



## **The new cultural economy, the artist and the social configuration of autonomy**

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### **Introduction**

**M**any recent commentators have identified the general features of a new economy within capitalism (Leadbetter, 1998; Kelly, 1999; Rifkin, 2000). At the most general level, this new economy can be identified as being increasingly global; increasingly about intangibles such as knowledge, information, images and fantasies; and increasingly decentralised, and characterised by networks and flexibility. Hodgson (1999) identifies changes in working practices and contractual relationships between employers and employees as a key facet of these general economic changes, which he sees as potentially leading to very different economic futures. It is clear that certain aspects of the cultural sector exhibit changed working practices and relations similar to those outlined by Hodgson, and that this new economy differs markedly from many other industrial sectors (Leadbetter, 1998; Leadbetter & Oakley, 1999; Heartfield, 2000; Howkin, 2001; Ellmeier, 2002; Florida, 2002). Within the cultural sector there is already evidence of the emergence of different economic futures, in micro-level zones of autonomy characterised by a work-life nexus, or 'creative ecologies'. The social configuration of such zones of autonomy in civil society is multi-layered, and has significant implications for radical social and economic policy.

There are three basic elements to our analysis in this article. First, we explore some of the conceptual and methodological issues raised by the emergence of the new economy. We argue that the new economy gives rise to significant questions regarding the subjective meanings, values and objectives that artists and other creative producers



bring to a world in which traditional boundaries between work and life have broken down. We suggest that orthodox economics—with its narrow focus on the motivations of ‘economic man’, operating in an environment of abstract markets in which social relations are reduced to price signals—is ill-equipped to analyse culturally-embedded economies. We argue that this creates a significant blind-spot in orthodox economics, which in turn leads to a fundamental undervaluation of the contribution made by the new economy’s work-life nexus to general economic welfare, the quality of life and social wellbeing.

Secondly, we examine the nature and cultural location of the artistic work that often develops within informal creative communities. These social, cultural and economic interactions are exemplars of the transformations in work and social life associated with the new economy. Within these creative communities, there is often a micro-and mezz-level expression of the radically different, socially- and culturally-embedded forms of economic motivation and exchange. At the micro level, we identify and examine the emergence of a relatively autonomous work-life nexus, which we define as ‘creative ecology’. We argue that this, in turn, gives rise to a new socio-economic resource at the mezzo level—namely, a form of social capital which we label the ‘cultural commons’.

Finally, we reflect on the precarious nature of the spaces for autonomy opened up by the new economy, given the wider structural context in which an orthodox economic rationality is imposed by the social dominance of capital and the imperatives of accumulation. Taking into account Andre Gorz’s critical analysis of the contradictory nature of the new economy under capitalism, we foreground the need for a politics of autonomy and macro-level policy interventions—governance for autonomy—to support emerging autonomous micro spaces within artistic communities.

### **1. The new economy, culture, and the poverty of orthodox economics**

The transformation of economic relations identified in the literature of the new economy is an analytical starting point. In highlighting the nature of artistic work as an



example of expanded work autonomy within this new economic context, recent research that has sought to examine the conceptual limitations of orthodox economics is informative, since it signals ways in which the 'economic' and the 'cultural' can be brought closer together. In this context, Ray and Sayers (1999) and Du Gay and Pryke (2002) have discussed the 'cultural turn' in economics, highlighting its effects on the study of the workplace and on the understanding of formal economic organisations. Such research has contributed to the widespread agreement that formal economic organisations such as firms are as much constellations of cultural practices as purely economic mechanisms. More widely, du Gay argues that the general theory of economic processes has been enhanced by the increased 'cultural' view, whereby cultural meanings are given enhanced explanatory weight. Rather than viewing economic processes as *a priori* givens, as it were, prior to culture, such theory sees economic processes as being 'culturally embedded' (Granovetter, 1985; du Gay & Pryke, 2002). In this way, the normal priorities and imperatives of capitalist economy are potentially reversed, so that economic processes are to a significant degree subordinated to wider social and cultural imperatives. Hence, du Gay has highlighted the growing recognition of the very notion of 'the economy' as a particular, culturally-constructed discourse (Miller & Rose, 1990), which requires a cultural account in order to develop an adequate self-reflexivity.

