Rhythms of Creativity and Power in Freelance Creative Work

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Abstract

Freelancers work for companies, but also apart from them - at home, on site, or in shared workspaces. This chapter examines how clients and freelancers manage and organise the employment relationship at a distance. Utilising interview data with freelancers working in the Dutch creative industries, Henri Lefebvre's method of 'rhythmanalysis', Nitzan and Bichler's theory of 'capital as power', and John Holloway's understanding of human creativity as 'doing', the chapter examines the conflicting rhythms of freelance creative work. It shows that freelancers remain subject to traditional workplace-oriented structures of control, particularly in creative agencies. Freelancers' use of time must correspond to client processes of measurement and valuation. Different client relationships, and the proximity they imply, produce different rhythms of work.

Introduction

Contemporary capitalism is risk-averse and, where possible, seeks to reduce unpredictable factors which might affect rates of profitability (Coggan, 2009;, Kunkel, 2014; Piketty, 2014; Boutang, 2011; Hutton, 2014). Individual firms are constantly faced with the challenge of ensuring that in the organisation of work and utilisation of labour they control all those variabilities which might undermine this objective. Yet contemporary firms are making significant use of, working arrangements such as freelancing which facilitate greater flexibility and autonomy of workers over their working time. This throws up an apparent paradox: capitalist enterprises may use these working arrangements to increase their flexibility of operations and redistribute responsibility for them, but this is at the expense of predictability of labour supply and service provision. It generates risks that are otherwise avoided. Companies who hire freelancers must manage this contradiction, and find ways to overcome the loss of control created by arm's-length contractual relationships with freelancers.

Freelancers relate to their clients in the commercial realm of service provision, and unlike formal employees, they do not have contracts which enshrine in law their employers' control over them. Freelancers therefore enjoy more autonomy than formal employees, but this autonomy represents a risk that their clients must manage. This state of affairs is most apparent in creative agencies, where the use of freelancers' time must comply with processes of work measurement and evaluation. Information and online technologies provide virtual networks through which these clients may monitor the work of their freelancers, but more important in disciplining them is the real, spatial imperative of the workplace and the legal framework of the contract. In other words, the desk, the clock and the contract provide a stronger form of control over freelance labour than digital technologies do. The traditional locus of capitalist domination and control is the workplace and, as this chapter shows, this still plays an important role in freelance work. The physical environment- the clock, the desk- is key. It helps structure the temporality and rhythm of the freelancer's creative activity. But, as this chapter shows, of equal importance are contractual relationships between freelancers and their clients. These relationships imply certain systems of billing that express the business imperatives of clients. In turn, they determine the use and experience of time by freelancers.

This chapter reports on a study of freelancers working in creative occupations in the Netherlands. The types of creative work they performed included illustration, graphic design, website programming, advertising and branding. The more senior creatives in the study were performing oversight roles such as art director or digital director. These forms of freelance creative work can be regarded as 'virtual work' in three respects. First, these freelancers are virtual workers by virtue of their arm's-length contractual status. Legal distance is implied in the freelancer's status as a service provider. However, this distance is often bridged by a compulsion upon the freelancer to acquiesce to more traditional forms of work relationship, based around workplace attendance and time discipline. In this respect, there is a direct aspect to the work relationship which I shall explore in this chapter. Although the virtual basis of the freelancer-client relationship benefits the client contractually, allowing a delegation of risk and responsibility that can be ended at will, the demands of project management and the control and measurement of labour frequently require that the client establish more direct relations with the freelancer. Thus, the status of freelance creative work is virtual, but, crucially, contested.

Second, the freelance creative work examined in this study is virtual with respect to the digital technologies used to manage the relationship between client and freelancer. At least ideally, freelance assignments are conducted at a remove from the client, and communication proceeds through email, Skype, specialised project management programmes and shared online platforms. My findings, however, suggest that these digital technologies are less significant as means of worker control than the traditional oversight of work-time through workplace observation and measurement. Here again, freelance creative work has a virtual quality, but this virtuality is qualified and subject to contestation and modification.

