eoin, a metal sculptor, realised that he possessed transferable skills and technical knowledge that could be put to use to supplement his living:

“At the end of the day a welder is a very useful person, luckily, because you get people who need car exhausts fixing, barbecues making, security grills making, fire escapes making. There’s an endless supply of people who need stuff making or fixing. So initially I was doing very functional stuff around the town. I’d be making hand to mouth money...for beer and a bed sometimes.” [Eoin, 36, sculptor]

Others, such as Penny, did not have these types of transferable skills and thus could not fall back on them to supplement their incomes. Penny was a fine artist who had moved from north of London in 1999 because she loved Hastings’ relaxed atmosphere and wanted to pursue a seaside theme in her artwork. She had sold property inherited from her parents to afford a shift to a live/work space in close proximity to the beach and had taught in the first few years of residency in the area at the local further education college:

“I came here thinking, ‘ooh, I’ve done art tuition in the past, these are the things I normally do’, and expected to get things. But it’s very very

competitive here because there's a lot of other people who are equally and better qualified than me ... And I'm in a situation at the moment where I need part-time work and I've run up very large credit card debts that I'm going to have to pay off. In the past I've been able to do it, I've had phone calls telling me that it's alright as I've sold £3000 worth of paintings. That would go a long way towards it. But being here I can't see where that little lucky break is going to come from. There isn't a buying public here.”
[Penny, 53, fine artist]

As Penny's biography illustrates, new entrants (including those moving from other locations but without an established market) often experienced a 'double-bind': they needed to concentrate on their creativity, to build a stock of work and to improve their skills; but they also needed to earn money to live, which they could not do if they could not sell their work and they could not find part time work to meet their needs.

In contrast, some interviewees advanced the idea that there were benefits to be gained from a peripheral location like Hastings, in contradistinction to the socio-economic dynamics of larger metropolitan areas. Whilst Hastings may suffer from an under-developed market for creative goods, and the governance and leadership of the sector may also be immature, it was felt to offer a supportive creative community:

“...one of the things that I really like about Hastings, as a small town, a working class town and quite an eccentric town with its artists, who've always been here, or have always chosen to move here, you get a good mix between ages and different types of people and my creativity's been inspired by that...” [Jane, 40, artist and typographer]

This feeling of community was felt by some to be in contrast to London, which was seen as an alienating, exploitative environment, populated by a youthful and competitive creative industries workforce and unscrupulous corporate clients. The

contrast between cultural ecology and creative economy, periphery and core, was made in a series of binary positions - autonomy vs. dependency, artistic integrity vs. market-behaviour, freedom vs. alienation, leisure/lifestyle vs. work. In most cases the periphery acted as a haven where cultural production, leisure-as-work or work-as-leisure lifestyles could be acted out. As one fine artist put it:

“I think I’d enjoy London in maybe five years when I’ve got a lot more experience, [it’s] very dog eat dog at the minute and if you’re not that knowledgeable you just get taken advantage of; your designs get exploited and stuff...” [Ben, 43, fine artist]

Established workers: getting by

Although it was generally accepted that the financial rewards available to the sector were small, there were established full time creative workers living in Hastings. They tended to distinguish themselves by reference to the quality of their art and their consequent ability to earn enough to live:

“There’s lots of artists, or people who call themselves artists, in Hastings. And there’s full-time artists, which I am, and there’s not many full-time artists, working artists. There’s degrees of...there’s good artists and bad ... it wouldn’t be unfair to say that for a lot of artists living in Hastings, their working isn’t very interesting really, it’s very local, very parochial, or very unambitious perhaps. I’ve always wanted to set my targets higher than just being a successful local artist...All towns are the same. Some towns attract more artists than others and seaside towns have always attracted arty people, because it’s on the fringe of things. And they’re usually cheap places to live and work and to find a studio” [Chris, 56, fine artist]

Access to markets appeared to be the key factor that determined when creative workers became established and began to experience the *working society of leisure*. Henry, an illustrator, recognised that he had exploited the advantages that could be

derived from living in Hastings and working for clients in London, highlighting the compromises that need to be made in order to earn a living:

