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24
EMERGING LABOUR POLITICS IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Greig de Peuter and Nicole S. Cohen

Concepts for resistant research on cultural work

Describing themselves as "the multitude of workers of the creative industries" (MACAO 2012), hundreds of cultural workers marched through the streets of Milan on May 5, 2012 to a 31-storey abandoned skyscraper and occupied it. In the ten days prior to their eviction, the occupiers transformed the space into a site for autonomous cultural production, a bold collective move taken in response to precarious employment and financial austerity in Italy (Cultural Workers Organize 2013). Across Europe and North America, cultural workers are responding to similarly strained conditions by experimenting with organizational forms and collective activities. Emergent organizations in New York City, such as The Model Alliance, the Retail Action Project, and W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy), are presenting new ways to address the precarity faced by flexworkers in urban centres that valorize creative industries despite insecure and often poor working conditions (de Peuter 2014). Globally, interns and their allies are forming groups like the Canadian Intern Association, the Precarious Workers Brigade in London, and Génération Précaire in Paris, filing class action lawsuits, and waging social media campaigns to oppose the rapidly solidifying norm that unpaid labour is a young worker's ticket into the creative sector. These are just some examples of emerging labour politics in creative industries, where workers, often through new labour organizations that exist outside the bounds of traditional trade unions, are lobbying for social protections and higher pay and exerting collective pressure to reclaim autonomy over their crafts and their lives.

As these examples demonstrate, conflict and resistance mark the vaunted creative industries. Research on cultural labour tends, however, to conceptualize cultural workers as either model subjects of neoliberalism—enterprising selves adept at individual coping strategies and self-exploitation—or as victims of precarity. Recognizing cultural workers' roles as activists and agents of change calls for deeper engagement in communication and cultural studies of work with efforts to organize, agitate, and

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resist precarity. Our focus in this chapter is informed by a collaborative research project called Cultural Workers Organize, a four-country study that documents and examines some of the various ways flexworkers in the creative economy, including freelancers, part-timers, interns, casual, and contract workers, are collectively responding to precarity. To date, we have conducted interviews with sixty individuals active in cultural worker organizations and initiatives.

Cultural industries, especially newer creative industries sectors, are generally not unionized, which has sustained the spread of precarious employment and resulting insecurity and presents new challenges to the already difficult task of unionization and collective bargaining. Despite this legal challenge, and in response to the inability of unions to address the needs of the precariously employed, our research observes that cultural workers are organizing in alternate constellations, including grassroots groups, virtual campaigns, in alliances with the labour movement, and in what Eidelson (2013) calls "alt-labour," non-union workers' organizations for those who cannot legally access a union. Attending to such instances of worker resistance, we propose, foregrounds alternative, worker-centred perspectives on how cultural production should be organized and supported.

A key concept in studies of cultural labour, and one animating our research, is autonomy. Autonomy appears in scholarship on cultural labour in two general iterations: creative or aesthetic autonomy, which describes workers' abilities to produce creative works independent of outside influences; and workplace or professional autonomy, which refers to workers' abilities to achieve self-determination in a workplace (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Banks 2010; Ryan 1992). Both conceptions of autonomy examine the possibility for, and limitations on, cultural workers' efforts to seek fulfilling, meaningful work and retain control over the creative content of their work in spite of the impulses of capitalist commodity production and market relations. Notwithstanding the insecurity that underpins contemporary cultural labour, and acknowledging its "negotiated" or "relative" nature (Banks 2010; Ryan 1992), autonomy has come to be understood as a defining characteristic of cultural work. We seek to widen and politicize the concept of autonomy beyond negotiating individual autonomy within workplace structures and seeking individual fulfillment through the content of work. Flowing from current efforts of activists, such a notion of autonomy would be expanded to include workers' efforts to collectively exert control over the terms under which their labour power is engaged, to question the dominant organization of cultural production, to seek ways to sustain independent work by de-linking social security from standard employment, and to produce alternative systems of meaning about work.

