Hope Labour Revisited: Post-socialist Creative Workers and Their Methods of Hope

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Introduction

Creative work has been celebrated with 'star struck optimism' (Pratt, 2011, p. 128). A grand, utopian narrative promulgated in policy documents, media accounts, and management textbooks has jargonised creative work as a harbinger of future work: cool, hip, fun, self-realising, autonomous jobs-nirvanas *promising* 'pay for play' and 'payment for doing what you love' (Gill, 2002; McRobbie, 1998; Ross, 2003; Taylor & Littleton, 2012). This grand utopian narrative has fuelled desires for a creative job (Alacovska, 2013). Creative work has thus become a magnet for flocks of 'hopefuls'—a multitude of passionate 'wannabes' enthusiastically disposing of their free labour in the *hope* of attaining their (inevitably scarce) 'dream job' in the future (Menger, 1999).

Indeed, what has most notoriously perplexed researchers into creative work is the disproportionate number of people (variously dubbed 'flocks', 'fish tanks', 'reservoirs of labour', etc.; see Hesmondhalgh,

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2002) seeking entry into creative industries despite abounding evidence that labour supply outstrips labour demand. Why do so many *aspire* to become artists when failure, job scarcity, and precarity are the norm? Sociologists have elegantly resolved this conundrum by depicting creative work as inevitably forward-looking, involving a strong temporal orientation: becoming a creative worker entails performing free or discounted labour in the present *on the speculation of future* payment and *in anticipation of future* greater artistic autonomy, fame, and bounties. Unsurprisingly, creative industries are awash with unpaid internships—the uncompensated pathway to an anticipated creative job (Siebert & Wilson, 2013). Habitually, creative work (of both traditional and digital kinds) has been framed essentially as 'hope labour' (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013), 'aspirational labour' (Duffy, 2016), 'provisional labour' (Frenette, 2013), or 'sacrificial labour' (Ross, 2003), whereby a creative workforce is predisposed (often self-exploitatively) to accept non-monetary rewards 'on the promise of deferred bounties' and 'future career rewards' (Ross, 2003, p. 142).

The future-orientation of creative workers has most notably been studied 'at the threshold of a creative career' (Taylor & Littleton, 2012, p. 47), and so it has been approached mainly as a tactical entry strategy into the industry and thus as a relatively unproblematic matter of aspiration, mental gambling, cold calculation, and grandiose phantasy of stardom, all of which nonetheless constitute a powerful disciplining tool in the hands of managers who take advantage of a cheap, aspiring workforce. But, what would desire, ambition, and aspiration look like, we must ask, if they are not seen as disciplining devices that lock aspiring creative workers into an endless future-oriented quest for becoming 'the next big thing'? Should we approach creative workers' future-orientation as merely self-exploitative and grandiose, or as enterprising? In this chapter, I argue for a more nuanced analysis of creative workers' future-orientation. To this end, I elaborate on the notion of hope as the primary operational mechanism and method (Miyazaki, 2004, 2006) employed by creative workers in adjusting to and building a work–life in highly precarious and contingent creative industries and labour markets. Hope is not here apprehended in its deferrable quality or grandiose intentions; hope is not about a deluding belief in the myth of progress, upward mobility, or future bounties, but

rather about the ordinariness of daily struggles—about the possibility of living a 'sane life' in spite of precarity (Berlant, 2011; Zigon, 2009). The analytical propitiousness of the notion of hope has not yet been fully explored in studies of creative labour. Hope, in itself a vague, elusive, and experiential category, is still not an operational category of social science (Crapanzano, 2003), and therefore sociological studies of creative work substitute hope with a variety of analytical proxies that are traditionally better established in sociology, such as investment (Bourdieu, 1998), projections (Mears, 2012; Neff, 2012), aspiration (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; McRobbie, 1998), or speculation (Menger, 1999).

This chapter, in contrast, makes an argument for hope as a lens through which to understand creative workers' moral attachment to the present contingent conditions of work rather than a postalgic and therefore self-exploitative projection of 'golden future' (Neff, 2012; Ybema, 2004). Drawing on anthropological theories of hope, this chapter refuses to approach a worker's future-orientation merely as a self-delusional, self-commodifying imprisonment in a continual state of becoming, which is, as I show below, the predominant mode in which creative work has been interpreted so far. Instead, this chapter examines how hope provides the minimum necessary propensity to imagine the future, even under conditions of constant adversity (Lindquist, 2006). Striding with this approach to hope and future-orientation, I examine here how creative workers mobilise hope when construing their imaginary professional selves amidst 'the new normal' of work; that is, in times when intermittent, insecure, undercompensated, and casualised work are normalised and stabilised as an inevitable and permanent part of precarious everyday life. This chapter essentially asks how and why creative workers uphold a hopeful attitude to work in spite of deteriorating work conditions and discouraging work experiences. In answering this question, I focus on the meaningful, daily struggles of creative workers rather than on their grandiose fantasies and utopian desires of good, autonomous, and well-paid future creative jobs (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

