1. Introduction

A number of studies of artistic labour, based primarily on survey data, have generated clear findings. This research suggests that artists tend to hold multiple jobs; there is a predominance of self-employed freelance workers; work in irregular contracts are shorter-term, and there is little job protection; career prospects are uncertain; earnings are very uneven; artists are younger than other workers; and the workforce appears to be growing (see Towsue, 1992; Menger, 2006 for valuable summaries of a range of studies). ‘Artistic’ here means subsidised arts sector; but these features would seem also to apply very much to artistic (and informational) labour in the cultural and creative industries, especially given changes in these industries over the last twenty years that have seen increasing casualisation and short-term contracts of work. If that is so, then policies that argue for the radical expansion of these industries under present conditions, as ‘creative industries policies’ do, without attention to the conditions of creative labour, risk generating labour markets marked by irregular, insecure and unprotected work. This means that as well as the intrinsic importance of studying the quality of working life in these growing industries, there is also a policy reason to do so.

However, there has been a somewhat surprising lack of qualitative studies of working conditions in the cultural industries (as opposed to the working conditions of more narrowly defined artistic workers – see Shaw, 2004) and of the experiences of cultural workers. While there is a rich tradition of research on the political-economic dynamics and organisational structures of these industries (e.g., Miège, 1989; DiMaggio, 1977; see Golding and Murdock, 2005, and Hesmondhalgh, 2005 for summaries), surprisingly few analysts have addressed questions of labour specifically (the major exception is Ryan, 1992). In recent years, sociologically informed writers have begun to fill this gap. For example, using diary data, Paterson (2001) compared career patterns amongst three age cohorts of workers in the television industry, and noted the profound uncertainty that had entered the lives of television workers with the technological and organisational changes of the 1990s. Also studying television, and concentrating on the freelance workers who form the majority of the labour force, Ursell (2000) analysed the way that these workers had in effect to organize their own labour markets. Blair (2001) showed how entry into the UK film industry was highly interdependent. If that is so, then policies that argue for the radical expansion of these industries under present conditions, as ‘creative industries policies’ do, without attention to the conditions of creative labour, risk generating labour markets marked by irregular, insecure and unprotected work. This means that as well as the intrinsic importance of studying the quality of working life in these growing industries, there is also a policy reason to do so.

Ursell's research was significant because it paid attention to the particularly high levels of precariousness in cultural labour – something that had increasingly been noted by sociologists of work concentrating on other fields (such as Kunda, 1991), building on groundbreaking studies of ‘consent’ (such as Burawoy, 1979). Ursell acknowledged that processes such as union derecognition and considerable reductions in labour costs and earnings provided plenty of evidence to support a Marxist reading, focused on exploitation and property. But she also noted ‘an intensification of the self-commodification processes by which each individual seeks to improve his/her chances of attracting gainful employment’ (Ursell, 2000:807). This element of ‘apparent voluntarism’ needed to be acknowledged, she asserted, and Ursell turned to Foucauldian theory (such as Knights and Willmott, 1989) ‘to not to dispense with [labour process] concerns’ but ‘to approach them more substantially’ (2000:809).

Angela McRobbie (2002:517) followed by offering ‘a preliminary and thus provisional account’ of how notions of creativity, talent and work are being redefined in those burgeoning micro-businesses of the cultural sector associated with young people, including fashion and design, but also entertainment industries such as clubbing, recording and magazine journalism. She echoed Ursell in pointing to the ‘utopian thread’ involved in the ‘attempt to make-over the world of work into something closer to a life of enthusiasm and enjoyment’ (McRobbie, 2002:523), but also in focusing on how this leads to a situation where, when things go wrong, young people entering these creative worlds of work can feel they only have themselves to blame. In this respect, McRobbie usefully broadened the study of cultural work to include a wider set of conditions and experiences, including the way in which aspirations to an ideal of ‘self-employment’ of autonomy could lead to disappointment and disillusion.