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In this chapter, we propose three conceptual lenses for approaching research on cultural labour from worker resistance. These concepts hold potential for envisioning alternate routes to cultural labour autonomy, via *mutual aid*, or developing bottom-up infrastructures to support independent work; *policy from below*, or creating worker-centred policies to mitigate the precarity of non-standard work; and *counter-interpellation*, or building alternate vocabularies to define cultural labour that resist dominant ideological codes attached to visions of, for example, "creatives" and "free agents." A politicized concept of autonomy regards cultural workers as active in forging new ways to sustain their work and lives, going beyond workers' efforts to

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adapt or cope with precarity in ways that can reinforce self-exploitation. Our proposed conceptual entry points demonstrate that beginning from cultural workers' resistant practices opens new areas for inquiry and action in the field of cultural and communicative labour.

Mutual aid

It has become common for researchers to view cultural work through the conceptual lens of "enterprising individuals" (Rose 1996) or a cognate frame (Coulson 2012; McRobbie 2002). Deployed critically, enterprise designates a neoliberal regime of conduct in which self-reliance is a default disposition. Maintaining a self-reliant sensibility is necessary in creative labour economies, where self-employed, project-based workers are personally responsible for maintaining a steady flow of paid work, accessed through informal networks or assumed to hinge on possessing a distinctive personal brand. Enterprise overlays what Pasquinelli (2007: 80) starkly terms "immaterial civil war," whose frontlines include "the usual conflicts between cognitive workers," manifest in such keywords as "competition," "rivalries" and "envy." "Cooperation," Pasquinelli goes on to say, "is structurally difficult among creative workers, where a prestige economy operates the same way as in any star system … and where new ideas have to confront each other, often involving their creators in a fight" (ibid.). Without underestimating the structural forces that amplify competitiveness, reinforce self-reliance, or otherwise inhibit labour solidarity in the creative industries, there is a need for progressive perspectives on cultural work that go beyond diagnosing the internalization of neoliberal priorities that can mute resistance (see Kennedy 2012: 23–51; Banks 2007: 156–87). We propose the concept of mutual aid as a useful entry point for researching (and inspiring) alternative social possibilities to competitive, self-reliant "culturepreneurs" (Davies and Ford 2000).

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We were steered to the idea of mutual aid through the case of the Freelancers Union. Labelled "A Federation of the Unaffiliated," the Freelancers Union is a New York City-based non-profit organization whose 235,000-strong membership is skewed to a creative-class demographic. Its mission is to advance the "next safety net" for "independent workers," which it does primarily through providing health benefits and insurance services to members outside standard employment (Horowitz, personal comm., 4 October 2010). Founder Sara Horowitz (2013) locates the Freelancers Union within "the new mutualism" (see Birchall 2001), an umbrella covering diverse community-based social and economic activities through which workers and consumers satisfy their otherwise unmet needs by variously pooling, sharing, or collaboratively managing resources via organizations outside the purview of the state or investor-driven corporations. It is not necessary to dig too deep into the etymology of new mutualism to arrive at "mutual aid," a concept popularized by Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin ([1902] 2006). Disputing the social Darwinist thinking of the late nineteenth century, Kropotkin argued that humans and non-human species are not exclusively engaged in, or condemned to, a competitive war of all against and all. Kropotkin (2006: xiii) meticulously documented some of the myriad ways in which the survival and evolution of diverse species is enabled by forms of behaviour

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that do not corroborate a totalizing "law of mutual struggle," but instead demonstrate a countervailing "law of mutual aid" encompassing values and practices that range from support and cooperation to equity and solidarity.

For Kroptokin, practices of mutual aid do not arise from an a priori fellow feeling, but rather the recognition, conscious or otherwise, of the necessity of mutual aid to survive in the face of difficult material conditions or common adversaries. In our context, the research lens of mutual aid would zoom in on forms of cooperation that are not imposed on labour by capital in commodity production but instead spring from below. Examples of such "mutual aid amongst ourselves" (Kropotkin 2006: 184–241) include craft guilds and their successors, unions, which are rooted in a mutualist premise that, in the context of structurally unequal labour–capital relations, organizing collectively is essential to give workers bargaining power and, in turn, assert, protect, and advance their economic and occupational interests. Workers' organizations are rarely centre stage in the most prominent contemporary accounts of cultural work. But if research on cultural and creative industries is to contest individualization, then inquiry into trade unions, professional associations, and autonomous labour groups is necessary. By extending existing scholarship on the established unions in the commercial media and cultural industries (for example, Mosco and McKercher 2008; Amman 2002), our research identifies a new constellation of precarious workers' association emerging from the margins of the union movement, exemplified by such initiatives as the Canadian Intern Association, the Freelancers Union, Intern Aware, and the Model Alliance.