“...I suppose being able to adapt your work has kind of made me, I suppose self-conscious of it, of adapting it to certain briefs...or being able to adapt it a lot...I might spend one day doing something for a wine magazine and then the next day you’ll be doing it for a dirty XXL hip hop sort of crazy mag and then doing a book cover. I think in the back of my mind I always wanted my work to be adaptable, but still keep a certain amount of integrity and hopefully for people looking at it to go “Fucking hell, it looks like he’s had a good time making that” [Henry, 32, illustrator]

In being an established worker, Henry was able to use electronic communication and e-commerce to cut down the barriers between Hastings as a place to live and markets in London and elsewhere. Indeed, he was one of the few interviewees who had an agent, primarily to source work from the American market. Henry was thus not at all reliant on the local economy for his economic security. Similarly, David, owner of a medium-sized creative design agency, spoke of the competitive benefits that being located in Hastings could bring. He could employ people at a far lower rate than that expected by advertising workers in London. However, the majority of his business was sourced from more developed industrial areas in the South East of England. Similarly Chris, a fine artist who has lived in Hastings for fifteen years, asserted that he was not financially reliant on the local area, instead selling his work internationally, largely through galleries. He argued that this was because the local economy lacked the necessary creative infrastructure to support artists who were more developed in their careers:

“There’s no art world down here really ... there’s no infrastructure for it to exist. There’s no money here to do that and not enough people with money. There’s no galleries down here, well one or two, but there’s no gallery functioning at that level that would place your work in somewhere like Toronto, because that happens all the time in London with their stable of artists ... the international links are definitely missing down here.”
[Chris, 56, fine artist]

While accepting that he was established enough to choose where he lived, Adam, an illustrator, recognised the precarious nature of work in his chosen profession, and the fact that he sometimes has to take on work that he does not find creative:

“...you do go through phases where it just feels like a job, you know, because it’s inevitable really, but you have to kind of step back sometime and try and remember why you love it, you know, do stuff...” [Adam, 35, illustrator]

In the earlier part of his career he had worked part-time in hospitality and as a car parking attendant and practiced his artwork on his days off and in the evenings. Recognising that his hometown of Glasgow offered “no work of any kind,” he moved with his partner to Brighton in order to pursue his illustration full-time. The city, he felt, with its abundance of creative industries and close links to London, would allow him to pick-up commissions from clients. Luckily, commissions started appearing and he was able to earn a modest living. He moved to Hastings because of the cheaper property prices and because he felt Brighton was undergoing gentrification to the detriment of its bohemian atmosphere. His average annual income was £14,000 (considerably less than the national average wage), enough to pay for rent on his studio and materials. He was supported by his partner who drew a slightly larger annual income as a comic book colourist. However, he considered a gender dynamic

that had to be negotiated in order for both of them to live and work as practicing illustrators. Speaking of his wife, he said:

“She colours children’s books, she’s freelance, so she’s got no contracts, she’s got no pregnancy leave, she’s got no sick pay, no holiday pay. She got her job when the guy who did it went on holiday for a couple of weeks and she’s still got it, several years later. If she wants to take a holiday she has to get ahead of her workload and then come back before anything misses a deadline or else she wouldn’t have a job, which is crap because she’s pregnant right now and she hasn’t told her boss, and I’m probably gonna be doing her work when she can’t do it...” [Adam, 35, illustrator]

Similarly, even those who worked for established commercial businesses such as design studios recognised that their survival was precarious, given the relative lack of work in Hastings and the surrounding area. This was illustrated by Tim, with respect to the support given to new business start-ups in the town (in this case the public funding of the Creative Media Centre as a ‘business incubator’ for start up companies):

“The Creative Media Centre has brought competition for us. Although there’s not a great...when I first heard these plans I thought OK, great, but there’s no work in Hastings. You know, you do need ... a whole bunch of design companies can’t generate work, they need clients. That was one thought I had, who were they going to be working for. The other thought I had was what little there is in Hastings, they’re going to be swamped with competition. And I suppose the other thought we had was that it’s great but there’s no support for existing companies. They’re bending over backwards to help start-ups and new companies but if you are an existing company who’ve been struggling to carve out a niche in the creative industries then, and based in Hastings for ten years, then you’re totally ignored.” [Tim, 50, designer]