Third, the freelance creative work performed by participants in the study reported in this chapter involves virtual, digital activities, practices and materials. Some participants were specifically digital designers, working mainly in internet branding, website design and programming. The product here ranges from a whole website to the creation of a broader design ethos across multiple platforms. Others, such as graphic designers or art directors, worked mainly on design projects for internet or online sites, reflecting the significance of the internet for contemporary business clients. However, as the chapter argues, the freelancers' creative activities are often performed in the context of more conventional and direct spatial and contractual relationships. In all three respects, then, virtual work is fluid, complex, and conducted within capitalist social relations of control, measurement and abstraction which tie are direct and physical.

The rest of this chapter sets out the theoretical and methodological approach which I have used to understand the tensions between the needs of companies to control their creative workers and processes, and the conditions within creative freelancers work best. Seeing creative work through the prism of John Holloway's theory of 'doing' (see Holloway, 2002, 2010), I draw particularly on the notion of 'dissonance' developed by Nitzan and Bichler (2009), and analyse its expression in creative work by means of the 'rhythmanalytical method' of Lefebvre (2004). My analysis of the rhythms of freelance creative work over dispersed sites of labour is based on interviews with Dutch freelance creatives in graphic design, advertising and branding.

Understanding the conflict between creativity and capitalist power

Nitzan and Bichler's theory of 'capital as power' (2009) centres on the tension between industry and business. They argue that business imperatives sabotage the potential creativity of industry. This produces a 'dissonance' between the two which is the productive driving force of capitalist accumulation. They also argue that this conflict is not a deficiency, but rather that capitalist production relies on dissonance between creative freedom and its management.

This argument rests upon a distinction derived from the work of Thorstein Veblen (2007) between business and power on the one hand, and industry and creativity on the other (Nitzan and Bichler, 2009: 219). The former prospers by actively sabotaging the latter (2009; 223). If not kept within limits, uncontrolled creativity overskills workers and causes employers problems of work measurement, undermining the potential for profitability. Creative work requires the constraints placed upon it by capitalist management.

The imperatives of clients and their creative freelancers are necessarily at odds with each other, therefore. They each work to conflicting agendas, with different temporalities and working rhythms. A fragile balance between creative freedom and control therefore has to be established. Borrowing from Nitzan and Bichler, in this chapter I will argue that this balance guarantees profit, but that this depends upon the channelling of creative potential so that creative activity is rendered predictable and quantifiable. The creative autonomy of freelancers is paramount to the achievement of profit, and vice versa. The freelancer's creative product often requires a profitable market in which to be traded, but the dependence of profit upon creative autonomy, and creative autonomy upon the pursuit of profit, is inherently contradictory.

Nitzan and Bichler contend that harmony and resonance are antithetical to the capitalist pursuit of power (2009: 226), which is inclined to undermine and disrupt existing social relations. For Nitzan and Bichler, capitalist society is a dissonant society, and must be so as to reproduce itself. Competitive advantage does not derive from companies' propensity to beat in time with others, but rather derives from deviation from others' rhythms or from the disruption of rhythm by stifling competition. Business power relies not only on antagonism between competitors and peers, it also depends upon the maintenance of antagonistic relationships of control over workforces. This usually involves limiting and managing their autonomy and creativity (see Edwards 1980 and Burawoy 1979 for classic contributions to the study of control in the labour process).

I use the term creativity here in a critical sense rather than in the positive sense of writers like Florida (2002). I mean it as something that takes on a contradictory and antagonistic status in capitalist society. In this account, I draw upon John Holloway's juxtaposition of 'doing' or 'power-to' with the rule of abstract labour or 'power-over' (Holloway, 2002). This maps onto Nitzan and Bichler's distinction between creativity and power, and fleshes out what the two terms represent. For Holloway, human 'doing', autonomous collective and individual activity geared toward some useful or pleasurable end precedes the distorted activity of capitalist production. In the latter, 'doing' appears in the mode of being 'denied'. 'Power-to' (that is, the power to create) is subverted by 'power-over', the dominion of abstract economic imperatives of value and profit (Holloway, 2002: 45). The creativity in human doing struggles against its subversion in abstract labour, the homogeneous, undifferentiated time of capitalist production (Marx, 1990, and see Saad-Filho, 1997 for an overview). Holloway shows that creativity - 'doing' or 'power-to' - is something suppressed, denied and struggled for (2002: 47). Creativity, then, is treated here as a potential quality that exists but only in the mode of being denied. It can only ever be partly present, what Holloway calls 'not yet' (2002: 13)