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Fraternal societies are classic institutions of mutual aid. Here, too, as the historian David Beito (2000: 234) writes of the US case, "[m]utual aid was a creature of necessity." Historically, fraternal societies have pooled the resources of their frequently poor members so to be able to extend economic support to members (or their families) at a time of need via, for example, sickness benefits or life insurance. Anticipating the centralized forms of universal social insurance administered by the welfare state (Birchall 2001), the model of the benefit societies is a staple of trade unionism, including in the cultural industries, where most workers are self-employed and thus unable to access workplace-based benefits. In Canada, ACTRA Fraternal Benefit Society serves members of the Writers Guild of Canada and the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television, and Radio Artists. The Freelancers Union began as Working Today, a non-profit provider of discounted health benefits for New York freelancers who could not access Medicaid or were not covered by an employer. Insurance may not be a glamorous topic for researchers of cultural work, yet access to insurance is often what draws independent workers to collective organizations. Mutual aid is prompted by other unmet needs among labour forces in creative industries. For example, dispersed workers are increasingly coming together in co-working spaces, where freelancers and others in non-standard employment share a common place to work, splitting the cost of rent and office services and reestablishing workplace community among disaggregated workers. Co-working spaces and benefits societies catering to independent workers demonstrate that, although the flexibilization of labour exacerbates competition and exploitation ("the law of mutual struggle"), it can also give rise to cooperation and association, confirming a countervailing "law of mutual aid."

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Mutual aid institutions strive to achieve more than enable cultural workers to better manage in precarious conditions. Practices of mutual aid in cultural production milieus encourage experiments in the construction of new relations of production to mitigate alienation and exploitation. Our research identifies three mutual aid institutions in the arts, media and cultural industries that create conditions for autonomous cultural work to be supported and sustained: first, artist-run centres, which are self-organized spaces where local artists come together to create, curate, and circulate work independently of commercial galleries and state-administered cultural institutions (Detterer and Nannucci 2012; Robertson 2006); second, worker cooperatives, member-owned and democratically-controlled businesses that intersect with creative industries (Boyle 2012), such as the co-working space Ecto in Montréal and the print-design shop Calverts in London; and third, occupied cultural spaces, which are more openly antagonistic to state and market power and governed via horizontal decision-making processes. These include MACAO in Milan and Teatro Valle in Rome, which are aligned with the Italian "common goods" movement (Bailey and Marcucci 2013). Artist-run centres, worker cooperatives, and occupied cultural spaces not only reflect but also help to cultivate the facility of mutual aid. These working institutions of mutual aid ought to be the places we look to explore normative criteria of "good work" beyond the confines of the commercial cultural industries (Oakley 2014; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011).

Our point is not simply to observe that there are social alternatives to self-reliance but more broadly to advocate for the uptake of Kropotkin's approach in cultural labour studies. Kroptokin's inquiries into mutual aid, in the words of autonomist Harry Cleaver (1992), set out to discover "already existing activities which embody new, alternative forms of social cooperation and ways of being." Rather than draft blueprints, research on mutual aid would spotlight counter-capitalist experiments in the here and now. Investigating cultural work through the lens of mutual aid thus dovetails with the idea of "post-capitalist politics" developed by Gibson-Graham (2006) and applied to cultural work by Kennedy (2012) and Banks (2007). Fidelity to Kropotkin's method requires activist-oriented research that not only documents and examines "the desires and self-activity of the people," but also, adds Cleaver (1992), "articulate(s) them in ways which contribute both to their circulation and empowerment." While the task is that of tracking "emerging trends of mutual aid working at cross purposes to capitalist domination" (Cleaver 1992), what makes mutual aid a productive theoretical entry is its ambivalence. For although mutual aid among cultural workers points to possibilities beyond waged labour, the commodity form and state administration, the extent to which practices of mutual aid disrupt, co-exist with, or even bind workers to dominant political-economic logics requires situated analysis. Be that as it may, mutual aid establishes the social bonds necessary to contest labour precarity and affirms the self-organization necessary for alternative economies. The stakes, then, are not limited to cultural labour: on the contrary, the greatest significance of mutual aid among cultural workers is the formation of sensibilities that favour solidarity generally, including solidarity with segments of the working class outside the relatively privileged quarters of the creative industries. This takes us to what we call policy from below.