Related to this general trajectory, Wilkinson (1997) has mapped the genesis of some aspects of what he calls a 'new paradigm for economic analysis'. His focus is on 'non-standard economic traditions' that emphasise an inter-disciplinarity that takes its cues from other branches of the social sciences. In particular, Wilkinson highlights developments within economic analysis that favour an interpretative approach, and a more micro-level focus upon the meanings and motivations of economic action, such as Callon and Latour's actor-network analysis. This is germane for our analysis in that it highlights the socio-cultural meanings behind the economic actions involved in artistic production, such as 'trust' and 'the gift' (du Gay and Pryke, 2002; Fukuyama, 1995), over and above base economic motivations of profit and utility maximisation. This contrasts with the inherent lack of wider cultural meanings in the purely formal connections emphasised in orthodox economics



between abstract individuals ‘interacting’ in the necessarily anonymous and amoral market ‘catallaxy’, which define relationships within the increasingly open and international economy of contemporary global capitalism (Hayek, 1979: 107-132).

In terms of research strategy, it signals a re-focus onto wider conceptions of what constitutes the ‘economic’, and an increased emphasis upon the more emotive and moral aspects of economic relations and cultural meanings that have contributed to a ‘subtle imbrication’ between economic processes, on the one hand, and cultural meanings on the other (du Gay, 1997). For instance, du Gay and Pryke (2002) refer to ‘economically relevant activity’, which is simultaneously economic but more than merely economic, and which occurs within an alternative ‘pattern’ of economic interaction.

Such economically-relevant activity only makes sense for an analysis of the economy as a whole in the context of particular cultural values, purposes and aims. What this suggests to du Gay et al. is the need for the development of an understanding of economics *as culture*, which focuses upon the ‘practical ways in which “economically relevant activity” is performed and enacted’ (du Gay & Pryke, 2002: 5), and which is centred on the micro-activities of specific economic actors within specific cultural and economic contexts.

In a critique of economics that, like Callon and Latour’s, advocates a reorientation in economic analysis to give greater priority to the wider cultural meanings actors bring to economic relationships, Paul Ormerod (1998) has made the point that conventional economics too often operates in a rather mechanistic way, which neglects the specificity of contexts. He contrasts this with a more organic approach that takes note of the way people interact and exert a mutual influence upon each other. He advocates that economies be seen as ‘living organisms’: ‘Individuals do not act in isolation, but affect each other in complex ways’ (Ormerod, 1998: x).

Such a focus on the non-economic motivations that bring individuals into productive social relationships is important, not least because it exposes the limitations inherent in orthodox economics’s attempts at measuring the overall welfare effect of economic activity. Such measures are purely output-based, biased towards quantification, and neglect the significance of the (inter)subjective meanings that individuals and groups bring to production and exchange relationships.



An example of the greater richness of a more culturally-embedded economic analysis, in measuring the overall welfare effect of productive activity, has been provided by Perelman (2000). In discussing the paucity of orthodox economic rationalism, he has pointed to the potential of 'passionate labour' for increased productive activity in pleasurable consort with others. Likewise, Madden (2001) has argued that economic studies of culture need to develop a wider research agenda in order to involve its 'welfare-enhancing' impact; the 'enjoyment, appreciation, and human capital of participants ... in other words [its] cultural impact' (Madden 2001).

## **2. The artistic labour, creative ecology and the cultural commons**

### *The new economy, micro-relations and creative ecology*

There is a fundamental distinction between artistic work—conceived as an expression of one's creative capacity through self-determined labour—and managed 'creativity', reduced to alienated work within orthodox capitalist relations of production. Managed creativity, which is a characteristic of formal employment within the 'creative industries', routinely proceeds through a separation of creative conception from its execution. The subsequent reduction of scope for artistic autonomy parallels the 'deskilling' that such a separation brings. Artistic labour is inherently linked to autonomy and self-determination, if it is to be a real and genuine expression of creative labour power.

However, the distinction between the managed and the self-determined is thrown into sharper relief when one considers that artistic labour often occurs within communities of similarly independent artists, working within radically new, relatively self-determined informal networks and mutual support systems. These independent artistic networks are composed of freelancers, the temporarily employed, sole traders and micro-businesses, and those who occupy a fluid position in relation to formal cultural economy, organisations and jobs. The mutuality, informality, fluidity and continual cultural feedback at the heart of these artistic communities suggests that they are better understood as ecologies of interdependence, rather than as formal economic structures. These ecology relationships are intermittent, irregular and informal,



and tend not to be based on contractual agreements, although more formal economic relationships also exist within the sector. It is estimated that these 'independents' account for between 20-30 per cent of the creative industries as a whole. Research on these independent networks supports the general picture outlined above, of a new cultural economy characterised by highly fluid and informally-organised networks of economic relations; different working patterns and forms of exchange that are thoroughly embedded in a range of non-capitalist values and meanings; and an alternative work-life nexus (Shorthose, 2004).