This differs from a perspective that celebrates creativity as something achievable and enjoyable in capitalist society, and which takes no account of the antagonistic and contradictory relationship between human beings and their 'doing' in capitalist society. Whereas Florida sees creative labour as the fulfilment of creativity, this chapter shows that the power to create is always in conflict with the abstract economic compulsions of capitalist valorisation and profitability. My use of the term creativity is critical in that it adopts the standpoint of its possible realisation in a world without the constraints placed upon it by capitalist social relations. a standpoint which leaves room for a critique of the conditions of exploitation and precarity to which cultural workers are subject (see Gill and Pratt, 2008 and Ross, 2008).

Analysing dissonance of capitalism and creativity through 'rhythmanalysis'

Sergio Tischler (2005) applies the understanding of human doing and its suppression and denial in abstract labour to a theorisation of the dual temporality of capitalist existence. He distinguishes between the 'time of reification' and the 'time of insubordination'. The former is the general 'uniform and continuous time' of capitalist valorisation (2005: 131-132). Labour must be, as far as possible, emptied of its specific content and divorced from its specific context in order to become measurable. This is abstract labour which entails the abstract time of identical hours passing.

Within this abstract time, however, there persists a latent time of 'struggle over the reduction of human creativity into profit' (Tischler, 2005: 132). On the one hand, this human creativity 'can be realised only within the framework of a form of power that is alien to it' (2005: 133). This is because human activity in capitalist society is worthwhile and recognisable only via the process of monetary valorisation. On the other, human creativity resists its 'negation' in capitalist production (2005: 135). Even in its denial, this creativity manifests as what Tischler calls the 'time of insubordination' (2005: 135). This human time of doing and creativity renders capitalist power unstable and precarious. As Tischler writes, 'human creativity is a scandal because its potential for dysfunctionality inserts uncertainty into the "well-oiled" machinery of accumulation' (2005: 135). At the same time, capital relies upon it. This reliance upon human creativity, however, 'negat[es] its purpose'. '[A]bstract temporality', Tischler writes, 'tends to annihilate creativity' (2005: 135).

Thus the capitalist negation of human creativity as abstract labour conducted in the 'time of reification' is marked by conflict and contradiction (2005: 131). The conflict centres upon the distinction between two times, of reification and insubordination. This distinction allows us to consider the implications of NItzan and Bichler's concept of the dissonance between creativity or industry, here synonymous with Holloway and Tischler's 'doing' or 'power-to', and power or business, here synonymous with abstract labour and 'power-over', with their opposing time, temporality and rhythm.

Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalytical method (2004) provides a template for the study of this dissonance between, broadly defined, capitalism and human creativity. Rhythmanalysis is the study of the rhythms and repetitions of everyday life (2004: 73). It examines the different rhythms created when different social principles and practices meet. They produce either eurhythmy or arrhythmia depending on the success with which they interrelate. Creativity and power approximate to two such rhythmic poles. This chapter explores the various eurhythmy and arrhythmia that they generate (2004: 20).

My rhythmanalysis proceeds by means of the testimonies collected through 11 interviews with creative freelancers working as designers and strategists in graphic design, branding and

advertising. I have used Lefebvre's method to examine the conflicting rhythms attached to the demands of, on the one hand, creativity, and, on the other, power. Clients grant autonomy to their freelancers, but must constrain this autonomy within manageable, measurable limits.

This chapter discusses the interviewees' personal testimonies and lived experiences of the conflicting rhythms of creativity and power. The interviews focused on two aspects of their experiences. First, it reviews the patterns and recurring themes of freelance creative work. Second, it explores the tensions, struggles and conflicts that ensue. This is in line with Lefebvre's recommendation that one assesses rhythm from two standpoints, repetition, on the one hand, and difference or disjuncture on the other.

The interviews invited the interviewees' reflection on where the rhythms of their work jarred with those of their clients, and so explored their experiences of rhythmic conflict, repetition and difference. It was in their sense of these differences that the dissonance described by Nitzan and Bichler became apparent. According to Lefebvre, disjuncture is something sensed and experienced, in either a bodily, physical or social, psychological way (2004: 10, 15, 77).