The chapter is based on some 160 qualitative, in-depth interviews with creative workers in the post-socialist Balkan countries of Macedonia and Albania, including musicians, actors, fashion designers, and new media workers. Post-socialist creative labour is especially pertinent to the

re-examination of hope, since post-socialist creative work is 'doubly insecure' (Primorac, 2006). For, in addition to the precarious and casualised nature of creative labour that has been already theorised, creative work in post-socialism also happens in radically tumultuous and uncertain institutional and societal contexts. These are contexts characterised by a notorious absence of the rule of law, lacking a reliable and well-functioning public sector, with high unemployment rates, flourishing clientelism, and a rudimentary and exploitative private sector. In such places, where economic hardship, precariousness, and institutional dysfunctionality are the natural and ordinary setting, hope is what carries people through the day, since hope makes life liveable while alleviating the constant pressures of daily survival (Berlant, 2011). Expressions of hope are indeed ever more accentuated in times of post-socialist transitional breakdown, adversity, and destitution (Verdery, 1995; Zigon, 2009).

The temporal orientation of creative work: 'Deferred economy', 'aspirations', 'cruel optimism', and 'methods of hope'

Creative work as it is currently conceptualised is essentially work executed on the basis of a promise: a promise of future payment, future employment, future social and economic capital, and future recognition (Duffy, 2016). Aspiring, 'wannabe', and hopeful labourers are genuinely entrepreneurial and enterprising—adopting a calculative attitude and working in the name of a brighter, better, and richer future. Creative work thus entails a strong future temporal orientation.

Bourdieu (1998) had early defined artistic work as a 'deferred economy'. The rules of cultural production presuppose an art-for-art's-sake game that requires the short-term creation of an illusion of disinterestedness in money matters. In the short run, artists deny their own economic interests. They become content with low pay, long and unpaid hours, and dismal working conditions, while garnering social and symbolic capital so as to 'make a name for themselves' through enhanced exposure, prestige, and reputation. Such accumulated symbolic capital is to be converted,

hopefully, on the long run into economic, monetary, capital. As Frenette (2013, p.372) put it, creative work is 'provisional labour'; it is 'temporal, conditional, and ambiguous', oriented towards the prospect of future 'delayed' work and professional success.

Rather than being irrational or foolish agents working for free and aspiring to enter a contingent and competitive marketplace, artists have been found to be 'risk-lovers', often harbouring strong superstitious beliefs in genius, talent, and stardom that help them 'maintain for so long the hope that they will eventually become famous' (Menger, 1999, p. 561). Artists entrepreneurially accept the 'temporary' hardship of over-crowded labour markets in exchange for the *promise* of *future* success. Hence, all artists are gamblers—genuinely hoping to *eventually* hit 'the jackpot in the lottery called creative work' (Menger, 1999, p. 568). The critical sociology of creative labour has identified precisely this deferred economy of creative work as the paramount cause of self-exploitation, burnout, and 'bulimic' work-lives (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; McRobbie, 1998).

As currently presented in creative work studies, hope possesses an instrumental, cognitive, and teleological dimension. The creative work studies' conceptualisation of hope thus entails 'projecting a golden future' or what Ybema (2004, p. 832) calls 'postalgia' (a mirror concept of nostalgia), which inherently presupposes 'a longing for a heavenly future'. Endorsed by policy rhetoric as a radiant model of future work, creative work is forward-looking, infused with optimism and projected positive states in the future. As such, it is linked to the 'aspirational nor-mativity' of contemporary capitalism, encompassing 'an evolving and incoherent cluster of hegemonic promises about the present and future experience of social belonging' (Berlant, 2011, p. 167). This is a projec-tive attachment to something 'yet-to-become' or 'yet-to-occur'—or what Bloch (1986, p. 7) calls the 'Not-Yet' (*Noch-Nicht*); that is, 'expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become'. According to Bloch, the Not-Yet always exists in anticipation of a future momen-tum of exhilaration, good life, and happiness. However, such overconfi-dent attachment to the grand vision and fantasies of the good life—upward mobility, lasting intimacies, and a good stable job—represents a double bind, or what Berlant (2011) calls 'cruel optimism'. Fantasies of the

