



MEDIA INDUSTRIES, LABOUR AND PRODUCTION

LECTURE 3 – MEDIA LABOUR I: FLEXIBLE WORK, PRECARITY & EXPLOITATION

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RECAP

Why study the **media**? Because the media shape the way we think about the world, our societies and ourselves.



Studying **production** helps us to understand how media products come to take the form that they do.



Today: Examine a particular aspect of media production:
The **labour** (or work) that goes into making cultural or media products.

WHY STUDY LABOUR?

Definitions

- *Work*: purposeful human endeavour
- Not quite the same as *Employment*: work we get paid for, or
- *Occupation*: what we do

Why does work matter?

- Involves the expenditure of massive amounts of our time
- Increasing levels of production, increasing social division of labour
- Persistent existence of inequality and class divisions (some people do the dirty work and get paid less for it)



SYMBOL-MAKING AND CREATIVITY

- Media work centred on the production of information, culture and knowledge
- *Symbol-making* as best collective name for this
- Present in other industries, but present in cultural industries more than any other kind of work
- So: cultural industries are thought to involve *creativity*

HOWEVER: An *organisational division of labour* exists

- i.e. only some people in cultural industries are centrally involved in symbol making

ORGANISATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

- Owners and executives
- Primary creative personnel (writers, musicians, actors, directors)
- Technical and craft workers
- Creative managers
- Marketing personnel
- Unskilled and semi-skilled labour

→ Different degrees of involvement in creative work.

→ Hierarchical organisation but project teams formed with (relatively) large degree of autonomy.

(Hesmondhalgh, 2019)

(Your Film) Budget Top Sheet		
28 Day Shooting Schedule	Pre Production Begin: Sept 2015	
Studio Rental	Principal Photography: October X-X, 2015	
Overnight Location(s) Days	Principal Wrap: 12/31/2015	
SAG, WGA, Teamster - Unions	Shoot Type	
	Post Production: XX Weeks	
Acct No	Description	Amount
	SCRIPT & STORY TOTAL	\$3,020
	PRODUCERS UNIT TOTAL	\$13,225
	DIRECTORS UNIT TOTAL	\$3,000
	CAST TOTAL	\$18,600
	CAST TRAVEL & LIVING TOTAL	\$5,360
	ATL OVERHEAD TOTAL	\$6,300
	Other	
	Other	
	ATL Fringes	
	Total Above the Line	\$49,505.00
	PRODUCTION STAFF TOTAL	\$7,155
	ART DIRECTION STAFF TOTAL	\$1,521
	SET CONSTRUCTION STAFF TOTAL	\$3,830
	SET OPERATIONS STAFF TOTAL	\$7,875
	SET DRESSING STAFF TOTAL	\$2,250
	PROPERTY STAFF TOTAL	\$1,575
	ANIMALS & PICTURE VEHICLES TOTAL	\$1,781
	WARDROBE TOTAL	\$2,375
	MAKEUP & HAIRDRESSING TOTAL	\$2,575
	PRODUCTION VIDEO TOTAL	\$14,750
	LIGHTING TOTAL	\$3,750
	CAMERA TOTAL	\$17,780
	PRODUCTION SOUND TOTAL	\$10,180
	TRANSPORTATION TOTAL	\$3,900
	LOCATIONS TOTAL	\$875
	PRODUCTION FILM & LAB TOTAL	\$8,400
	Other	
	Other	
	Production Fringes	
	Total Production	\$90,572.00
	EDITING TOTAL	\$6,800
	MUSIC TOTAL	\$2,750
	POST-PRODUCTION SOUND TOTAL	\$10,220

TODAY

Key shift in employment patterns and consequences for media workers:

- Flexibilisation
- Precarity
- Exploitation
- Self-exploitation

FORDISM



FLEXIBLE PRODUCTION

- Industrialised mass production and consumption
 - Standardisation/automation of production processes
 - Centralised control
 - Reliance on unskilled workers
 - Long-term employment
 - Unionisation and welfare state
 - Critique: unpleasant, de-skilled labour
- Diversification of production and consumption
 - Computation → reductions in communication, logistics, and information processing costs
 - Leaderless work groups
 - Requires numerate and literate workers, capable of self-direction
 - Deunionisation and reduction of work security