In the absence of more traditional forms of employment relationships, individual artists in these ecologies rely to a significant degree on their own and others' entrepreneurial skills. For example, entrepreneurialism is crucial to the establishment of networks within the sector. These networks enable artistic workers to migrate as necessary between different projects, groups and events. In contrast with the more rigid and fixed structure of traditional forms of corporate employment, such networks are amorphous and transient in nature, and tend to be contingent upon specific times and contexts. In order to support their independent creative projects, many artists have 'portfolio careers', which entail them working on a part-time or contractually-flexible basis in other sectors of the economy, usually in the service sector or in education.

However, over and above economic entrepreneurialism, there is often a culturally-embedded and self-consciously *non-economic* commitment to the re-affirmation of membership of the artistic community. There is, thus, a host of artistic and cultural motivations within the ecology and the wider social and political values it revolves around. These range from professional motivations concerned with community development and educational work, to independence and autonomy in creative and artistic work for its own sake: motivations that are not located within a commercial, market-oriented agenda. Portfolio careers also tend to imply a 'portfolio' of social and cultural values that motivate productive activity.

Such non-economic motivations, coupled with an underlying creative rationale for, and ethic of, the cooperative sharing of resources, regularly leads to collaborators becoming friends as much as professional colleagues. Thus, another crucial feature of artistic labour within the creative



ecology is the tendency for distinctions between interior artistic life, work life, social life and friendship to blur. These tendencies signal a social context for de-alienated labour, as cultural meanings and bonds are intimately intertwined with productive activities. Consciousness of these relationships between artistic labour and life-quality maximisation contrasts with the stricter separation of work and life in much of the capitalist sector, where instrumentalism tends to be the dominant motivation.

As the term suggests, one of the most important features of the creative ecology is its self-sustainability, which in turn reflects its voluntary, cooperative, localised and community-like nature. Such 'eco-cooperation' marks out the creative ecology from the formal and anonymous money-based, commodity economy. It is common to find socio-economic relationships underscored by trust-based, gift and other non-financial exchanges that are, at most, only minimally underpinned by formal economic rationality. The motivations that underpin this ecology routinely transcend traditional economic motivations, since many of the people engaged in mutual artistic labour do so primarily for reasons of group re-affirmation, and a sense of satisfaction gained from the creativity itself, rather than for personal economic gain.

### **Mezzo-level consequences of micro-ecology: The cultural commons**

As noted above, the value of artistic labour is difficult to quantify or measure because of its collective, intangible nature and its independence from formal market exchange, where prices provide an index (however misleading and distorted) of social value. However, clearly the artistic and cultural labour of the creative ecology makes a substantial contribution to the general welfare of society and its communities. Such artistic labour, social reciprocity and trust-based exchange contribute substantially to the quality of life of its producers and consumers. It is the host of positive externalities and (inter)subjective intangibles associated with collective cooperation, collaboration and sharing that constitutes the essence of the social and economic value contributed by the creative ecology. Mutual artistic labour, the independence of collaborative networks and the



creative ecology potentially form a new social resource. In our view, this new collective resource may usefully be labelled the 'creative' or 'cultural commons'. Following Putnam (1991, 2000), the cultural commons can be regarded as a form of 'social capital' that exists at a mezzo-structural level, as a consequence of the flow of the individually *contingent*, yet collectively *constant*, cooperative micro-relations within the creative ecology. It is fundamentally important to an understanding of the radical potential of the new economy since, as a collective resource rooted in voluntary micro-associations in civil society, it exists independently of, and often in opposition to capital, providing a mezzo-level structural defence for autonomous artistic labour, and a politics of autonomy within and beyond the commodified cultural sector.