good life are 'idealising theories and tableaux' about how people and the world 'add up to something' (Berlant, 2011, p. 2)—theories and tableaux which, although neither sustainable nor tenable in present real life, nonetheless convince people to make further affective investments in fantasies of 'the good life', in part so as not to lose the possibility itself of fantasising about it. These postalgic factors account for how people get caught in the daily impasse and suffering of self-destructive jobs. When a job is infused with one's affective narratives, images of coherence and sense of being, then no matter how painful or injurious it may be, the work nonetheless makes it possible to keep imagining a good life, driving people to develop the skills and knowledge needed to adjust to precarious conditions while keeping alive the project of good-life building. 'Cruel optimism' is thus contradictory: both an incentive to actively participate in the building of alternative life-worlds or 'modes of living' and an obstacle to one's flourishing (Berlant, 2011, p. 1). Through this perspective we can say that creative workers develop relations of 'cruel optimism' towards their work: on the one hand, they forge damaging (self-exploitative) relations with 'compromised conditions of possibilities' and unsustainable 'clusters of promises' (Berlant, 2011, p. 24) about creative work as 'good work' (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011), while on the other hand they persistently and actively nourish and maintain imaginative and resilient relations with their day-to-day work–life in spite of its precariousness.

The critical sociology of creative work has so far judiciously studied one side of this double bind of cruel optimism; that is, the forward-looking abusive attachment to futurity and the utopian fantasies of good work. The projection of a golden, upbeat future, of achieving stardom, wealth, fame, and success—or what Ybema (2004) calls 'postalgia' and Miyazaki (2006) terms an 'economy of dreams'—propels creative workers to invest in their future-oriented, imagined artistic selves while consenting to their own present precarity and contingency. Premised upon an incessant process of *becoming,* or on the normalisation of the Not-Yet, creative work becomes subjugating and (self-)exploitative (Gill & Pratt, 2008; McRobbie, 1998; Neff, 2012; Ross, 2003), much akin to chasing the illusory proverbial pot of gold at the end of a rainbow.

However, sociologists of creative work have tended to neglect the other side of this double bind of hope—the hope that is ordinary, linked to the actual present and not to futurity—hope understood as 'the negotiated sustenance that makes life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly and incoherently' (Berlant, 2011, p. 14). Hope entails more than future-oriented instrumentalism, dream-like optimism, and buoyancy of action. Hope is ultimately an experiential category of being-in-the-world, and hoping is a practice for getting through the despair of the concrete realities of work–life (Zigon, 2009). In this sense, hope also involves a moral calling, a 'strenuous moral project' (Mattingly & Jensen, 2015, p. 38) that presupposes the negotiation of what defines a good life and what it means to be a good worker. In the daily, precarious conditions of work, hope transpires as contradictory: on the one hand, it involves an active redefining of one's career dreams; on the other hand, it induces a sense of passivity and resignation, as well as illusion about divine powers of salvation (Crapanzano, 2003). Anthropologists, however, refuse to accept that hope is passive or illusionary. For the anthropologists of hope, hope is 'an existential aspect of agency'; that is, hope furnishes the capacity to act consciously and morally upon the world 'even under the direst privations' (Lindquist, 2006, pp. 7–8). Accordingly, Miyazaki (2006, pp. 16 and 9) defines hope as 'a method of engagement with the world' and as 'a common operative in all knowledge formation'. Through this prism, hope becomes a method of engagement with a troubled present during 'bad times'. Hope, then, is 'a method of radical temporal reorientation of knowledge', especially in contexts in which uncertainty, turbulence, and rupture are given conditions (Miyazaki, 2004, p. 5). Hope is a modality of moral/ethical engagement with the world and with self-knowledge.

In what follows I provide empirical analysis of some of the 'methods of hope' of post-socialist creative workers, that is, of their modes of hopeful engagement with work-related self-knowledge. In doing so I concentrate on the ways in which creative workers animate hope and maintain a hopeful yet moral attachment to their work, even when evidence abounds of contingency, precarity, and fragile fiscal economies. I further examine how nostalgia, informal economic practices, and progressive social art-based action serve as sources of hope.

Sources of hope: Post-socialist modalities of hopeful engagement

> I desire many things […][1] success with my band, a fully booked festival roster, giving up my steel factory job […]. But, all my desires would become irrelevant if I lose health. Therefore health! The hope is health first, and then everything will fall into place. (35-year-old rap musician, Albania)

Many sociologists of post-socialism have pointed out that transition has incapacitated post-socialist labourers in their ability to plan meaningfully for the future or to self-imagine with confident optimism (Burawoy, Lytkina, & Krotov, 2000). The institutional failure and industrial collapse have aborted workers' sense of initiative and individual enterprise. As a consequence, post-socialist workers have developed a radical faith in 'chance-based miracles'—a paralysing belief in divine powers of salvation (Verdery, 1995, p. 668). Above and beyond a blissful belief in promises of fairy-land miracles, however, the post-socialist condition of hopelessness propagates vernacular (often unimpressive and mundane) types of hope, and this because hope is requisite to enduring the everyday hardships, instability, and hopelessness of post-socialist conditions. Hope in post-socialism is a 'background attitude that allows one to keep going or persevere through one's life' in the face of hopelessness (Zigon, 2009, p. 258). Hope is the urge to live 'sanely' and 'acceptably' in the social world (Zigon, 2009).