Such questions of quality of life and dynamics of ‘self-employment’ have also been investigated by writers such as Andrew Ross (2003) and Ros Gill (2002) in relation to culture-related industries such as IT. Writing about work in the IT sector (a form of work sometimes unhelpfully blurred with artistic labour in the notion of creative industries), Ross observed how, in the eyes of a new generation of business analysts in the 1980s, Silicon Valley ‘appeared to promote a humane workplace not as a grudging concession to demoralized employees but as a valued asset to production’ (Ross, 2003:9). ‘New economy’ firms, he argued, aimed to provide work cultures that ‘embraced openness, cooperation and self-management’ (Ross, 2003:9). But this, showed Ross, was closely linked to long working hours and a serious erosion of the line between work and leisure. Whilst the dot.com working environments offered ‘bodies of autonomy along with warm collegiality’ (Ross, 2003:17) they also enlisted ‘employees’ freest thoughts and impulses in the service of salaried time’ (Ross, 2003:19).

These are only some of the contributions to studies of cultural work in recent years from sociology and related areas such as cultural studies. There is no space to offer a survey of this research here (and in any case Banks, 2007, has provided a comprehensive overview). Instead, we aim to build on that strand of research which seeks to explore the experiences of workers in cultural and media industries. We do so across a number of dimensions that have emerged in the sociology of work more broadly, and in these qualitative studies of cultural work more specifically. These dimensions are here grouped into the following three categories: pay, working hours and unions; insecurity and uncertainty; socialising, networking and isolation.

Our research goes beyond the existing studies discussed above in a number of ways. First of all, we conducted interviews across three very different cultural industries. The three industries were selected because they represent examples of each of three different ‘logics’ of cultural production, identified by Miege in his influential 1989 account of different ‘logics’ or models of production in cultural industries (Miege, 1989): • Music as an example of the publishing model or logic (based on offsetting risk by producing a catalogue of repertoire, whereby inevitable failures are balanced out by occasional hits or successes – used in books, music, and film). • Television as an example of the flow model or logic (based on a continuous flow of product, and the gaining of audience loyalty, as in radio, television and new media). • Magazines as an example of the written press model or logic (the regular and loyal consumption of a series of commodities, in newspapers and magazines).

A testing of Miege’s classification was not our main aim. Rather, using these categories seemed the most effective way to draw upon existing classifications of the cultural industries to ensure a spread of examples of cultural work, including different working conditions and employment arrangements. Recognising the integral importance of genre to cultural production, and therefore to cultural labour, we also interviewed workers in a range of genres within each industry: rock/pop, jazz and hip hop/electronic dance music in the recording industry; music magazines, men’s magazines and the building and construction trade press in magazine journalism, and arts/history documentary, drama serials and ‘factual entertainment’ in television. A total of 63 interviews were conducted in England in 2006 and 2007, with between six and ten interviews undertaken for each of the genres under consideration. Interviewees ranged across the following characteristics: corporate and independent sectors; freelance and salaried; established creative personnel who have made their names in the industry, aspiring newcomers, and older practitioners; London-based workers and those in other locations in England; creative managers, marketers and creative personnel. We also conducted ethnographic fieldwork in a London-based independent television production company, which we report separately (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008) but refer to briefly here. Thirdly, our aim was to analyse more closely the emotional responses of cultural workers to their working conditions, insofar as these could be ascertained from fieldwork interviews. By ‘emotional responses’ we mean states of mind such as pleasure, enjoyment and anxiety. We focus on these experiences and emotional responses in order to register with greater clarity the effects of the working conditions of the cultural industries on cultural workers. This includes some of the pleasurable and autonomous aspects of cultural work, as well as its downsides. As is appropriate
for qualitative research interviews, we emphasise subjective experience over generalisability, while making no claim about the experiences of people we were speaking to, and the kinds of motivations they might have in presenting their views to us. We are seriously our interviewees’ accounts but do not necessarily take what they told us at face value.