Second Careers: escaping routine

For the majority of second career workers, the decision to undertake a career change was motivated by frustrations with their previous jobs and the desire to seek new challenges. Transitions were made away from professional and highly-skilled jobs with established career structures and pathways (trading standards officer, local authority officer, librarian, military, museum curator, railway driver), often toward new roles as boutique guest house entrepreneurs or larger hotel owners. All of our participants had made this change at middle-age (40-50) and posited the change in terms of breaking with convention, a desire to escape routine and to find new sources of satisfaction. Ian, a former librarian, described it thus:

“I think I lost interest in the career. I was finding things for me to do that were interesting and different and working with the team, but it wasn’t doing it for me any more. And I thought there must be more to it than this, especially the 9 to 5 of it. I think about it quite a lot. Coming home of an evening and never having a particularly challenging day, but feeling quite tired and drained. And I don’t have that feeling anymore. Even though I’m doing these long and extended hours, with people checking in at different times....but working 9 to 5 was driving me nuts. I’ve had this shift in my attitude as to what are disruptions and inconveniences...but all the dross stuff that you do in the day has to be done. Whether it’s changing the bed or emptying the dishwasher or watering the plants or doing the grocery shopping. But all that stuff doesn’t bother me now.” [Ian, 42, hotelier]

Many of those who had quit other careers to locate in Hastings and pursue a creative labour life spoke at length about quality of life issues, where their own interests could be pursued without recourse to financial constraints:

“I wanted to come down here and break the chain of monotony and I knew it was cheap to buy property down here....all the time I was looking for somewhere as a live/work place by the sea.” [Roger, 34, fine artist]

For others, the transition to an artistic career realigned unfulfilled lifestyle goals with a new vocational direction. Frank, a gallery owner, spoke particularly in these terms. He had been “channelled into a professional path as a young lad” by parental expectations and the family’s need to maintain a “veneer of middle-class respectability.” This had led him to suppress his creative urges and true vocational calling until confronted by a series of personal tragedies and traumas. Suddenly, he said:

“...I found myself walking on the beach on a sunny day, picking up bits of wood and making beautiful things with it....and that was hugely rewarding...I found that I had a life which through creativity could make me rich in ways that money could never achieve...it’s about making a difference to our own lives and the world – let’s make it beautiful.”
[Frank, 51, gallery owner]

The commitment to a new form of work as a life choice for most was underpinned by their appraisal of the assets, infrastructure and people in the area. This might be termed the ‘cultural ecology’, taken to denote the professional infrastructure that enables producer lifestyles, as well as providing the means, both remunerative and emotional, to affirm career choice (see Shorthose & Strange, 2004). Across the sample particular mention was made of the presence of a critical mass of arts professionals, thriving local museums and galleries, supportive local authority arts officers, proximity to education and training establishments, availability of business development schemes, receptive public audience, and the inspirations given by the wider natural and built environment:

“There are a lot of opportunities here; they just don’t seem to have money attached to them. Not a lot of money. Just any money. Because I spent five years voluntarily and not being paid I can’t afford to give my time,

you know, I've got to be very careful about how I spend my time....I don't want to do things where I'm not paid for it." [Roger, 34, fine artist]

However, it was equally noted – by Kerry for example, a former surveyor who had become a hotelier in Hastings - that this cultural ecology often lacked a sufficient financial edge to allow new businesses and creative workers to prosper; indeed, several participants indicated that they were living off the equity realised through the sale of property in London or the South East of England, which had afforded the opportunity to pursue a more creative direction.

Overview of findings

The findings suggest that most of the participants understood and experienced the possibilities of combining necessary and creative work into a civil labour profile through which they could express their identities as creative workers. Some of these workers managed to generate sufficient income to support their lifestyles (sometimes wholly from creative work and sometimes as part of a mix with other income sources), while others relied on releasing capital to support their work.