Creative freelancing: outsourcing risk, losing control

Creative work is characterised by ephemerality and unknowability. The potential success of a creative good or service is uncertain (Caves, 2002) and it is not always possible to observe or measure creative work in progress, for its immateriality makes it hard to quantify (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: 83-84). Thus, creative organisations can rationalise their work only to a limited extent and must use other means to overcome the inherent risk and uncertainty of their endeavours. Flexible, decentralised working arrangements and contracts allow them to delegate some of this risk to employees. On one hand, these arrangements remove some of the certainties and control of the formal employment relationship. On the other, they eliminate some of the risks usually borne by the employer. Freelancers exemplify the paradox of the simultaneous outsourcing of risk and loss of control.

Graphic design, branding and advertising are industries which rely strongly on the use of freelance workers. In fluctuating, fast-moving markets, the use of freelancers helps them to respond rapidly to events. These industries typically serve consumer goods manufacturers and distributors, but these are highly volatile markets. A potentially unlimited flexible roster of freelancers, available when needed, at short notice, helps them respond to the unpredictability of market demand. Outsourcing this creative work to freelancers also outsources the risks associated with creative production.

Outsourcing creative work shifts the location of the employer-employee relation. In formal employment arrangements, the employers assume much of the financial burden of the relationship, by providing health insurance schemes, pensions, sick pay and redundancy pay. Employed workers sell their labour power in exchange for their subsistence, plus these and other protections. The employer's assumption of risk involves the assumption of some responsibility towards the employee. At the same time, employees forgo their own self-direction in exchange for their wages. This is the model on which the capitalist labour market functions (Boutang, 2011: 142, p. 153).

Freelancers, however, transact using commercial contracts rather than conventional contracts of employment. This involves no assumption of risk by the employer. In the commercial market, freelancers assume responsibility and the capacity for decision-making, but enjoy no security or regularity of pay (Boutang, 2011: 142, 153).

The advantage of this arrangement is that freelancers have more autonomy over their own working lives. The disadvantage is that this autonomy brings with it risks. Freelancers conduct their work in a business and project context that requires flexibility and responsiveness, but this also presents them with 'opportunities to deviate from the overall plan' (Legault, 2013: 88).

As Legault points out, project-based work demands that freelancers adapt to discontinuous and contingent business rhythms. Freelancers are part of the toolkit of project-based working, but they must be controlled through 'work breakdown structures' meetings, waypoints, targets, indicators and other measures (Legault, 2013: 87) . Digital technologies allow for this control to be decentralised and exerted at a distance. Project-based working derives its efficacy from 'digital networking', according to Boutang (2011: 63), which can unite and control 'high-trust but ephemeral teams' (Smith and McKinlay, quoted in Hodgson and Briand, 2013: 312). Digital

technologies therefore establish virtual connections linking freelancers more closely to their client managers. This relationship, however, crucially involves more traditional systems of power. Technologies are not the main instruments used in the enforcement of control and discipline over freelancers. Rather, time discipline, work measurement and workplace-based control bind freelancers into the rhythms of business power, as we see in the next section.

The rhythmic experiences of freelance creatives

The rhythms of freelance creative work are set mainly by the client. Three main types of client relationship emerged from the interviews conducted for the research described here. In the first, creative agencies recruit freelancers to work on projects. The end user of the work done is the agency's corporate or government client. The freelancer's client is therefore the agency, not the end user of the creative work.

In the second arrangement, third party agencies hire freelancers to creative agencies. They do this either by employing the freelancers and selling their labour power on to the highest bidder for an hourly fee, pay the freelancers a proportion (for example, 75 per cent) of this fee. Alternatively, the freelancers pay a percentage of their fees to the agencies (say, 30 per cent). Both arrangements place a contractual barrier between freelancers and both agency and end users. In both arrangements, the freelancers work, de facto, for the agencies.

In a third arrangement, freelancers are recruited by corporations or public bodies directly, without the use of a third party. Sometimes the freelancers contractually resemble a creative agency, working alone or with other freelancers to meet their briefs. They may even delegate work to other freelancers, though this is a rare practice.