2. Pay, working hours and unions

We begin with what is widely considered to be the most crucial way in which workers think of their work: how much work they do, and how much they get paid for it. Striking here was the use of language and metaphor by the sheer numbers of young people competing for work. One factual producer spoke of ‘an army’ of graduates from media and journalism courses (Interview 21). Another BBC employee, ‘can’t expect to graduate and magically fall into a TV job because everyone knows how competitive the industry is’ (Interview 35). Documentary production told us that ‘hordes and hordes of kids ... will do anything’ to get a position (Interview 4). And in our ethnographic research at a London-based independent television production company during the first half of 2007, workers expressed concern about their ‘social credit’ – recognising, from their own experiences of job searching ‘between’ contracts, the sheer volume of young freelancers competing for the same pool of positions (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008).

2.1. Pay

This massive ‘reservoir’ (Müge, 1989:83) of labour means that wages are depressed, and in many cases workers – especially young people – are willing to work for free. In her study of the UK television industry Ursell (2000:814) writes of the number of university students on work experience who ‘gift’ several weeks of free labour to production companies in the hope that ‘their gift will earn them their return in the future’. When many of these students graduate from their course, says Ursell (2000:814-815), they ‘persist in working for nothing if they are required to work overtime or on Sundays or a very low pay’ and this then results in ‘extremely low pay at the entry point to the industry’ (Ursell and Dex, 2003:124) concurs, saying that the labour supply is bursting with ‘graduates willing to work for free or for very low wages to get a foothold in the industry’. One junior writer for a men’s magazine, for example, explained that ‘on the fashion desk loads of them are working for free, up to a year and stuff, and people do work experience as writers for free’ (Interview 12). In television the willingness to carry out unpaid or low-paid labour results, as one production manager of documentary films claimed, ‘when you are eating into people producing reality and factual television: They don’t get paid properly, but it’s supply and demand ... people out and split them up ... leaving the young workers ‘battered and bruised’ (Interview 4). Two metaphors conveying worker experiences of job searching ‘between’ contracts, the sheer volume of young freelancers competing for the same pool of positions (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008).

...there is a strong tendency towards self-exploitation in the cultural industries. ...But why do so many young people want to work in these industries, in spite of the low rates of pay and long working hours...?

company demands and certainly committing oneself to the commercial imperatives of the firm over and above new working relationships...

This was very much confirmed in our research. One documentary camera operator explained how, in television, contracted working hours have extended, though there is little increase in pay:

‘On commercials you used to have an eight-hour day, that was your basic working day, and then after eight hours you’d be on overtime. Most commercials you did ten hours minimum anyway so you’d work two hours overtime and then production companies and budgets got tighter and they started saying your basic day is going to be ten hours. The same thing has happened in documentaries. We never had an eight-hour day; it was always a ten-hour day ... But now people are trying to be sneaky and saying your basic day is twelve hours, but instead of saying you get paid for an extra two hours, you get the same pay for working twelve hours that you did for working ten hours, which effectively means that you take a pay cut.’ (Interview 33)

However, as noted in Section 1, one of the problems for cultural workers is that they are often, at least on the face of it, ‘free’ to decide whether to take on such long hours. This has its pleasures and disadvantages: the music industry outlines the kind of working week that results:

‘I tend to work six days and it tends to be mid morning to late evening. But the evening stuff is stuff that I love to do, seeing bands and artists and putting on gigs. I do a radio show as well, I forget that. I do a monthly radio show on the local music scene. It’s really varied, which I enjoy because I do it with my mate at all.’ (Interview 19)

‘Pleasure in work’ (Donzelot, 1991; Nixon and Crewe, 2004), then, is closely linked to self-exploitation. For example, a reviews editor of a music magazine said:

‘I’m one of those people who really love being busy but then I risk taking on far too much ... and people presume you’re going to do it and then you realise you’ve got no time to do it. I went to my boss and said I’m going to have a breakdown one of these days because I’m working ridiculous hours and working on weekends and doing all this crazy stuff! ... I enjoy it, admittedly, but when it starts affecting you, that’s really the problem.’ (Interview 18)

Interviewees also told us of the physical dangers of working long hours, especially in television. One factual producer (Interview 27) spoke of a friend who after working extended four day shifts and shoot then had to drive back to London, exhausted, and ended up having a car accident. A cameraman told us: ‘Crews do crash on the road sometimes because they get overworked and flagged and they drive off the road or they crash and even get killed occasionally, and that’s because there’s a lot of pressure’ (Interview 24). Whether this is really the case or not, this worker can be understood as externalising his own fears about the pressure put upon him. Even as an established cameraman who tries to phase himself, say no and ‘be sensible’ he still finds there are ‘times when you are downing Red Bulls or taking Pro Plus and things and you are and you are shaking and you have to work the most ridiculous hours and you’re in a terrible state, which you shouldn’t really be in’ (Interview 29).