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Policy from below

By many accounts, the growth and expansion of the creative industries has been fuelled by policy. Over the past few decades, governments the world over, policy-makers, consultants, and institutions all the way up to the United Nations have prioritized policies promoting arts, media, and culture as catalysts of jobs creation, economic growth, and urban "revitalization" (United Nations Development Programme 2013; Throsby 2010; Martin and Florida 2009; DCMS 2008). The ascendency of creative industries policy has been met with critique, particularly from scholars alert to the difficult conditions in which a growing number of cultural workers labour, including rising rents, low wages, and general precarity. Critically, many note a lack of attention in official policy discourse to issues of work and the quality of jobs that creative industries produce (Oakley 2013; Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Ross 2009). Researchers "looking for work" in creative industries policy (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009) typically focus on the state and industry as the primary agents. Cultural workers in the arts, as Woddis (2013: 1) argues, are "rarely acknowledged by cultural policy researchers as being more than marginally involved in policy-making." Although Murray and Gollmitzer (2012) attend to policy fixes for precarity in creative industries, the efforts of workers themselves and their organizations to advocate for policy aimed at improving working conditions for the precariously employed are generally downplayed in the literature on labour and creative industries.

We propose zooming in on cultural workers' participation in policy processes by examining their role as generators of proposals attentive to labour issues (see Coles 2012). From this view, policy innovation lies not in the top-down designs of state and corporate actors, but in the bottom-up solutions proposed by workers and their collective organizations. Policy from below is targeted at remedying the gaps in creative industries and related labour policies, but could have farther-reaching effects in addressing precarious employment across the labour market.

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Take, for example, the proposal for a basic guaranteed minimum income, which has resonance across the globe as a remedy for widespread precarity and economic inequality. In the 1980s, the Independent Artists Union (IAU), a grassroots group of artists based in the Canadian province of Ontario, organized, demonstrated and wrote policy briefs on the need for a form of basic income that would entitle working artists to receive an adequate living wage from the state. The IAU elevated a notion of art as labour and linked artistic autonomy to artists' material conditions. The IAU extended its call for material security in the form of a decent, guaranteed income to all workers (Independent Artists Union 1986).

Although the IAU disbanded by 1990, cultural workers in Canada continue to circulate policy proposals that could have mitigating effects on precarity, ranging from the narrowly focused bid to allow performers to average their fluctuating incomes for tax purposes, lobbied for by the Alliance of *Canadian* Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) (n.d.), to the sweeping purview of the national Urban Worker Strategy, a bill introduced in the Canadian Parliament that responds to the plight of temps, freelancers, interns, part-timers and other flexworkers who flit from gig to gig, shift to shift, contract to contract, with no guarantee of income or of future work, let alone social protections (Cohen and de Peuter 2013). The Urban

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Worker Strategy, developed by a member of parliament who himself worked for decades as a freelance musician and journalist, contains a patchwork of policies that could extend social protections typically reserved for those in standard employment: the bill includes expanding access to Employment Insurance and pensions, cracking down on employment misclassification, and better regulating temp work and unpaid internships. Notably developed through consultations with alt-labour and cultural worker organizations – including the Canadian Intern Association, the Workers' Action Centre and ACTRA – the Urban Worker bill builds on the ongoing history of Canada serving as a test site for cultural-worker led policy development.

To date, the most significant Canadian policy that has resulted from art worker activism is the Status of the Artist Act, a unique piece of federal labour legislation enacted in 1995 – after extensive lobbying by artists and cultural worker organizations – that extends collective bargaining rights to self-employed cultural workers. The IAU, although short-lived, served as a critical venue for mobilizing artists around the notion that artists could secure decent material conditions only through collective bargaining (Condé and Beveridge forthcoming). Decades later, CARFAC, Canada's visual artists' union, is using *Status of the Artist* to pressure the National Gallery of Canada to bargain for artists' minimum fees and copyright protections, a labour dispute currently en route to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Beyond Canada, cultural workers and their emergent organizations are incubating policy proposals that fall under a framework of flexicurity, or security for workers in flexible working arrangements, which advocates note is key for supporting workers who seek out self-employment in a bid for autonomy (Murray and Gollmitzer 2012; Vosko 2010). The Freelancers Union, for example, has delved into policy development. After documenting over US$15 million in unpaid wages that freelancers have no legal recourse to collect, the organization drafted and lobbied for the Freelance Payment Protection Act, which would enable freelancers to use the state's resources to collect unpaid wages. The bill is currently in front of New York State's Labor Committee (Freelancers Union 2014). Other examples include artists lobbying for an artists' resale right; the Model Alliance mobilizing to pass a bill extending child labour protections for models under eighteen (Holpuch 2013); the fledgling intern advocacy movement pushing for the passage of bills to protect interns' labour rights in New York, Oregon, and Ontario (McKnight 2014; Gershman 2013); and Italian activists proposing new legal frameworks for conceiving of culture as a "common good" to protect cultural institutions from privatization (Mattei 2013).