Through this prism, post-socialist creative workers' future-orientation has little to do with either 'postalgia' or 'dream economies' (Miyazaki, 2006; Ybema, 2004). Nor does the future-orientation need to posit fantasies of the 'good life' or 'good work' (Berlant, 2011; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Post-socialist creative workers harbour more mundane aspirations of attaining what are commonly referred to as a 'normal life' and a 'normal job'. (On the salience of 'normal life' hopes among post-socialist workers, see Zigon, 2009 on 'the sane life'; Burawoy et al., 2000.) For post-socialist creative workers, the aspirations for a good job that is autonomous, self-gratifying, and self-expressive (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011) are dwarfed by the nagging daily pressures of economic

hardship, lacking infrastructure, absent public arts subsidies, and capital investment. Hope for a normal life is then modestly associated with the morality of a healthy and uneventful life devoid of daily economic struggles and survival dramas (Zigon, 2009). This was hope that a creative job will provide stability and a steady family life, often non-grandiosely 'imagined' by the informants as 'the possibility to have a one-week sea vacation in the summer' or of 'sipping a glass of wine after work with your partner on the couch while watching TV'. For post-socialist workers, a hopeful outlook on the future entails acknowledgement of the hopelessness of present unbearable conditions. Given the long working days, the juggling of multiple jobs, and low pay, such otherwise unimpressive hopes may indeed represent a dream of 'a better life [...] that might be possible' (Bloch, 1986, p. 1).

The many and heterogeneous objects of hope are irrelevant, however, if we approach hope as a method, as a hopeful engagement with the present. What interests me here is, indeed, what keeps hope in living a normal life alive. To explore that I consider the phenomena of nostalgia, waiting, and the creation of 'spaces of hope' (Mattingly & Jensen, 2015) (passive methods of hope prevalent among an older generation of creative workers), as well as informal economic activities and social-change art practices (more active methods of hope common among a younger generation).

Backward-looking hope: Nostalgia, God's blessing and spa-going

A method of hope typically observable with an older generation of creative workers (above 50) is that of nostalgia—a longing for working practices and work-lives experienced in the old socialist system. Such retrospective utopia should not always be understood as lamenting or glorifying the 'socialist paradise lost' (Velikonja, 2009). Rather, this retroactive reassessment of the past is less an exercise in romanticising and idealising the past than it is an effort to revive past hopes while trying to 'reorient knowledge' towards the possibility of a good life, a safe world, fair working conditions, solidarity, and prosperity (Velikonja, 2009, p. 538) (even if these

possibilities were only imaginatively lived in the past). Nostalgia recuperates hope in the present post-socialist condition through the detour of imaginary memories of a hopeful socialist past. According to Anderson (2014, p. 453), nostalgia represents 'disappointed hope', which provides the method of adjusting to living in conditions that continually defy the possibility of existence of any 'audacious hope' as promised by past ideologies. 'The memories of the future unfulfilled' or nostalgia therefore help creative workers recast their orientation from bold projections of golden future to daily struggles in order to keep going.

However, backward-looking hope has not itself become ideological or progressive. On the contrary, it has rendered hope-fulfilling action delusional: 'hope depends on […] a god, fate, chance, an other for its fulfilment' (Crapanzano, 2003, p. 6). Nostalgia, in this sense of 'resigned hope' (Crapanzano, 2003, p. 27), had its upshot in 'the abeyance of agency' (Miyazaki, 2015)—the capacity to suspend one's agency while delegating responsibility to others (such as God).

Consider the following excerpt from an interview with a low-level fashion designer in her late 50s, conducted while she was having a late-afternoon break in the corporate backyard before continuing her work until midnight with no paid overtime:

> It was better in [a socialist fashion company]. We all went to work with joy. It was friendlier. We all went on workers' holidays on the Adriatic coast. Eh … Now, the pay is low [150–200 EUR], we work late … everything's changed. See there? [She points to a decrepit building behind her]. There was the gynaecological practice where we got free contraception every Friday. A nursery for the kids. A restaurant as well. We had a dentist unit over there [points to the left]. … Now we work in three shifts. The boss calls us mad cows any time we want to go to the toilet. But God will help. Nothing's greater than God. … I hope everything will work out in the end.
>
> Interviewer: What do you do to combat this? Are you a member of a union?
>
> No, not at all. That's such a throwback to the past. That does not exist today. Now is capitalism.