In the context of these arrangements, freelancers have a variety of daily working patterns and relationships. Some work at their clients' premises, particularly in the case of agency clients. Where corporate clients are involved, freelancers generally work in their own studios or in shared workspaces. Some freelancers prefer to maintain control of their schedule by always working independently and so tend to work from home or in co-working spaces shared with other freelancers.

Freelance contracts cover the provision of a service rather than being employment-related. As one participant said, 'it is more of a supplier's contract, providing a service' (Freelance digital designer, male, 20s). Some freelancers provide this service on a day rate, which is generally suited to bigger projects, whilst others work for an hourly rate, which is better suited to smaller projects. Many freelancers use a mixture of pay and pricing structures over the course of their professional lives. As the majority of their jobs were small, most of the freelancers whom I interviewed worked on hourly-rate contracts, delivered over the course of days, weeks or months.

Hours-based contracts are particularly appropriate for work with agency clients, because agencies structure their projects based on billable hours - an allocation of hours covering the amount charged out to clients. Freelancers employed on an hourly basis fall under this billing convention and are incorporated into a project's accounting. Agency contracts tend to require a close proximity of freelancer and firm, and freelancers face a subtle compulsion to work from agency premises. This is designed to give agencies a sense of the freelance hours they are paying for, since they can directly monitor their freelancers' effort in relation to their billable hours.

In working arrangements involving day rates, it is assumed that a set number of hours – usually eight – are worked, but the actual number of hours worked may deviate above or below this amount. One interviewee claimed that day-rate agency jobs make for longer working hours, often exceeding the amount contracted and paid for. When working on-site at the agency, this interviewee reported working 'nine or ten hour a day' (Freelance graphic designer/art director, male, 30s).

Other freelancers seek contracts that pay for the project as a single piece of work, pricing the job on the basis of its anticipated duration. The client is not billed on this basis but, rather, on the basis of the quality of finished product. This contractual arrangement involves a freer relationship between freelancer and client. The freelancer's time and space are freed from the temporal and spatial strictures of company life and the freelancer works independently. Such contracts appeal more to corporate clients because the costs of the work are contained and fixed. For the freelancer, there is less clock-punching and desk-based working than with agency working and they can enjoy working at a greater distance from the client's offices. In creative freelancing, such contracts, however, are rarer than those mediated by creative agencies.

These permutations - of contractual arrangement, client relationship, and work location and contractual basis - produce rhythmic variations in freelance work. Freelancers working on-site for corporate clients usually have shorter, more standard working hours. Freelancers working on-site for agencies, by contrast, find themselves sucked into long working hours and intense working routines. In the corporate world, in the Netherlands at least, the pace of work is slower and more relaxed than in creative agencies.

Amsterdam creative studios are known by some as expat agencies because they rely on a young international workforce which arrives in the Netherlands but has no established social or family networks, but well accustomed to the intense working schedules of London and New York and ready to be totally immersed in work. Dutch nationals prefer work-life balance and family time, so young foreign creatives offer agencies the possibility to extend and intensify work patterns.

> '[Whereas] the Dutch have got it much better in terms of work-life balance, younger graphic designers […] brought over specifically to work at agencies are being abused (Freelance digital designer, male, 20s).

Dutch creative agencies have adopted a long-hours culture more associated with Anglo-Saxon economies, and freelancers who find themselves based in these agencies tend to get drawn into this culture. They have some freedom from these arrangements, however. For one thing, they are free to leave when their permanent colleagues cannot. The freelancers whom I interviewed agreed that the longer a job goes on, however, the less freedom they enjoy. As one participant commented, 'you stay longer than six months, you become part of the company, of the corporate world' (Freelance digital director, male, 40s). After six months, their working rhythms are those of the agencies which they once left. Moreover, with each month, the hours spent on-site increase and the expectations of the agency reach a point where freelancers may be disciplined for arriving late for work. One recounted being told by a manager: 'you cannot come in at eleven anymore because we have interns you have to set an example to' (Freelance designer/developer, male, 20s).