Risk was an ever-present factor in this emergent *working society of leisure*: that individuals would not find or be able to sustain the necessary/creative work nexus that they sought. In part this is about their own self-expression (including, for some, eschewing their 'respectable job in favour of a new creative career). However, materially it was also about the economic consequences of their actions (or inactions). As some of the interviewees identified, risk commenced with the decision to leave secure employment in search of the *working society of leisure*. This risk – or the

personal impact of the risk – was often ameliorated by the sale of valuable family houses or an inheritance, and by the desire to experience an authentic (or romanticised) cultural ecology. However, not all creative workers had this luxury, and some were faced with a reality – for them – of balancing low and insecure incomes with the production of the lifestyle of their choice. This seemed to apply even to the established creative workers, although it was at its most apparent in the case of the new entrants. While claiming their identity as creative workers, the new entrants talked about being flexible and using their skills – even if not very creatively - to generate income.

In addition to the generic findings about the *working society of leisure* enjoyed by creative workers in Hastings, there is the role of the town itself in creating the specific cultural ecology experienced by these workers. Clearly, Hastings is enjoyed for its location by the sea (see, for example, the quotes from Jane and Roger), its affordable housing and studio space, the growing network of producers working locally and the exhibitions and occasional commissions that allow creative workers to earn some income from their production. But it has yet to display, to our participants at least, the developing possibilities of the creative economy championed by Florida (2002, 2004).

Many of the cultural producers contrasted the cultural ecology of Hastings with the ‘creative economy’ of London (and Brighton). For whilst the larger metropolitan (and cosmopolitan) economies of London and Brighton seemed to offer opportunities to develop rich social networks, strong economic ties and exposure to new ideas and values (see Fischer, 1975; 1982; 1984), the smaller Bohemian community of Hastings was valued for the levels of emotional, social and artistic support that it could provide.

By drawing this distinction the cultural producers implied in the process that the creative economy is what cultural ecology is not; that is, while cultural ecology implies localised networks, the creative economy represents a market in which producers and consumers trade. The significant point here is that it is not just the local networks that provide community, but the actual act of production; it is this conflation of the consumption of community and the production of creative goods and services that marks the new *working society of leisure*.

However, many cultural producers have found that their version of cultural ecology contains a basic flaw: the local market for creative work has not advanced as fast as the volume of creative production in the town. As Penny (above) and others observed, the market in Hastings for creative work is limited, particularly for larger and more expensive works. This constraint to the development of creative careers is consistent with Gershuny's (2000) warning about the dangers of production and consumption getting out of balance: that in the emerging working society of leisure, many producers will have to sustain periods without income (or with low incomes) in order for production and consumption to find an equilibrium. This is the lived reality of Hastings for many cultural producers. While the need for production and consumption to equate is equally strong in the larger creative economies, it is arguably of less significance to creative workers, since there is usually employment that can meet the demand for necessary work (this is also the case in Hastings, but to a much lesser degree). Thus, instead of being solely reliant on the sale of their production, the creative economy often facilitates creative workers finding 'necessary work' to provide basic income upon which to live.

As a result, the emergent *working society of leisure* owes more to class (or, at least, wealth) than it does to genuinely authentic creative production. For while there are undoubtedly creative workers earning enough to live in Hastings, there are others who are not in the position to substitute necessary work with creative work, certainly in the short to medium term. In this context, class provides both the cultural capital to implement a lifestyle change towards Rojek's (2001) notion of civil labour, and the economic capital to see it through. For those involved in this shift, the gesture is one of individualisation: shifting from the mass approach to leisure (as the 'reward' for necessary work and good citizenship; see Ravenscroft, 1993) to civil labour (Rojek, 2001) driven by a desire to conflate necessary and creative work. This suggests that, rather than the original ideal of a 'leisure society for all' (Newman, 1983), the emergent *working society of leisure* is evidence of a new class project in which distinction is no longer gained from disposable time or consumption, but by harnessing both of these in creative production.