### **3. Micro-autonomy, capitalist heteronomy and the need for an alternative macro-environment**

#### *Macro constraints on autonomy within the creative ecology*

As highlighted in our brief analysis of the new economy, contemporary economic transformations open up micro-spaces of autonomy. Within the context of the creative ecology, the emergence of a mezzo-level cultural commons helps to defend, reinforce and potentially expand the realm of autonomy for artistic labour. In tandem with the new economy, the cultural commons provides opportunities for both individual self-realisation and life-affirming forms of autonomous collective production and consumption, as well as the gearing of artistic labour towards socially-useful ends unmediated by exchange value. Yet the sphere of autonomy sustained by the cultural commons is at best partial and fragile. It is partial in the sense that the creative ecology represents only a micro sub-sector, surrounded by more commercially-oriented corporate activity. It represents only a micro-alternative to the dominant capitalist 'culture industry' (Adorno, 1991). The creative ecology is thus also fragile. Those engaged in de-alienated artistic labour sustained by the cultural commons may, nevertheless, face structural pressures to commercialise their output. Especially if artistic output is culturally successful, it is likely to face pressure towards the commodification of production, towards engaging in economic relations with the capitalist sector,



and negating the trust-based reciprocity of ecological relationships.

The potential for micro-level autonomy and its further development is always under threat from the heteronomous macro-environment of capitalist forms of economic interaction and organisation of work. Such macro-economic constraints on autonomy are not sufficiently acknowledged by some radical analysts of the new economy. For example, Clive Hamilton argues that the primary, if not the only, constraints on autonomous, self-determined activity in the 'post-affluent' societies of the new 'consumer capitalism' are essentially cultural. They are rooted at the superstructural level in the ideology of consumption. Hamilton maintains that the new economy has provided material relations and conditions conducive to liberation from the compulsion of alienated work for the vast majority of people. For Hamilton, the main problem is that, despite the possibility of autonomy from capital that now exists, many people still *choose* a consumerist 'having mode' of existence over a 'being mode' (Fromm, 2000). This, in his view, constitutes a failure to make the 'psychological leap' by which they might 'decide that they will no longer judge their own worth by the amount they earn and consume' (Hamilton, 2003: 207).

Earlier writers such as Erich Fromm saw the distortion of the human psychology that led people to treat the material world and other humans as mere objects to be possessed, consumed and ultimately destroyed—rather than as subjects with which to mutually and creatively engage—as firmly rooted in the alienating and exploitative social relations of the capitalist mode of *production*, rather than in consumption (Fromm, 2000). Other contemporary radical analysts, notably Andre Gorz, have in turn taken a much more circumscribed view of the new economy, maintaining that its liberatory potential is systematically undermined by the structural conditions of its reproduction under capitalism (Gorz, 1999: 27-54, especially 31-32). Gorz recognises that some relatively privileged creative people, with market power, may be able to successfully negotiate trade-offs between self-determination and commercialism, by utilising their control over their human capital in order to negotiate part-time or temporary contracts in the commercial spheres, and thereby partially retain control of their time and creative expression. Given structurally-imposed financial pressures, others with similar knowledge assets will become thoroughly absorbed



into the corporate economy (McRobbie, 2002), while those without the requisite human or social capital will suffer social and economic marginalisation. As Gorz notes, the negative side of a 'post-Fordist' new economy is its reliance on a macro socio-economic environment characterised by permanent mass unemployment (Gorz, 1999). According to Gorz, this creates a pervasive economic insecurity that imposes structural pressure on individuals to compete for and maximise the economic returns obtainable from what are often transient opportunities for paid work. Some may experience this new fragmentation of the labour market as a source of positive flexibility: an opportunity to voluntarily 'downshift', and reject life-long work career structures in favour of a creative 'portfolio' career. This may be experienced as enabling more purposive and meaningful 'life narratives', as relative autonomy (albeit temporary) in work, and as a sense of independence in the expression of one's creative labour power. Such positive experiences of work may be integrated into wider life projects that replace heteronomous work as the dominant source of identity and meaning (Hamilton, 2003: 147-173, 205-240).

This is the positive side to the new economy as represented, for example, by the creative ecology as an expanded realm of autonomous artistic labour. For many others, however, the expansion of part-time, casualised and unskilled work against a backdrop of permanent mass under-employment will be experienced as creating transient moments of economic compulsion, in life narratives structurally determined by social and economic exclusion. On this negative side, the new economy operates within a wider context of capitalist economy that necessarily generates and depends upon a macro socio-economic environment which, at best, provides for workers a contradictory environment of 'autonomy' within heteronomy. Thus, while the creative ecology's production of cultural commons provides some defence for autonomous artistic labour, providing artists with a new exit-route from the heteronomy of the culture industry, the pressure to succumb to commodification created by economic insecurity is profound, and structurally imposed (McRobbie, 2002). The independence and lack of formal structure at the heart of the creative ecology may be experienced by some as isolation, and as exclusion from regular work situations in which to express one's creativity. The informality of this



ecology is usually accompanied by continuous financial insecurity, a lack of career structure, lack of social benefits that other industries take for granted and a lack of trade-union organisation. Its blurring of work and social life often brings time pressures, which may be experienced as the feeling of always being at work. Clearly, the potential for autonomy that artistic labour within the creative ecology holds is limited by wider macro-environmental factors.