Often whole networks of freelancers, formerly employees of an agency, are used for assignments. They then return to the workplaces they once left and may even be re-inducted into the rhythms of company life, having left with the express intention of distancing themselves from these rhythms. Tax breaks for the self-employed are all that separate freelancers from employees in these situations. They must arrive at and leave work when everyone else does, and work the same long hours. As one freelancer observed, the 'only difference is that I can get a tax deduction for the lunch I buy' (Freelance graphic designer and illustrator, male, 20s).

Many freelancers have more than one job at any one time, and rush from one job to the other, working on a mix between longer and shorter jobs simultaneously, though these often conflict with one another. The details of shorter jobs frequently disrupt the time and space that the freelancers need to devote to the longer one. Their attention is constantly distracted by emails from and meetings with multiple clients, sudden changes of mind and last minute requested adjustments to work. These freelancers therefore find it hard to establish a satisfactory creative rhythm in of work.

Freelancers field the problems of many clients in many corporate sectors. They react to sudden changes in their clients' market position, target audiences and company focus. They fix issues of presentation and image accompanying the contingent rhythm of consumer markets. The clients are at the mercy of these rhythms. Freelancers carry in their wake. One freelance graphic designer claimed that the small retail firms 'more reactive than proactive', so decisions are taken on the spur of the moment (Freelance Graphic Designer, Male, 30s). The precariousness of freelancers' work puts them in a weak position. Since they rely on a steady stream of work to survive, they must respond to their clients' every request, no matter if doing so disrupts their work and personal schedules. One interviewee had to reduce his hourly rate to keep his clients, despite their tendency to ask for more work than he was able to deliver. This shows that time is a poor measure of freelance creative work, and that the billing and accounting convention of hourly rates inadequately reflects the rhythms of corporate and creative life.

As noted above, the freelancers involved in the study reported here tended to work very long hours, sometimes 65 hours a week or 12 hours a day, at considerable human cost including, in one case, a very serious car accident which was subsequently attributed to the freelancer's overwork. Rather than freeing people from corporate work demands, freelancing seems to exacerbate their enslavement to the job.

Digital media play a key role in this subjugation to the demands of 24 hour working. Email accessed through mobile devices, for example, constitutes a virtual rope perpetually connecting the freelancer to the job. In this context, freelancers have to manage their online presence so that their client do not assume that they are working and contactable. They do this by, for instance, avoiding sending emails at weekends even when they are working. This policy merely manages client expectations and keeps freelancers' rhythms separate from those of their clients. To do otherwise tends to drag freelancers into the slipstream of client routines and work patterns.

The billing of a job based on an hourly rate intensifies the temporal and spatial command of client over freelancer. This because client companies - specifically agencies - have a stronger wish to see the hours for which they are paying pass in a productive manner. The hourly structure encourages a stronger focus on the time that a freelancer works. This puts pressure on the freelancer to conform to the rhythms of formal employment and to enter the spatial infrastructure of a traditional workplace setting. This often conflicts with their own creative rhythms which, in the case of the young creatives covered in this research, pertain less to desks and offices than to showers, surfboards and sofas. Freelancers often prize their ability to work on projects in their own time, for instance, at weekends, evenings or in the early hours of the morning, whenever their inspiration and focus is at its sharpest. This also gives them the freedom to stop work when they are not creative or productive, and return to it another time. One interviewee noted that 'the best insights come when you're outside the workplace' (Freelance design director, male, 40s). The organisation of one's life and work in this way is impossible within a formal employment setting and in an office. Agencies, in particular, require their freelancers to be physically present in their premises which set their own rhythms of work, running counter to creativity.

The emphasis placed by creative agencies on presenteeism results in struggles by freelancers for the freedom to work remotely. Information technologies are used to support this bid for remote working: remote access computing, virtual private networks, Skype and email may all be harnessed by freelancers so that they can work at a distance. Their clients, however, need to have a clear sense of time elapsed as planned and work performed as costed. Remote working conflicts with the system of billable hours by which agencies price work to their external clients. Their need to check and monitor the work of their creatives compromises the very creativity they have engaged.

Particular problems occur when freelancers stay with agencies for longer than six months. The outsider perspective that they bring with them and that is valued by their clients is undermined as they become part of the organisation, in effect, permanent employees. In these ways, the demands of agency life subordinate freelancers to the detriment of creativity itself.