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Our research demonstrates that cultural workers' associations are not only documenting the scope of precarious employment but also proposing alternative visions for how cultural work should be supported and organized. In an era of declining union power and entrenched labour market precarity, as agents of policy development, cultural workers demonstrate the possibility of detaching social protections and security from an employment relationship. This is a significant step for cultural policy from below, which has shifted from focusing on the act of creating culture—requesting more state funding for the arts, for example—to demanding that work be sustainable and secure outside of traditional employment relationships. Such efforts point to a wider transformative vision of a model of social security that would go "beyond employment" (Vosko 2010: 219), one that has been proposed as

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part of rethinking labour under post-Fordist capitalism and the possibilities of delinking social protections from waged labour (Weeks 2011).

There is no guarantee that cultural worker policy proposals will benefit a broad swath of the labour market, however. Workers and their organizations must engage in the difficult task of cross-class, pan-sectoral organizing to broaden the reach of cultural policy from below. Inspiring, then, are instances such as the Urban Worker Strategy, which, although not without its problems, involves an effort to link cultural sector unions with other organizations such as Toronto's Workers' Action Centre, whose constituency includes migrant workers in low-wage service sector jobs. The struggles of art workers, interns, and freelancers to be compensated for their labour could, moreover, link up to broader anti-austerity struggles, including campaigns in North America to raise the minimum wage. In the meantime, cultural workers' proposals provide rich terrain for researchers looking for work in cultural policy, and provide pointers for what policy infrastructures might make independent livelihoods in art, culture, and beyond more sustainable. An important step in this process has been the efforts of cultural workers to redefine dominant labels offered to name and explain cultural labour, a process we consider through the lens of counter-interpellation.

Counter-interpellation

The labour turn in contemporary social theory is synonymous with a surge of concepts created to name ongoing transformations in the nature of work and capitalist valorization processes, including "immaterial labour" (Lazzarato 1996), "cognitive labour" (Berardi 2009), "affective labour" (Hardt 1999), and "digital labour" (Fuchs 2014). Cutting across these Marxian categories is the point that although the world of work is mutating in dramatic ways, it remains driven by familiar economic imperatives and power asymmetries. This is a key message of the pioneering critical studies of labour in creative industries that were carried out under such headings as the "no-collar" workplace (Ross 2004) and the "cybertariat" (Huws 2003), terms coined to tarnish the egalitarian gloss on high-tech work in the early twenty-first century. These reality-checking labels continue to provide a much-needed antidote to persistent neoliberal frames such as the "creative class" (Florida 2012) and the "free agent" (Pink 2002), entrepreneurial identities that neutralize class and power relations. Overall, these varied terms are volleys in a contest over the meaning of work, workers, and workplaces in contemporary creative industries.

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While there are now rich empirical accounts of cultural production detailing experiences of labour and unpacking practitioners' understanding of their work (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), less attention has been devoted to the diverse ways in which working people in creative industries, in the context of collective organizing, struggle over the meaning of their employment status, working identities, and the labour they perform. This gap can be addressed through our third concept, counter-interpellation. If interpellation designates the process through which ideology hails individuals to inhabit a subject-position simpatico with the priorities of the dominant order, counter-interpellation encompasses practices through which workers and their associations challenge prevailing interpellative devices and adopt alternate identifications.