**An alternative macro-environment: Towards ‘autonomy within autonomy’**

Notwithstanding this, artistic labour within the creative ecology may be seen as an exemplar of the wider and potentially radical transformations in the nature of work and social life associated with economic restructuring and the emergence of the new, knowledge-based economy. Our characterisation of the creative ecology suggests the emergence of new, socially valuable collective resources, and indicates the potential for the expansion of new forms of autonomous artistic labour.

**Towards a politics of autonomy**

So what are the political responses and social-economic policy initiatives required in order to facilitate a broad cultural assertion of autonomy, which might challenge the currently dominant imperatives of capitalist heteronomy and its destructive impact on socially-orientated, independent creative production, convivial forms of social interaction, and economic forms of association based on trust and mutuality? As a starting point, there is a need for the further development of a *politics of autonomy* or, to use Hamilton’s term, a ‘politics of downshifting’ (Hamilton, 2003: 207). This he defines as ‘the entrenchment within popular culture, public and private institutions and, ultimately, government of a predisposition to promote the quality of social and individual life rather than surrendering to the demands of the market’ (Hamilton, 2003: 207-208). As Hamilton notes, such a politics of autonomy finds a natural home—and is already



evident—in much of the new anti-capitalism politics of contemporary social movements in civil society. Thus, for example, an explicit politics of autonomy from capital underscores the philosophy of the *No Logo* campaign, and many of the diverse groupings within the anti-globalisation movement (Klein, 2000).

We would add that a politics of downshifting or autonomy is also inherent in the political subjectivity of the independent creative community. While this community is objectively as vulnerable as any other social community to the structural processes and imperatives of commodification, it is also true that many independent artists bring to their creative activities a set of meanings, norms and values—a political subjectivity—which assumes and recognises the value of autonomy as a basis for authentic forms of production—that is, creative activity undertaken, without economic imperative, for its own sake or for wider (non-economic) social purposes. Understood in this way, artistic consciousness tends to be inherently opposed to, resistant to and subversive of the heteronomy that underscores the commodified social relations of capitalist society. Independent artists recognise that the potencies of artistic creation and intervention are undermined by commercialism and commodification. This is why, for example, creative people who succumb to or actively court corporate sponsorship are regularly vilified as ‘sell-outs’, whose integrity as members of the artistic community is fatally compromised by their willingness to subordinate their creativity to the commercialism of the culture industry.

It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the creative production of the independent sector either explicitly or implicitly commits to a politics of autonomy, and recognises the value of collective resources—such as the collective commons—which offer some independence from capital. A clear example of this is provided by the subversive artistic interventions of contemporary political Situationists, the immediate aim of which often tends to be to highlight the destruction of conviviality and community by commercial capitalism’s hyper-commodification of everyday life (see the contributions in this issue by Barnard and Worth & Kuhling). At other times, the interventions of independent artists are less explicitly political but no less assertive of the value of autonomy. A micro-example is provided by the *Dogma 95* project of Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas



Vinterberg, which has had a considerable impact on the independent filmmaking community. While *Dogma 95* has no obvious or explicit political agenda, nevertheless the democratic DIY filmmaking principles set out in its *Manifesto*—including an insistence on relatively cheap, handheld digital cameras, the minimal use of production technology, the authentic creation of situations and spontaneous performances rather than tightly-scripted, director-determined production, and the non-crediting of directors—are consistent with the cooperative, trust and DIY ethics of creative ecology while, at the same time, they clearly confront the commercialism and promotion of celebrity typical of the obscenely-expensive, corporately-controlled Hollywood ‘spectacular’.

#### **Towards a policy for autonomy**

Such artistic interventions and productions are important in helping to subvert the culture industry ideologically, and thus in developing a political subjectivity that consciously asserts the value of autonomy. However, the politics of autonomy also needs to engage more directly with the state, since it is the state that is by far the most economically and politically powerful resource available for effectively confronting the dominance of the market and competitive economic rationality over self-determined creative social relations. Arguably, Andre Gorz has provided the most insightful analysis of the elements needed to form a coherent, macro-level state policy for autonomy. Gorz has emphasised three structural or institutional changes which, taken together, could provide the foundation for a macro-level ‘paradigm shift’ from economy to ecology (including creative ecology) (see also Lipietz, 1995): a socially co-ordinated policy of reduced working time; a substantial basic income guarantee independent of waged work; and the development of a ‘third sector’ of autonomous, multi-skilled activities and services (see Gorz, 1999).