There are consequently irreconcilable differences of perspective between client agencies and freelancers. Agencies simply see their freelancers working for a certain number of hours. Freelancers experience these hours as varied and diverse. When they work from home, their billing hours take in dealing with unrelated emails, phone calls and other activities. Their real rhythms of work do not conform to an even pattern of uninterrupted recorded and billed time - the abstract, standardised time of business. However, it is this standardised time which is used to structure freelance contracts and work, since payment is usually based on the time spent on the job and not necessarily on the quality of the end result.

For many freelancers, flexible work rhythms facilitate creative inspiration. Corporate clients have very different perspectives on the flexible delivery of the work they contract. They like to be able to contact freelancers with demands for last-minute changes, or sudden deadline shifts, in response to the realities of their business requirements, and particularly in response to the requirements of profitability and their market position. Creatives find it difficult to activate their creativity at will in response to these imperatives, to switch from other work or from domestic activities in response to the demands of their corporate clients. In this respect, the requirements of business clients clash with the rhythms of creative work. The outsourcing of the employment relationship to the commercial sphere does not eliminate conflict, merely redefine it.

Agency rhythms are structured by the system of billable hours described above. Hours are recorded in line with budgets of time allocated to certain projects and agencies need freelancers on hourly contracts so that they have the currency with which to bill clients. However, the hours recorded by employees and freelancers seldom match the reality of the time spent on a job. For example, an agency might contract a freelancer for eight hours for a job, but the freelancer may do it in three. The freelancer then has to sit and do nothing, giving the impression they are working, to pass the remaining five hours. Agency clients want to see freelancers working and so they require them to

come to their premises and monitor their work once there. Ironically, therefore, freelance work can be both less free and more intense than regular employment.

Agencies seek to secure the maximum value from the hourly rate they pay their freelancers, but this is difficult to achieve since paying by the hour rather than, say, the product or the end result, undermines this objective. The hour's value, abstracted from what is done within it, becomes the focus of attention and this seldom assists creative endeavour. In this way, too, agency management practices are incompatible with creativity. Many of the freelancers interviewed for the research reported here were greatly in favour of efficiency and effective work organisation, which they saw as the best way to manage their time and balance their paid work with activities beyond this sphere. For them, the billable hours system militated against effective time management, wasting time which could be spent otherwise. The opposite problem for freelancers also occurs when they work longer than the number of hours billed, which happens frequently. Hourly-based billing is seen by freelancers as effective in the sense that it reassures their clients who feel that they are paying a fair price if they have some idea of how much time is spent on the work. Freelancers who work for companies in traditional, non-creative sectors, which have little idea of the conceptual work that supports the design and production of, say, a poster or a flyer, find it hard to justify the time spent on these jobs to their clients.

Clients often pay freelancers for the hours they work rather than the quality of what they do, and freelancers dislike this. Some seek out contracts based on a total fee for a deliverable service or product. This frees them from the system of billable hours and allows them to work at rhythms more suited to their creative needs.

Reflections on the management of creative freelancers

Creative work is an uncertain endeavour, as we have seen. Employing freelancers to complete creative projects successfully depends upon the careful harnessing and control of their labour. As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) have noted, creative management always 'struggl[es] against the relative autonomy given to creative workers' (2011: 83-84), but at the same time, it relies on this autonomy for the delivery of innovative work. There is a fine balance between, on the one hand, the 'freedom to be creative', and on the other, the ability to keep 'creativity within manageable and productive bounds' (Townley and Beech, quoted in Hodgson and Briand, 2013: 311). Creative projects are successful not in spite of this tension, but because of it.

This chapter has shown creative agencies themselves to be the keenest controllers of creative freelance endeavours, because of their commitment to the system of billable hours. In this respect, they try to make creative work more amenable to measurement and less uncertain in its conduct and outcomes.

Creative autonomy is generally necessary to the effective performance of creative work, according to a romantic conception of creativity as an unconstrained and independent work process. In this conception, creatives use their imaginations in careful, loving undertakings. The creativity essential to many forms of cultural production therefore depends upon the devolution of control over their work to the creatives. In creative companies, however, the creative process is much more controlled, and, crucially, limited.