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Precarity, the keyword catalyzing our research, exemplifies counter-interpellation. Before its adoption by critical scholars, precarity was a mobilizing term used by activist groups in Europe in the early 2000s bound up with an "alternative system of meaning … about labour market flexibility" (Mattoni 2008: 108). By condensing in one word the social, financial, and existential undercurrent of the neoliberal pursuit of flexibilization, the idea of precarity helped to meet workers' need for "words to talk about what is happening to us," as the feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva (2004: 57) noted in a related context. More than describing conditions of labour and life marked by uncertainty and insecurity, the language of precarity circulated through activist interventions, the term wielded not just to grieve collective marginalization but also to assert collective agency (Cosse 2008; Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 228). It is in the production of counter-publics that precarity came to function as a counter-interpellation: the concept sought to combat the individualizing effects of the conditions it named by encouraging the identification of common ground among disaggregated workers differentially affected by labour market instability. The activist origins of precarity affirm the autonomy of communicative capacities, with youthful militants turning the linguistic abilities, brand savvy, and media know-how that flexploitation thrives on, against itself.

While the concept of precarity was a general oppositional response to the neoliberal doctrine of flexibility, struggles are also unfolding around dominant terms associated with specific forms of nonstandard work. One example comes by way of the Freelancers Union, which addresses its constituency as "independent workers." Recognizing workers' desire for autonomy vis-à-vis the standard employment relationship, the independent worker label presents an alternative to the subject position of the entrepreneur while simultaneously appealing to a vague anti-government sensibility that potentially reinforces individual self-reliance. Underscoring the term's ambivalence, however, the process of hailing its members as independent workers is part of the Freelancers Union's bid to convert a source of marginalization (exclusion from state entitlements and employer-supported benefits) into a point of collective identification, in turn a prerequisite for fostering social relations of mutual aid.

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Nowhere on the cultural labour landscape is the battle to identify and define work more pitched than around the figure of the intern, whose quasi-employers are densely clustered in creative industries. Dominant discourse on internships is littered with phrases that abet the process of "self-precarization" (Lorey 2009), including clichéd rationales ("paying your dues," "getting a foot in the door"), deprecating self-assessments ("But I have no experience"), and reluctant acquiescence ("This is the way to break in now"). Over the past two years, however, the intern label has become contentious, due largely to autonomous organizing and agitating by interns and their allies. Campaigns of intern activist initiatives, including Intern Aware in the UK, the Canadian Intern Association and Intern Labor Rights in the US, are troubling the framework within which internships are normatively understood and the terminology deployed therein. Attracting considerable media attention, intern rights advocates have achieved something quite striking: the politicization of the previously innocuous subject of the intern, by linking internships to "exploitation," an increasingly common word choice in mainstream media coverage of intern advocates (for example, Goodman 2014). Action on the internship issue, including internship policy reforms being floated by governments, the extra caution an employer might exercise before advertising an

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unpaid position, and the courage of young people to speak out against dubious internships, are fuelled by intersecting forces, including independently organized interns' practices of self-representation.

Other symbolic fronts are emerging in the fight against the naturalization of the performance of labour at a discount in creative industries. While the intern category is more or less accepted by intern rights activists, other cultural labour collectivities reject outright the legitimacy of prevailing terms. "Content provider," for example, is strongly resisted by freelance journalists and writers' unions. Their efforts overlap with campaigns such as the US National Writers Union's "Pay the Writer!" slogan. Similar campaigns have emerged in other sectors, including the UK Musicians' Union's Pay Not Play campaign, waged to erase the perception of working musicians as hobbyists. Discursively asserting the value of professional craft from below, as these and other initiatives do, is an attempt to protect workers' livelihoods from the material effects of industry-derived terms that devalue the labour of symbolic production. Responses based in professional identity are significant, yet potentially constrained politically to the extent that they skirt addressing a more universal subject, that of worker.

The artist is a prototype for the contemporary "do-what-you-love" ideology (Tokumitsu 2014). It is significant, then, that politicized artists are reviving efforts to ground artistic identity in labour, upsetting the reputation of the artist as a model of the de-alienated worker and bypassing individualized narratives of creative autonomy (for a historical study, see Bryan-Wilson 2009). The New York City-based group W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) formed in 2008 to challenge cultural institutions' habit of compensating artists merely in the "promise of exposure" (W.A.G.E. n.d.). Via teach-ins, conference presentations, and publications, W.A.G.E. has argued that the offer of exposure as remuneration "denies the value of our labor" (W.A.G.E. n.d.). Under such conditions, says W.A.G.E.'s Steiner (2008), artists "become market speculators rather than cultural workers." W.A.G.E.'s efforts to reject a market-based identification and instead frame the artist as an under-compensated worker performing value-generating labour for institutions was a preliminary step in an organizing process that has more recently focused on developing policy from below, specifically the W.A.G.E. certification programme, a proposal for minimum fee structures at New York galleries.