FLEXIBLE LABOUR

- Forms of flexible employment:
 - illegal, seasonal, and temporary employment
 - homeworking
 - subcontracting
 - freelancing
 - self-employment
- Advantages for companies: flexible cost reduction when production/demand is low
- Advantages for workers: potential for workplace autonomy/choice, more 'interesting' work
- Challenges for workers: transfer of responsibility, irregular and uncertain work and income, finding work becomes part of job
- Emphasis on entrepreneurialism instead of work security

PRECARIOUS LABOUR

- Precarity as “the financial and existential insecurity arising from the flexibilization of labor.” (Brophy and de Peuter 2007:180)
- Increasingly wide-spread (up to a million households in UK on zero-hours contracts, freelance and temporary contracts more common)
- Erosion of holiday pay, sick pay, maternity benefits, healthcare and pension contributions, ...
- Also refers to psychological and emotional effects of insecurity
- Precarity as “a collectively created conceptual tool, the practical purpose of which is to aid in naming, understanding and ultimately transforming the conditions of labor under post-Fordism” (Brophy and De Peuter)

MARXIST CRITIQUES OF EXPLOITATION

- “For Marx, exploitation occurs whenever a group has gained a sufficient degree of control over production in society to compel direct producers to labour not simply to meet their own needs (and those of their dependants) but also to support this dominant group.” Callinicos (1997/2007), *Social Theory*, p.86
- Therefore, the owner of labour power makes profit (passively) from other people’s labour
- Harry Braverman (1974) *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the 20th century*.



DOES “EXPLOITATION” HELP US TO UNDERSTAND MEDIA WORK?

- Yes in part but: doesn't get at specificity of cultural/artistic labour.
- Ryan (1992): 'artistic labour personifies a demand for personal autonomy in the workplace and the high value of creativity and originality, which provides a material basis for resistance by artistic workers to subordination and control, and against which capital has to struggle'.
- Also: not enough focus on individual experience of work – the voice of the worker
- But it is part of the story...



SELF-EXPLOITATION IN CREATIVE WORK

Governmentality theory used to explain why media workers not only accept exploitative working conditions but seek them out

Core ideas:

1. Societies no longer dominated by a centralised core authority – but administered by a whole array of agencies and authorities
2. Authority and power in modern societies involves the manipulation of desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs

Not overt domination (well, sometimes) – but mainly through...

- a) discourses – sets of meanings circulating in society and
- b) by ensuring that subjects (people) are embedded in contexts that guide them towards *exercising power on themselves*



Subject is governed “as an individual striving for meaning in work, seeking identity in work, whose subjective desires for self-actualisation are to be harnessed to the firm’s aspirations for productivity, efficiency and the like”. (Nikolas Rose, Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought, 1999:244)

DISCOURSES SURROUNDING CREATIVE LABOUR

- Enterprise discourse (independence)
- Creativity discourse (self-actualisation)
 - image of creative work as attractive, glamorous, independent, flexible...

(Mark Banks *The Politics of Cultural Work* (2007))



MARXISM VS. GOVERNMENTALITY

“While Marxists suggest that cultural workers are forced to accept capitalism because they’re powerless, governmentality theorists suggest that workers/subjects are trained to accept and reproduce for themselves the precise conditions of their subordination.”

(Banks, 2007: 42)

Marxist theory:

Neglects specificity of creative work

Neglects agency
(agency)

Governmentality theory:

Addresses creative work and subjectivity

But: overemphasises structure (no actual

→ Both focus on powerlessness of worker

FINAL THOUGHTS

- Shifts in nature and organisational form in modern labour including flexibilisation and immaterial production (both typical for cultural labour)
- Potential for greater work choice and satisfaction
- But lack of work/income and social security and discouragement of potential resistance
- Resulting prevalence of second-jobbing/multi-jobbing
- Intensified work patterns: “crunch-time” is increasingly normalised

→ *Questions about precarious work:*

- Do precarious workers form a “new, dangerous class” (Standing 2011)?
- Are all self-employed workers equally precarious?
- Are some workers and groups of workers more precarious than others?
- Who benefits?
- What kind of worker fits these conditions best?

REALITY OF CULTURAL LABOUR MARKETS

Economist Ruth Towse on artistic labour markets:

1. artists tend to hold multiple jobs - work is irregular, contracts are shorter-term
2. there is little job protection
3. there is a predominance of self-employed or freelance workers – work long hours
4. career prospects are uncertain
5. earnings are very unequal
6. artists are younger than other workers
7. 'Cycle of feast and famine' (Ross, 2009)