The risks attendant upon devolving control to creatives must be minimised through the careful management of their creative energies. Checks and monitoring arrangements are put in place in order to contain these seemingly autonomous activities. The workplace is the locus of this control, and despite the dispersed and virtual nature of much freelance work, technical control is less significant.

Conclusion

In many ways, freelance creatives appear to inhabit a world of work that is decentralised, relatively autonomous, tech savvy, digitally wired, and nourishing of individual creative freedom. This chapter has shown, however, that the apparently independent contractual status of freelancers, and the dispersed nature of their work does not undermine management's attempts to control the temporal and spatial dimensions of freelance creative labour. It suggests that, contrary to contemporary approaches to new ways of working, most notably that of the 'immaterial labour' thesis (see Lazzarato, 1996; Hardt and Negri, 2000; and Pitts 2015a: 5-6, 20-23 for a critique), freelance creative work is not exempt from the processes of measurement, abstraction, time discipline and

worker control to which labour under capitalism has traditionally been subject. Rather, it makes these processes more transparent.

The relative autonomy to which freelancers are contractually entitled means that their employers cannot legally exercise complete control over their working arrangements, time and activities. Freelancers operate, in theory, independently from the daily control of their employers. This chapter has revealed the ways in which they frequently end up very much under this control. Consequently, the ways in which abstract, quantitative systems of time measurement structure the working rhythms of labour may be more obvious in freelance work than in formal employment. We should not be so optimistic as to think that a society based on the control of workers' time in the pursuit of profit is in decline. Nor should we disregard the material and contractual confines within which labour is performed and which in the process, makes such a society possible.

The potential of some forms of virtual work - for example, open source and peer-to-peer forms of production - to serve as the harbingers of a new type of society free of the compulsion to work for pay are sometimes extolled (see Mason, 2015, and Pitts, 2015b for a critique). However, the technological context within which the labour is situated matters far less than the social relations from which it springs. The virtual nature of work performed by freelance creatives simply expresses these social relations, rather than being somehow exempt from them. In fact, it allows employing agencies and clients to withdraw from any obligations or duties towards those they hire. The study of freelance creatives reported here shows that the degree to which work is virtual or not is determined not simply by its digital quality, but also by the way in which value is created and control over the process exercised by capital.

This chapter has shown how client agencies undermine the very creativity they promote and depend on, weaving freelancers into webs of billable hours. The creativity of freelancers thereby becomes reduced to the performance of an abstract 'hour', based on their temporal and physical presence in the client's workplace. The lifestyle imagined by creatives is often one of 'cool' and egalitarian independence (Gill, 2002). The work they must perform, however, is often the opposite of this. How then can they organise to defend their creativity in this context?

Holloway, whose understanding of human 'doing' and 'creativity' has informed the central argument of this chapter, contends that 'doing' is inherently social and collective (2002, 41). While freelancers may outwardly appear individualistic and entrepreneurial, the evidence collected for the research underlying this chapter suggests that, when they seek a richer and more stable basis for their creative activity, they tend to do so collectively. Around half of the freelancers involved in the study were based in a co-working space, working alongside other freelancers all working on their own assignments. Co-working spaces have become spaces for freelancers to collaborate, socialise, share feedback and advice and eat and drink together. They provide working environments free from the constant monitoring of work and recording of billable working hours. In these spaces, activities are carried out to a different rhythm, set by the creatives' own working pace and creative requirements. Co-working spaces are imbued with a sense of productivity which is totally different from that found in agency or company workplaces. Equally, these are not freelance factories where independent creatives assemble to discipline themselves into the productive rhythms of business.

One participant compared them unfavourably to agencies, which have 'big offices' where 'everyone is on the hour', and there is no other motivation for the freelancers than 'the money that they need' (Freelance graphic designer/illustrator, female, 40s). Co-working spaces, for this participant, are radically different and they allow creatives to focus more on creative production and to temporarily forget their commitment to the billing hours system. In these spaces, perhaps, creativity may be expressed free of to the imperatives of business. 'Doing' may overcome its negation in abstract labour, and 'power-to' may withstand 'power-over', suggesting that spatial and material relations of control are decisive in the domination of creative labour, against which freelancers struggle for creative freedom.

Acknowledgements

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