Post-socialist creative workers typically resign themselves to the fact that not much can be done in the present except to hope. They do not merely succumb to fear or despair, however. Despite the 'abeyance of agency', the need to hope—to cherish abstract hope in God's power—is not simply a sign of denial or deceit. Hope possesses restorative power in the midst of embittered everyday work realities, managerial abuse, and overwork. By regularly invoking God's assistance, our informants tried to repair their broken hopes. In this way they expounded the necessity of hope in order to endure, stoically and patiently, the toil of working life 'under capitalism' (Zigon, 2009). Yet their invocation of God may be a manifestation of 'abstract hope' (Crapanzano, 2003, p. 10), hope which, while invoking an ever unreachable and remote horizon of accomplishment, is nonetheless expedient for the pursuit of daily survival. Many workers indeed professed vague yet trustful hope: 'I hope everything will work out in the end'. However, the possibility of a 'concrete' change-inducing agency in the form of unionisation or organised resistance lies outside this hoping horizon. The majority of our informants were not members of any union and commonly regarded unions as anachronistic. Unions constitute another referential and unfulfilled hope of the past—desirable, but incongruous with the present.

Spaces of hope: Working on the self

Outside of the workplace, where any hopes of unionisation and collective action have been cancelled out, post-socialist creative workers create semi-private solidaristic leisure 'spaces of hope' (Mattingly & Jensen, 2015, p. 39). In these spaces, hope—however, miniscule or mundane—is not passively received but 'actively cultivated, practiced' (Mattingly, 2010, p. 4). The above-mentioned fashion designer, like many other female fashion designers interviewed in the Macedonian fashion cluster of Stip, gathered enthusiastically after work in a post-socialist, inexpensive, decrepit, and run-down working-class hot springs spa adjacent to the fashion cluster factories. In communist times, health spas were far removed from today's media-perpetuated attractive images of wellness, wholesome lifestyle, and luxurious consumer choice; instead 'the spa was

both a reward for hard work and was part of an economic rationale of extending the productive life of the worker' (Naraindas & Bastos, 2011, p. 2). Even when the trade unions formerly awarding workers with spa vacation vouchers (hard-work tokens) collapsed, the workers individually preserved spa-going as an essentially self-congratulatory, hope-restoring practice. A seamstress with 30 years of working experience, whom I interviewed at the spa, told me:

> The only thing that keeps me going is this spa. I work hard bent over the machine, go home and make dinner for the kids, and the next thing I do is come here. This is a little time for me. I believe really that the waters here have healing properties. I forget about all my problems here. I get to talk to other seamstresses and share the tribulations. This place eases the pain, and gives hope.

The spa represents an informal yet powerful, gendered space of personal but also social and occupational sociality and solidarity—a sheltered, bounded place of hard-earned comfort. In accordance with Miyazaki's (2015, p. 214) theory of hope, fashion workers carve out 'a space for resting in the midst of a crisis' which restores a new 'hopefulness of a rested body and mind'. Hope becomes an ethical imperative to make seriously disadvantaged and exploitative work-lives habitable, to 'keep going' indeed (Zigon, 2009). Spa-going, as a method of hope, makes otherwise underpaid and disillusioned fashion workers capable of positively embracing failure and enduring managerial harassment.

To prevent hope from morphing into hopelessness, creative workers value meaningful action, practise everyday care for themselves, and actively cultivate hope, or, in Zigon's words (2009, p. 261), pursue 'work on the self'. This focused and meticulous work on one's self also takes the form of intense spirituality and religiosity in specially carved, sacred spaces of hope. Disenchanted with her job at a public theatre in which she was consistently harassed and denied roles on the grounds of her age, a 54-year-old actress whom I interviewed in Skopje found refuge in 'an alternative evangelical congregation', her alternative space of hope ('This is my only island of hope … the rare ray of light'). Many of our interviewees viewed hopeful and restorative work on the self through religious

communities and spaces (such as monasteries and church-run rehab clinics) as a prerequisite for ultimate sublime, authentic, and enhanced artistic performance.

'Waiting for a job': Daydreaming, escapism, and micro-politics

Another method of recuperating hope and reorienting knowledge towards the future is evident in escapist daydreaming and fantasies of fleeing the Balkans. This includes the dream of supplanting the clientelistic and nepotistic nature of creative work in the Balkans with an idealised version of labour in the West. 'Normal jobs' and 'meritocratic work' in which, as one informant put it, 'you succeed because you are good at what you do, not because of your uncle', and where there is 'no interpersonal favour-swapping', are just a few of the discursive idealisations in which the post-socialist creative workers we interviewed enshrined neo-liberal creative work.

