Mapping Labour in the Creative Industries

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Research question
Inspired by David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker's question: "There is a strong tendency towards self-exploitation in the cultural industries…but why do so many young people want to work in these industries, in spite of the low rates of pay and long working hours…"?

Thesis
Creative labour is more complex and nuanced than the perspectives that view creative work as wholly negative and submissive to neoliberal considerations claim it to be; creative labour is a complex, contradictory process that can alternatively, even simultaneously, conform to, resist and negotiate neoliberal ideologies and market imperatives.

Key Points – Literature Review
• Creative labour as a negative construct of neoliberal capitalism that results in precarity, isolation, insecurity, and the self-exploitation and self-commodification of workers
• Creative labour works long hours on temporary and sporadic projects; intense individualism and competition; a high dependence on social networks; the blurring of work and leisure time, resulting in 24-hour workdays; and a creative workforce that is emotionally and psychologically drained
• This exploitation is justified by intrinsic pleasure and satisfaction, social cache and existential gratification, and the traditional notion of the struggling or starving artist, which equates creative work and lifestyles with suffering

Approach
Problematize the notion that all aspects of creative labour are inherently "bad" and serve solely the interests of neoliberal capitalism, by critically engaging with the principal existing scholarship on the topic, emphasizing ethnographic and qualitative research that reveals the complexities of creative labour.

Defining the Creative industries
• Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (Creative Industries Mapping Document)
• Associated with individual artistic production, the exploitation of intellectual property, digital technologies, the information society
• Criticisms: economic reductionism of the arts and neoliberal rhetoric

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References: See handout

Key Points – Problematizing Dominant Idea of Creative Labour
• Independent creative labourers engage in networks in order to *combat* competition
• Community based on support, mutual interests and strong interpersonal relationships
• Social, not market imperatives: user co-creators (i.e. fans) negotiated and resisted commodification and marketization of their labour in video game content production; offer free content add-ons, refuse profiting from it
• Clear lines between business practice and social practice
• Creative labour communities can privilege 'art values' rather than 'business values'

Conclusions
• The notion of creative labour as exploited, (self-) commodified and inherently adhering to market logic, and its corresponding values of competition and commercialization is too simplistic
• An understanding of creative labour cannot exclude the possibilities of individual agency, community practices and an organization of labour around social and cultural values and networks
• To recognize these complex and contradictory practices is not to negate conditions of economic, political and social inequality. Rather, their recognition acknowledges the complex nature of power relations and limitations to the uniform adoption of neoliberal ideology.