Our evidence suggests that there is a strong tendency towards self-exploitation in the cultural industries. This may be a feature of a great deal of modern professional work. But why do so many young people want to work in these industries, in spite of the low rates of pay and long working hours that many of our interviewees reported, and which are confirmed in the survey data presented at the beginning of this article? Menger (1999:554) usefully distinguishes three different explanations for this phenomenon. The first is the labor of love explanation (Freidson, 1990) – artists, or symbol creators, have a strong sense of a ‘calling’, of potential fulfillment, and they are prepared to take the risk of failure. A second set of explanations emphasises that artists might be risk-lovers, or like lottery players, simply haven’t considered properly how likely it is that they will win, and hence the risk of failure isn’t quite as arbitrary as in a lottery.

A third explanation is that artistic work brings nonmonetary, psychological rewards, associated with autonomy, community, the possibility of self-actualisation, and potentially high degrees of recognition, even celebrity. McRobbie explores the political implications of such views of work, when she writes about the way that the ideal of self-expressive work is mediated by new rhetorics of mobility and success (McRobbie, 2002:101). This has implications, we would claim, the degree to which cultural workers turn to unions for support.

2.2. Working hours

According to Mark Banks (2007:36), being a flexible worker in the cultural industries: ‘essentially means that whatever is required to support commercial interests. It increasingly requires working longer or unsocial hours, taking on-board additional responsibilities, relocating according to company demands and certainly committing oneself to the commercial imperatives of the firm over and above new working relationships...’

With regard to the television industry, Saundry et al. state that ‘inexperienced workers, who have been on sequential, rolling short-term contracts with a regional factual company found the political implications of such views of work, when she writes about the way that the ideal of self-expressive work is mediated by new rhetorics of mobility and success (McRobbie, 2002:101). This has implications, we would claim, the degree to which cultural workers turn to unions for support.

2.3. Unions

What role can unions play in countering the problems of pay and working hours discussed above? As an official of the main UK broadcasting union (BECTU - the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph & Theatre Union) put it, ‘freelances arguably have more need of union support than do permanently employed workers’ (Saundry et al., 2007:182). Though this may be the case, the uncertain nature of freelance work and worries about where next short-term contract will come from means that unions are highly valued by many of the next short-term contract workers. This was borne out in the interviews with music industry workers, none of whom spoke about the role of unions in the organisation, conditions or experience of their work.

...
it ‘difficult to go up to a production manager and say “I want that amount of money”’. His concern is that the going for the BECTU rate (you quickly price yourself out of the market and the company would find themselves a new camera operator whose wage is 2% below the BECTU rate for the 90th week. He believes that it would not be for another 20 years of working in the industry as a cameraman that his ‘self-worth’ would have risen to the point that he will have the confidence to negotiate his pay with production managers. No wonder then that one young documentary producer (interview 24) remarked ‘if there’s one place that should be unionised it’s the TV industry. The exploitation is pretty severe’. Yet it was recently estimated that only one-third of UK freelances are members of the broadcasting union BECTU (Carlyon, 2006:22).

Similar stories come from the magazine industry, like the audio-visual industries, was once heavily unionised. In a discussion of the impact of union derecognition in magazine publishing companies Gall (1997:157 – 158) posits there is a distinct correlation between derecognition and increasing incidence of lower starting rates, longer working weeks, the removal of overtime pay and various allowances, and reduction in holiday pay and redundancy pay.