While such escapist dreams may fuel the stamina to endure present precarious work conditions, however, they rarely trigger active hope fulfilment. When I followed up my initial interviews a year later, not one of the informants who had been hoping to emigrate to Western Europe had undertaken any concrete hope-fulfilling actions. One unemployed academically trained violinist justified her inaction as follows: 'I am waiting for a job. I have been promised a job at a state-funded symphony orchestra.' 'Waiting for a job' in publicly subsidised cultural institutions is the pervasive mode of forward-looking. It reveals the entrapment of creative workers in an inherited ill-fated hope in state paternalism, which in turn nurtures clientelism. Many creative workers perceive 'waiting' as an inevitable hope-enduring method that entails long-term nudging and sweet-talking of local political party officials into the micro-politics of state-job allocation, as the party officials are in charge of the employment and human resource policies of state cultural institutions. In turn, party officials inveigle unemployed creative workers into posing as alleged political supporters who (often grudgingly) perform at electoral rallies, promotions, and party banquets or feasts.

Amidst a generalised feeling of hopelessness, a creative job in the public sector represents a 'dream job'; and thus capitalising clientelistically on the hopes of creative workers is not difficult. Political parties trade long-hoped-for jobs in state-funded orchestras, opera houses, and theatres in exchange for electoral support. In most of the transitional and subaltern world, workers share a profound 'just waiting' engagement with futurity (Jeffrey, 2010). According to Jeffrey (2010, p. 3), such future-orientation represents a 'timepass', a '[form] of "waiting" wherein people have been incited by powerful institutions to believe in particular visions of the future yet lack the means to realize their aspirations'. In timepass, people read just their hopes by repurposing their actions, knowledge, and time-horizons.

In such prolonged and abusive waiting for *formal employment*, creative workers are neither inert nor completely submissive. While 'waiting', as I will show in the next section, dispossessed creative workers resort to an elaborate assortment of *informal* economic activities by which they reorient their dis-trust in public institutions towards (1) reciprocal trust/hope in interpersonal relations and (2) social practice art.

The flourishing of informal work is the logical outcome of clientelistic and inefficient creative labour institutions, policies, and markets. Hope for a normal life has been recuperated through entrepreneurial informal work practices—through 'getting your own gigs on the side'. As trust in institutions is eroding, interpersonal trust and relations of mutual aid are proliferating. The mutuality of informal economic relations is based entirely on reciprocity; that is, *hope* in future affirmative action—moral obligation and not deflection.

Even when hope proves itself unrealisable or untenable, creative workers still do not lose hope. This is because not-fulfilled hope presupposes that hope is still possible. They replace unfulfilled hope with newly reinvigorated efforts at knowledge reorientation. This is not a repetitive self-deception or self-defeat but a practice of 'enduring hope' (Miyazaki, 2004), whereby the question of temporality (knowledge of the self) is recast as a problem of agency (the practical realisation of the self).

Among post-socialist creative workers, hope has been the oxygen of perseverance and the *spiritus movens*. Hope instils the determination to fight honourably in life, to never give up. 'Hope dies last' is a phrase that

kept recurring in all our conversations with creative workers in the region (see also Zigon, 2009). But hope requires action for its fulfilment—an active engagement with self-knowledge. In its active status, hope influences the disposition to act by breeding trust in interpersonal, collegial, and kinship relations (Raffnsøe, 2013), which in turn recuperates hope, however fleetingly, for progressive politics and social change in general, which Banks (2006) asserts represents the basis of the understanding of creative work as 'moral work'. Next, I briefly examine each of these distinct but interrelated methods of hope.

Hope in action: Informal economic practices, art for social change, and the 'NGO-isation' of creative work

In a context of paralysing systemic conditions—including weak creative labour unions, restricted access to loans, fragile intellectual property protection, corrupted public cultural management, and unreliable welfare protection—post-socialist creative workers revitalise hope in their work through engagement with a wide spectrum of informal labour practices and coping strategies, all of which are deeply embedded in local relational infrastructures (kinship, family, neighbourhoods, and colleagues). The hope-inducing informal labour practices that our informants most commonly referred to in interviews were barter, in-kind payments, favour-swapping, gratuities, and envelope wages. Future work should examine in more detail the multifarious and relational informalities and infrastructures of creative work. Here I would like to briefly elucidate the relationship between informal labour activities and hope.