Both reduced working time and an income guarantee independent of waged work are state policies necessary for the effective removal of what Gorz identifies as the structural economic constraints on the new economies’ liberatory potential, as discussed above.

Reduced working time, along with the democratic redistribution of available high-quality work opportunities, would provide already-employed creative people with more free time in which to pursue their own and collective creative projects in the independent sector, while it would also offer new opportunities for those currently marginalised to enter the creative sector, and develop their skills in high-quality paid employment. Buttressed by a guaranteed income independent of formal employment in the capitalist sector, such a policy would provide for the expansion of the 'space' available for creative autonomy, while at the same time protecting and embedding the sphere of autonomy, by removing the economic insecurity that draws people into the commodified sphere of economic rationality under the conditions of the waged-based society. Specifically in relation to the independent creative sector focused on in this article, social policies of reduced working time and an independent income guarantee would provide a state-resourced macro-level support framework, to reinforce the mezzo-level resource of the cultural commons generated by the micro-social interactions of creative ecology.

Finally, Gorz argues for the state-assisted development of a 'third sector' of autonomous 'multi-activity'. The state's role would be to help provide communities with the physical and skill resources needed to independently develop autonomous, creative activity, so as to enable communities to effectively resist the commodification of production and consumption by the capitalist sector (Gorz 1999: 72-80, 100-111). Some third-sector policies would be infrastructural, aimed at providing communities with the physical resources needed for the development of multi-skilled creative activities. Important here would be the provision of convivial spaces: for example, the development and/or sponsorship of cultural quarters in urban environments. Other third-sector policies would be focused on education and the provision of multiple skills. Again, the underlying objective of government policy would be to build on, defend and reinforce existing civil society-based micro-spaces of autonomy, typified by the creative ecology of the independent cultural sector, but evident also in other community-level 'micro-experiments' such as Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS).

Like reduced working time and basic income guarantee policies, third-sector policies would involve a radical



reorientation of existing state provisions, especially in relation to education and training, away from the imperatives and values of economic rationality and towards a more open-ended concern with human wellbeing and the quality of life. For example, training and education policies, which—as in the case of current Labour government policy—are narrowly aimed at increasing market-based employability and thereby reducing unemployment, would be guided much more by an ethic of creative autonomy for its own sake. This ethic would recognise the social value of more open-ended education and creative learning, aimed at enabling individuals to develop their multiple creative capacities, and would reject the imposition of economic imperatives on learning which, for example, are currently often imposed on unemployed people undertaking government-sponsored job-training schemes, leaving individuals free to autonomously determine for themselves what skills they wish to acquire and how best to deploy them in terms of socially-useful and socially-productive activities. Thus third-sector policy aimed at facilitating autonomy would abandon the gearing of education and training towards waged employment.

### **Conclusion**

Social and economic transformations associated with the emergence of the new economy have opened up possibilities for wider, radical transformations, and for new forms of state-level policy intervention. The radical potential of the new economy lies in its opening-up of new spaces of autonomy from capital. This article has attempted to analyse and map the social configuration of autonomy associated with artistic labour, and the forms of social and economic interaction that are embodied therein. These new forms of social and economic interaction give rise to contingent structures of autonomy—the creative ecology and the cultural commons, in this case study—which are examples of the more widespread forms of ‘social capital’ networks (Putnam, 1991, 2000) that have emerged as a consequence of the relative disintegration of capitalist wage and property relations in some sectors of advanced, post-work economies. We have argued that if the new economy is to facilitate more

fundamental social transformations towards general liberation from capital, then a further configuration of autonomy must occur at the macro level of state social and economic policy. The work of Andre Gorz has, to some extent, shown the way forward, highlighting many of the policy interventions required in the construction of such a radical form of governance for autonomy. The living practices of artistic labour found within creative communities —along with other micro-experiments in alternative ways of living, being and interacting that transcend the denuded version of ourselves reflected back at us by capitalist culture —also express this creative potential. As Gorz has said, ‘What is essential is not to define a new coherent political scheme, but to suggest a new imaginative attitude, one that will be radical and subversive, by which alone we will be able to change the logic of our development’ (Gorz 1983: 62).

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