Those most affected have been ‘newly recruited full-time permanent staff, freelancers and casualties – because their terms are far easier to vary and worsen because of their relatively greater insecurity’ (Gall, 1997:158). One key issue for freelancers is their rate of pay per word. The NUJ (National Union of Journalists) promotes minimum rates but some of the freelances we spoke to were not aware what these were. ‘The business is quite, but I can’t remember what it is. It’s a minimum rate and it’s really monosyllabic. It’s something like 240 pounds for 1,000 words. Not much. Unless it’s like 240 pounds for 1,000 words. Not much. Unless it’s 240 pounds for 1,000 words. Not much. Unless it’s’ (Interview 41, SPring 2011). And it is not just rates that has to be paid for. As Ekinsmyth (2002:239) reminds us ‘freelances are responsible for their own development and training, pensions and social security; and home-working freelances are additionally responsible for their capital equipment, their accommodation, lighting and heating’.

Cultural workers seem torn over the precariousness of their work – bemoaning the mental and emotional states produced, but also resigned to insecurity, and prepared to speak of it as necessary and even desirable.

### 3. Insecurity and uncertainty

According to Murdock (2003:31) moves in the cultural industries ‘toward outsourcing production, relying more on freelance labour, and assembling teams on a project-by-project basis, have combined to make careers in the cultural industries less secure and predictable’.

Researchers have noted how in television, for example, changes in regulation and developments in technology have contributed to ‘a sense of uncertainty’ for television workers since the 1980s and that these workers ‘find uncertainty a problem; they dislike it and it causes stress for the majority’ (Dex et al., 2000:283). Murdock also notes the ‘growing uncertainty concerns on centres about gaps in employment. Given the short-term nature of most contracts, new work is constantly being sought and working is restless, even during times of employment, ‘in order to sustain sufficient employment and to maintain career progress’ (Paterson, 2001:457). For Neff et al. (2005:319), the cultural industries are ‘built on working freelances are additionally responsible for their capital equipment, their accommodation, lighting and heating’.

Cultural workers seem torn over the precariousness of their work – bemoaning the mental and emotional states produced, but also resigned to insecurity, and prepared to speak of it as necessary and even desirable.
positive side of my relationship between doing other types of work in music was always that sense of I didn't really have to be bonded to that gig and [without the teaching] I'd be forced to do that.' (Interview 63) Another jazz musician told us that 'if you don't mind a bit of risk in your life you do a certain kind of work' and that 'a stable social life you do another kind of job' (Interview 10). But the 'risk' she refers to is not always sustainable. In television, for example, a factual producer reported that 'a few people have left because they found it... just too uncertain.' (Interview 21). And as another producer suggested 'with telly it's never you work, you always get to be thinking about what else you might do.' (Interview 52).

4. Socialising, networking and isolation

In this next section, we explore the ambivalence of the sociability of cultural production. Workers discussed in detail the rituals of socialising with their colleagues but questions were raised as to the blurring of boundaries between socialising for pleasure and networking for work. Also, even with the emphasis on regular socialising and networking in these industries, a number of workers reported feeling isolated from both colleagues and their profession.

4.1. Socialising and networking

In all the industries we studied, there was a strong sense that the contacts which eventually lead to creative work revolve around sociability. For example, in many companies there was a ritual of going to the pub on a Friday night after work or, in the magazine industry, to 'celebrate' going to press. Nixon and Crowe (2004:137-139) describe a culture of hedonism in magazine publishing and the advertising industry noting that 'it was drinking with colleagues after work in the local pub on Friday nights, as well as frequently in the week, that formed a more regular social ritual for both sets of media practitioners'. This was confirmed in our research. A reviews editor for a music magazine reports that: 'after we go to press we go out for a pint and to me and to the art director that's really important... because the last week is all stress and panic and adrenaline going, you just really want to go and have a pint or two, a glass of wine, two glasses of wine, go home on the bus.' (Interview 30)

And such social events often bring people together from different parts of the same company, such as creative and marketing personnel: 'If you are working with the editorial team and they are going to the pub on a Friday night, you are naturally going to go with them because you are part of a team.' (Interview 47, men's magazine manager)