Many creative workers engage in informal labour practices to 'keep their work' going. Such informal engagements represent 'the only hope' for surviving and persisting in an otherwise unsustainable creative career. In the absence of liquid cash, creative workers maintain work relations through a range of non-monetary exchanges. Many informants confided that they were engaged in chains of repeated barter and favour-swapping, exchanges involving the moral imperatives of trust, fair dealing, personalised ties, and enjoyment, so as to obtain expensive

equipment (such as a guitar) or software packages, to cover expenses for rehearsal space, to settle foreign rights and copyright, or similar. One musician had bartered 'a dog, two pigeons, and a wedding party' in exchange for a guitar. Another musician had his album recorded in an improvised recording studio in exchange for his old car. Favour-swapping was also a common mode of survival; for example, a rock musician playing at a fashion designer's show in order to get 'free clothes'. A new media worker reported having designed a full digital web presence for a travel agency, together with an original logo design; in return, the agency reimbursed him with an 'all-inclusive' sea vacation on the Adriatic coast instead of a pay cheque.

All of these multifarious activities bear witness to workers' hopeful and innovative attempts to stay employable by disentangling creative work from direct money investment and, instead, infusing it in elaborate interpersonal infrastructures. Indeed, the above-mentioned assortment of practices is based on a moral contract—a contract that involves the mutual trust and hope immanent in the temporal dimension of gift-giving. The informal exchanges are based on 'hopeful' relationships of trust immanent in the reciprocal relations of gift-exchange (Miyazaki, 2015; Raffnsøe, 2013). According to Raffnsøe (2013, p. 253), hope is 'to be understood as actively trusting the new and unknown'. To en-*trust* one's work or possessions in the hands of others requires hope that the others will fulfil their deferred obligation and reciprocate. Hope becomes thus a matter of ethical practice and moral obligation (Zigon, 2009). In this sense, hope also leads to redefinition of creative work as 'moral work', work predicated on 'new social and economic relations based on sustainability, mutuality and a sense of moral obligation' (Banks, 2006, p. 462).

Informal labour activities are not simply oriented towards enclosed collegial communities. Rather, creative workers engage hopefully with post-socialist societies at large through socially useful creative work taking place under the auspices of countless non-governmental organisations or NGOs operating in the region. The increased 'NGO-isation' (Stubbs, 2007) of cultural work marked a transition towards the prominence of social change values, which economically but also

morally monopolised 'art-for-art's-sake' values. Creative work thus has become 'an implausible palliative to exclusion and poverty' (McGuigan, 2005, p. 238). Banks (2006, p. 463) also notes that creative work in Manchester more often than not takes on a socially responsible non-governmental form, requiring a hopeful artistic engagement with impoverished locales through 'helping the community' and 'improving the neighbourhood' initiatives.

Yet, for the creative practitioners themselves, art for social change has become a resource for sustaining both their own creative careers and local communities. To this end, artists have refashioned themselves into informal social entrepreneurs. 'Peace coaches', 'ethnic dialogue facilitators', 'same-sex marriage evangelists', and 'transition psychology art therapists' were just a few of the labels with which creative workers hopefully reimagined themselves.

Many informants were actively engaged in pro-bono creative work, mostly in fundraising events to create spaces of hope, mutuality, and help:

> If I am a famous musician or actor and can make two hundred people come to my concert or performance and pay for a ticket, then I can give a humanitarian concert and gather that money needed for that poor sick-child family that cannot afford the expensive medical treatment. We are people. We artists have social responsibility. When our state is nonfunctional, we are obliged to give these people hope.

Following Bloch, Miyazaki (2004, pp. 14–15) argues that to actively hope actually means attempting to change the world. Through the hopeful engagement in progressive social action, creative workers preserve the economic sustainability in their own creative work while cherishing the moral obligation for social change.

Emboldened hope

In a context of institutional malfunctioning and protracted fiscal crisis followed by long-term unemployment—conditions that would normally be paralysing for most people—I have indeed registered some of the most

radical expressions of hope: hopes that not only fuel the quest for a normal or sane life but also rekindle confidence in action for near-utopian social change. Consider the following story.

Martin, a 40-year-old games developer, abandoned a well-paid and secure job in Germany to 'come back home to Macedonia' and set up a game-developing studio. In the course of our conversation, Martin openly decried what he missed of 'the normal life' he used to live abroad, while constantly nourishing a hopeful engagement with present post-socialist conditions by vigilantly adjusting his daily practices and purposefully reorienting his self-knowledge:

> *Martin*: I miss a reliable postal system that will deliver the books I order online and not steal them. Now I order only ebooks or get them through friends in Western Europe. I miss a reliable Internet provider. The connection, and we need superpower, is slow during the day but we come to work during evenings, so it works out somehow … I miss more governmental control over food in supermarkets, but my family and I have now trusted farmers who deliver food directly to us. … I miss also the clean air. It is very polluted here ….
> *Interviewer*: I admire your staunch hope in life! But you cannot do much about the air pollution, can you?
> *Martin*: (Laughs) No no, we can. We have done the research. What causes the pollution is the thousands of old cars on the streets. … We started developing prototypes for cheap sun-powered vehicles. … I really do have faith that our vehicles will see the light of the day and will save the city!