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Singling out cultural workers risks reinforcing borders between groups of workers who otherwise share common structural conditions, and so it is notable that another artist-activist group, Arts & Labor, which emerged from Occupy Wall Street in New York, has also reclaimed the "art worker" category, inflected inclusively in an attempt to encourage solidarity across occupational strata. As Arts & Labor's (n.d.) mandate reads, "We are artists and interns, writers and educators, art handlers and designers, administrators, curators, assistants, and students. We are all art workers and members of the 99%." While there are unresolved political tensions in the "art worker" category (Bryan-Wilson 2009), groups like Arts & Labor and W.A.G.E. nonetheless engage cultural producers in a process of collective identification within a context of solidarity activism and a critique of structural inequality.

Inquiry into process and practices of counter-interpellation in creative industries would explore livelihood struggles as also encompassing meaning struggles. Struggling over meaning is one of the principal activities of the collective initiatives we are

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researching. Activist aggregations are the political innovators of new semiotic means of self-understanding vis-à-vis the political economy of precarity. Access to counter-interpellations is, we argue, a condition of possibility for furthering labour politics in creative industries: resistance is enabled by terms for locating oneself differently in dominant relations of power. What the terminological contests we have described point to is a different kind of cultural work, that of producing new communicative devices for labour's critical self-awareness, self-activity and collective organization.

Conclusion

Carrying out cultural labour research beginning from resistance and alternatives requires a revised conceptual lexicon that positions workers as agents directly confronting structural pressures on their work and lives. In this chapter, we have proposed three concepts that can serve as entry points for further investigation of how cultural workers organize, why they organize in certain formations, and what challenges their initiatives face. Mutual aid, we proposed, is a concept that can identify workers' collective efforts to resist the individualization and structural competitiveness of cultural labour. Through worker cooperatives, collective associations, and institutions, cultural workers are engaging in cooperation to support one another in navigating precarious labour markets and developing collaborative practices that facilitate collectivity and solidarity, providing a counter to the enterprising ethos so ingrained in contemporary cultural work. Our second concept, policy from below, highlighted cultural workers' efforts to develop or push for bottom-up policy solutions that could mitigate the precarious nature of cultural work and which have potential to extend beyond the creative class. Our research points to a range of policy proposals emerging from cultural worker organizations, from a universal basic income to more specific initiatives such as labour protections for interns. Our third concept, counter-interpellation, identified the critical practice of struggling over meaning that underpins contemporary cultural worker organizing. By resisting being "hailed" into dominant subject positions, cultural workers are collectively proposing alternative meanings that attempt to interpellate cultural workers into a counter subjectivity, that of resistant, autonomous workers.

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These conceptual entry points also begin to reveal some of the tensions marking and generated by workers' efforts, tensions arising from the political-economic conditions in which these activities occur. While mutual aid points to the spread of what have previously been marginal institutions and practices, the organizations we highlighted do not engage in collective bargaining, which is a serious limitation on their potential to democratize power relations in cultural production. And while policy from below reveals the development of innovative ideas from those who experience precarity firsthand, it will take serious collective power in the form of social movement backing to push for implementation and enforcement at the state level. Finally, while practices of counter-interpellation show promise for recoding discourses of cultural labour, it is still a minority of activist workers who are organizing and embracing a politicized worker identity – the majority of cultural workers tend to shrug off a labour-oriented identity.

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Our proposed concepts nonetheless support a politicized understanding of labour autonomy in cultural and creative industries. The question facing further inquiry into emerging labour politics in creative industries is, ultimately, the same question facing all working people: how do you confront power? This includes the neoliberal forces seeking to individualize work and isolate workers, state power to impose austerity measures and scale back worker protections, and the aggressive power of corporations and capital. What cultural workers' collective initiatives show is the understanding that power cannot be effectively confronted individually, and that collective resistance under today's difficult conditions takes time to develop, mobilize, and sustain.

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