For those who are less inclined to such forms of sociability, however, this emphasis on post-work bonding is a problem. For example, a music producer explained himself as 'not a sociable' (Interview 59, drama producer) and while recognising the importance of networking and socialising with industry colleagues prefer not to engage in the pub culture. But not identifying as a 'pub person' can be a problem as this camera operator explained:

"You see, I'm not a pub man, and I think there are lots of cameramen or lots of crew who are pub people, and I've never really been part of that scene. As a result, I'm very much excluded from a big area of the business, but that's a choice I've made about how I wanted to be and how I wanted to work." (Interview 63)

By making that choice this manager feels he is excluded from certain powerful cliques that have developed around the scene and not belonging to these means 'you don't get a look in': 'So if I were to take a new band to a label, I wouldn't really know where to begin at this point because I'm not really part of all those scenes.' (Interview 63). But on the other hand he feels that he is not limited by this exclusion 'because ultimately if they are interested in something they will find you'. There were also questions of work-life balance to take into account: 'I'd rather be at home with my wife and kids than out getting drunk with a bunch of people who pretty much like, chashing a deal that I didn't believe was right for the band.' (Interview 63).

Even in less 'glamorous' occupations such as trade magazine journalism, the expectation to socialise was strong. A junior reporter (Interview 44) described the visits to the pub as 'an extension of work hours' and said that often 'talk can revolve around work' which can be frustrating on days where 'you want to switch off' but, she says, 'it's actually genuinely fun as well'. Here again we see the blurring of pleasure and obligation, freedom and constraint. The blurring of networking and socialising means it becomes very difficult to maintain a boundary around working life. One series producer in the factual programming genre said that although he would like to keep his work and 'private life' separate, 'the nature of the job' encourages you to 'bleed your work into your personal life, because that's how you build contacts, how you get jobs...'. (Interview 52).

As one music reviews editor (Interview 30) put it, networking is 'important for the freelance part of the job'. But although it tends to happen outside of work hours it isn't necessarily pleasurable because 'lots of people are never off so you can't relax and socialise with them.' 'Never off': all hours of work hours. This was the case not only for those working in the music industry, including music journalists, socialising with colleagues and their profession but questions were raised as to the blurring of boundaries between socialising for pleasure and networking for work. Also, even with the emphasis on regular socialising and networking in these industries, a number of workers reported feeling isolated from both colleagues and their profession. In the music industry, says this writer, networking is implicit and covert. 'People just being friendly with each other, just having a drink and being casual' is networking masquerading as socialising. 'You are basically being friendly under the guise of networking... it's like an unspoken thing where people are being friendly and being friends and not trying to network with each other to get out of work. At the end of it if you are kind of saying 'do you want to do this?' or something.' (Interview 4)

We are describing 'work worlds' which in many respects seem to conform to Andreas Wittel's depiction of a new 'network sociality' on the basis of his observations of new media workers in London, characterised by many of the features of individualization in modern societies, such as high degrees of mobility and increasing 'choices' about relationships; but also, as Wittel points out, intense but fleeting contact between people, and an assimilation of work and play (though we are not sure that this will become 'the paradigmatic social form of late capitalism', as Wittel (2001:71) speculates). Moreover, we found evidence of many relationships that went beyond the circle of work colleagues, and the difficulty of separating which creative work is carried out can also lead to friendships that can enable workers to cope with the insecurity and precariousness of creative work. Take this documentary producer's description of the friendship he has developed with a fellow producer: 'We're very close friends and we don't get together to talk about work anymore. We usually talk about wine. He's a great wine expert. But I'm very close friends with [him] because we've worked together and we've been driving through the night, we've ended up in huge difficulties, and it's an interesting thing about this process that when you've been really up against it in a really bad situation, it might be a violent situation, it might be just the plane didn't arrive and you've got to drive 200 miles to the next place and the conditions are cold or difficult, or it might be that you have to turn something around in no time at all. There could be very tough things but you go through these really, really intense emotional experiences, and if the person you are working with is able to match your energy and actual drive or maybe exceed it, then you develop a bond that's been seen through some powerful experience.' (Interview 37)