Conclusions: reducing the distance between production and consumption

There is little doubt that there is a shift taking place in the culture of work. Whereas once most jobs were undertaken to address the necessities of sustenance, there is increasing evidence that some labour at least offers the possibility of creative fulfilment (see Ravenscroft, 1998; Ravenscroft & Gilchrist, 2005; Seltzer & Bentley, 1999). Allied to the 'long-hours' culture of the contemporary workplace (Gershuny, 2000; Schor, 1992), with time being traded for consumption possibilities, there is an argument that work is no longer merely a site of production (Rojek, 2001). Similarly, leisure is no longer a mere site of relaxation and self-expression (Newman, 1983), but

is increasingly being deployed to achieve a status and distinction that was previously reserved for disposable time and wealth. There is thus a seeming juxtaposition in which work takes on a consumptive and creative quality, just as some leisure takes on the productive qualities of work. This inversion suggests that where, once, the 'leisure class' were time and income rich, the new leisure class may be the opposite.

What is not yet clear, however, is how far the bifurcation between production and consumption has broken down. Some people have been able to break down the barriers between work and leisure, to create what we have termed the new *working society of leisure*. This construct allies production and consumption, to the extent that creative workers seek to combine necessary and creative labour into a single civil labour project (Rojek, 2001). When combined with other elements of 'down-shifting', particularly moving to a town with a comparatively low cost of living, the *working society of leisure* becomes a sustainable reality for some workers.

Following Gershuny (2000), the sustainability of the *working society of leisure* ultimately depends upon consumption matching production. For every creative worker who reduces their consumption to take up civil labour, someone else must increase their consumption to soak up the new production (hence the worries and complaints about the lack of an arts market in Hastings). In the short run, this is more usually achieved by the creative worker 'subsidising' his or her production through 'down-shifting' and/or the deployment of their retained wealth, thus maintaining the status quo. In the longer term, however, either the shift in consumption – the creation of the arts market - has to occur, or the new creative worker will be unable to transform their production into new consumption opportunities.

Thus, it is not that the production/consumption bifurcation has broken down, but that the sites of production and consumption change, as do the identity of the producers and consumers. In terms of site, a number of cultural workers spoke of the producer-led 'cultural ecology' at the core of their lives in Hastings in contrast to the consumer-led creative economies of Brighton and London, with a recognition that the two do not currently mesh, meaning that some producers have few routes to market.

Similarly, the identities of the producers and consumers change: many new cultural producers were previously cultural consumers; if they continue in this dual role, it will largely be in terms of buying and selling locally, within the cultural ecology of Hastings. The new producers thus tend to move from the vibrancy of the open, creative, economy to a much more closed and static cultural ecology that focuses more on the lifestyle of the producer than on achieving equilibrium between the production of cultural goods and their subsequent consumption.

Thus it is not the producer/consumer dualism that is at the core of the emergent *working society of leisure*, but the understanding and management of economic risk. And the core risk is, of course, that production and consumption will not achieve equilibrium at the level of production sought by those wishing to establish themselves as creative producers. Not only would a failure to achieve this equilibrium undermine the ability of many producers to enter or remain in the market, but it would also throw open the politics of the new society. For while there may be a veneer of meritocracy concerning the most talented (and well marketed) producers, there is a much more deep-rooted schism between those producers (the wealthy and those with alternative sources of income) who are able to sustain their production during the

producer/consumer disequilibrium, and those who depend upon a thriving creative economy for both necessary and creative work. This may indeed be recognised as a disparity in endowments (cultural tastes, talents, and economic wealth) in the ability of individuals to successfully pursue a lifestyle through work and leisure and a sustainable level of productive labour and consumption necessary to their individual welfare (Van Parijs, 1995). Thus, while the new production orientation seems to offer the potential to meet Dumazedier's (1967) vision of an accessible leisure society, therefore, the reality is different, particularly for those workers who do not have the cultural or economic capital to join the creative class. As a result, we conclude that while there may be a new construct of the leisure society that offers hope of access to a wider section of the population, it is certainly not the democratic society implied by a shift to cultural production.

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