Driven by necessity, shortages, and instability, post-socialist creative workers not only dare to imagine but also inhabit alternative worlds of informal work relations, progressive social art, and utopian development projects, where not everything pertains to market rationality and economic instrumentality. While striving for a future of not only personal enrichment but also a mutually shared eco-conscious, institutionally, and economically stable environment, creative workers frame their work as essentially 'moral work' (Banks, 2006)—work executed in contradistinction to markets and direct monetary value.

Conclusion

This chapter tried to integrate the concept of hope in the theorisation of the temporality of creative work. It by no means sets out to be a well-rounded or complete attempt to tease out the role of hope in creative work; rather, it is an initial step towards the development of a full-blown analysis of hope in the sociology of creative work more generally. The concept of hope is still not an accepted analytical category in sociology, if only because hope points always in a prophetic and subjunctive 'what if' direction of knowledge. Sociologists of creative work, however, should pay more attention to the empirical unfolding of hope, as it is a prominent indigenous, emic concept with which our informants repeatedly refer to their ethical, moral, and everyday projects of being-in-the-world. In cultural geography, Ben Anderson (2006, p. 733) had already convincingly argued that 'thinking through hope touches something that remains elusive to an act of explanation or description', as the focus on hope makes explicit those modes of operation that are so ingrained and taken-for-granted as to become hidden from analytical scrutiny. *Thinking through hope* in creative labour studies promises to alert us to this taken-for-granted, ordinary, and modest, but nonetheless crucial dynamic of working lives in creative industries.

This chapter has resisted the all-too-prevalent sociological reading of hope in creative work as a form of false consciousness in which 'wannabe' creative workers, mesmerised by the promise of future success, pay and fame, fail to detect the present conditions of their own exploitation. While unravelling workers' complacency is no doubt of political importance, close attention to hope as a mode of existential engagement with everyday work and working conditions will allow us to better appreciate the endurance and persistence of creative workers—not least their moral attachment to work above and beyond bold projections of wealth, success, and fame.

Hope and the hopeful behaviour patterns of post-socialist creative workers are of course path-dependent on the socialist past. This is seen, for example, in the way creative workers in the post-socialist Balkans have inherited from the communist era of shortages a valuable skill set for negotiating informal economic relations of favour-swapping and barter

(Burawoy et al., 2000). It is also seen in the impact of the increased post-socialist NGO-isation of civil society (Stubbs, 2007) and in nostalgia for the socialist 'paradise lost' (Velikonja, 2009). Expressions of hope become more evident in times of transitional breakdown and hardship (Verdery, 1995; Zigon, 2009). However, 'wounded' dismissed Western managers giving away hope 'to return to former glories' (Gabriel, Gray, & Goregaokar, 2013, p. 63) and Japanese security traders disenchanted with the 'Big Bang' financial reforms and 'hoping for early retirement' (Miyazaki, 2006, p. 159) have also been found to harbour a more modest hopeful engagement with their professional futures. The category of hope is thus well poised to help elucidate the complexities of work experiences in 'bad times', not only in times of transitional raptures but also in the West, which is currently ailing due to protracted austerity crises, volatile financial markets, increased unemployment, political instabilities, and economic breakdown. When bad times become instituted as 'the new normal' of life and work, then informal and socially proactive economic activities emerge as new spaces of hope. In this sense, the emphasis on workers' hope also revitalises the hope in creative work as a site and arena of 'moral work' (Banks, 2006).

Last, but not least, the focus on hope opens up potentially rich and relatively underexplored directions in creative work studies. The urge of creative workers to create casual spaces of hope and to pursue dedicated work on the self has to be studied in all its psychological complexities, including religiosity, spirituality, and mental health. The multifarious and relational informalities of creative work deserve more sustained attention from research, if only because they represent a renewed hope-driven attachment to otherwise unsustainable creative careers. The increased NGO-isation of creative work (see Lingo & Tepper, 2013 on the growing trend of social practice art in the USA) begs for immediate scholarly attention, since creative workers' hope in common good, community organising, and local social change is susceptible to abuse by international and corporate actors.

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Note

1. Transcription style: … indicates words have been omitted in a sentence, often just the repetition or a word or two; […] indicates a sentence or more has been omitted; [words in brackets] are inserted to clarify meaning.

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