4.2. Work-life balance

Our interviewees, then, reported many ambivalent experiences of the intense sociability of cultural work. This was the case not only for those working as part of culture-making organisations, but also for freelancers and short-term workers who did not need to maintain contacts. But many freelancers also reported a strong sense of isolation. For one of the music writers we spoke to one of the hardest things about being a freelancer is the isolation: 'you don't talk to anyone and you don't see anyone.' (Interview 46). This can be 'crippling' as it has a powerful impact on motivation: 'I'm very different day sometimes, even when I've got things to do, [with] very random things... they get me nowhere and it's an interesting thing about this process that when you've been really up against it in a really bad situation, it might be a violent situation, it might be just the plane didn't arrive and you've got to drive 200 miles to the next place and the conditions are cold or difficult, or it might be that you have to turn something around in no time at all. There could be very tough things but you go through these really, really intense emotional experiences, and if the person you are working with is able to match your energy and actual drive or maybe exceed it, then you develop a bond that's been seen through some powerful experience.' (Interview 37)

"I am a born worrier, which probably means I'm not the best person to be a freelance. I get a bit freaked out when the work is coming from, I'm concerned about where the work is going, whether my career path has any direction, and it's quite difficult when you are isolated to get re-assurances because you can't get other people. You look at other people and think 'how come you've got all that work, where are mine?'" (Interview 46)

The music writer we quoted earlier (Section 3), who referred to his work as involving 'a very complicated version of freedom', was referring to the fact that he didn't have to 'commute or work in an open plan office or deal with colleagues' (Interview 4). But the temptation was to take this freedom too far. He says: "I can write my copy in my pants if I want to but at
some workers highly valued the freedom purportedly offered by the cultural industries, as our title suggests this freedom is complicated because it involves a very strong sense of ambivalence for many workers. Pleasure and obligation becomes blurred in a highly challenging way. Another area in which ambivalence was strongly manifest was the requirement for socialisation and network. There is a very strong culture of hedonism associated with increased creative work and this brought with it burdens for those not inclined to the dominant forms of sociality. The evidence we present above in Section 4 suggests that this has age and ethnic dimensions, though this needs exploring more in future research (as do gender dimensions). Conversely – or perhaps linked to that fact – many workers reported experiences of isolation. Against this, however, other workers emphasised the very real friendships formed in cultural work.

Here, then, in reporting on the aspects of our study related to working conditions and experiences, our emphasis has been on the way that our results, in combination with previous related work, offer support for the analysis of problems and ambivalences identified by writers such as Banks, McRobbie, Ross and Urwin. Of course, such ambivalent experiences may seem delightful compared with some of the brutal conditions faced by workers across the world, including the world’s wealthiest economies (see Ehrenreich, 2001). But brilliant journalistic exploration of the conditions faced by maids, shop assistants, waitresses and other workers in the USA. The issue becomes not isolation from one’s profession, but a sense of alienation can occur when spending so much time with a production team; and here the links to self-exploitation are apparent again: ‘During the productions, [...] it’s impossible to make arrangements in terms of seeing people. I think ultimately your friends get a bit fed up of you never turning up, and so you end up not bothering to ring them up. Or you are so knackered when you finish the day you want to come back and chill out anyway really, rather than running off down the pub. So, I think there is some alienating aspect to the lifestyle, which means you tend to spend more time with the people that you work with because they understand .’

Some young men’s magazine writers (Interview 28) rent a desk in the office of a design agency which is located in a regional ‘creative industries’ precinct. But while the space which an office space can help to reduce isolation, workers can still feel removed from others in the same profession. As a music writer emphasised: ‘It’s the same with all magazines; I’ve never met anyone from others in the same profession. As a music writer you feel quite removed from the production team; and here the links to self-exploitation are apparent again:

‘It’s the same with all magazines; I’ve never met anyone from others in the same profession. As a music writer you feel quite removed from the production team; and here the links to self-exploitation are apparent again:’ (Interview 2)

...