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Chapter 18

‘Essential – Passion for Music’: Affirming, Critiquing and Practicing Passionate Work in Creative Industries

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Abstract

This chapter considers “passion” as an enthusiastic orientation to work within creative worlds: work motivated by intense attachments to the products of work and their conditions of production. Drawing on Luc Boltanski’s pragmatic sociology of critique and justification, the chapter argues that the passionate lens most usefully trains our sights on normative questions: not *what* or *how* – but *why* such work is undertaken. Embedded in research on cultural and creative industries, the contemporary recorded music sector is presented as a “passionate” industry in transformation. Interviews with workers, who both criticize and defend their industry, act as a springboard to explore three possible interpretive approaches: affirmative, critical and pragmatic. Theoretical flexibility is needed to keep “passion” open to future inquiry – particularly regarding inequalities in creative work.

Browsing through each bullet point on the “preferred candidate will demonstrate...” list, I reflect on my experience. A qualification; some event promotion; office work: I consider how to pare these down into basic elements that display a technical, social and personal prowess in the field of music administration. What are the requisite “transferable skills”? Word processing and spreadsheet management. “Meeting deadlines”. “Professionalism”. “Interpersonal skills and relationship development”. “Creative thinking”, “initiative”, “passion for music”...? I wonder, uncomfortably, what is meant by this. Music is my passion, of course – but this music? I’ve never even heard of most of their artists. Do I have the right passion?

Author’s reflection: applying for a job at a major record label, November 2007

Introduction

In 2007, I had completed an eclectic undergraduate degree in music and was on the hunt for work. I was conservatoire-trained in classical piano performance although most of my energy was consumed either in producing electronic music in a small home studio, DJing at and promoting club nights, or otherwise playing weddings and community festivals as part of a Brazilian samba *bateria*. If my spare time was spent making, listening to, reading and talking about music, it had become clear to me that neither teaching, producing nor performing would be my route to career sustainability. Through an office recruitment agency I had secured some temporary work in local government – but music remained my love, as well as the source of any expertise I had to offer: I had the certificate to prove it! I felt the urge to make it (in some way I couldn’t quite articulate) my vocation. And so it was that I found myself applying for jobs I hadn’t previously considered but for which I nonetheless felt qualified: orchestra ‘fixer’; festival planner; indie label production coordinator; talent management; audiobook publishing assistant; licensing administrator. In each interview, I was nonplussed to discover that my degree counted for very little: rather, what was being excavated was my ability to perform a blend of bureaucratic spirit with a passion for music.

For those working, or seeking work, in music the notion that a passion for music is obligatory is ubiquitous: simple common-sense. According to recruitment literature, marketing communications and, crucially, to workers themselves, passion is the “essential” quality that binds together an array of careers and projects. This insight was reached over the course of five years’ work and subsequently four years of research on the corporate music industry world in which I ended up employed. If it verges on the banal, then two points render it more

interesting. First, the ubiquity of passion discourse is set against a backdrop in which recorded music companies, emerging from a period of economic crisis, have become more formal and professionalized. In line with broader policy-led ‘creative industry’ imperatives, they have sought to attract and strategically deploy specific skills and talents. Second, this appears to be the case not just for so-called ‘creatives’ in the music industry but also for the ‘non-creative’ colleagues like myself: administrators, legal executives, systems operators, finance assistants, supply chain managers, technical and support workers of all stripes. In other words, “passion” is a pre-requisite even for those in the more apparently rational(ized) ends of this creative workforce.

This chapter considers such passion in enthusiastic orientations to work within creative worlds: work that is motivated by an intense attachment to and sustained expertise in the product of work and its conditions of production. Passionate work is thus not to be conflated with creative work, nor with similar critical concepts like emotional or affective labor, even if much overlap exists. Drawing on Luc Boltanski’s pragmatic sociology of critique and justification, the chapter argues that the chief contribution of the passionate lens is rather to train our sights on normative questions: of *why* such work is undertaken, rather than *what* work, or *how*. Embedded in research on cultural and creative industries, and a longer history of political economy, the contemporary recorded music sector is presented as a passionate industry in transformation. If passion is often co-opted for promotional ends, I ask how workers appeal to passion to justify their positions and, more importantly, both criticize and defend their industry at a time when it is seen to be under attack. Interviews with workers act as a springboard to explore three possible interpretive approaches: affirmative, critical and pragmatic. Some concluding comments suggest theoretical flexibility is needed to keep ‘passion’ open to future inquiry – particularly regarding inequalities in creative work.

The Problem(s) of Passion

Passion or PR?

What is usually called “the music industry” is an economic construct first and foremost, a piece of hotly contested commercial and policy rhetoric (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007),

often merely a “public relations tactic” (Sterne, 2014, p. 51).¹ Nonetheless, it is also a *cultural* construct, produced, stabilized and altered in partnership with the intense relationships individuals and groups form with particular musical subjects, objects, practices and spaces (Negus, 1995). The tension between the cultural and the economic, passion and PR (or the co-optation of the former by the latter), has intensified with the growth of marketing and corporate communications functions – but especially so at a time of ‘digital disruption’, when the success of new business models and commercial strategies require institutions to establish cultural legitimacy. In a discussion of the performance of musical passion, Long and Barber (2015, p. 143) complain that “the advertisement of emotional investment in the business of music informs ideas of reliability and integrity, even at corporate level”: the latter, they contest – in contrast with the work of songwriters – is self-promotional “rhetoric”.

Major labels have long used institutional aesthetics as a device for attracting musicians, conjuring an image of a natural home for creative types through corporate culture (Negus, 1999, ch. 3) and today’s major label headquarters continue to be lavished in gold discs, music memorabilia and impressive design features. Yet, if the online world fosters the challenge of increased uncertainty, it also affords the opportunities of more visible performances of authentic passion. Websites splash photographs of the more spectacular interiors, while the visuals are accompanied by written and video testimonies from workers, sharing listening recommendations and fashion tips, alongside companies’ active, personable social media accounts. The internal world of these companies has become more visibly curated for external audiences: customers and the public, potential signings and clients; but also (my focus here) those navigating the industry’s labor market.

With particular regard to the latter, given their role as cultural intermediaries, ‘diversity’ is increasingly seen as crucial by music institutions on the grounds that a diverse workforce is required to meet the needs of a diverse field of consumption. As such, persistent inequalities and exclusions have been identified and targeted by corporate social responsibility (CSR)

¹ ‘The music industry’ is a normative designation that does not necessarily reflect the unevenly distributed plurality of economic forms it covers: this chapter’s examples stem from the commercial recorded music industry, which Williamson and Cloonan (2007) note is often misleadingly taken to stand in for the broader ‘music industries’. Nonetheless, the singular designation conveys workers’ own sense of participating in a shared imagined community (see footnote three).

initiatives as part of a broader “business case for diversity” (e.g. UK Music, n.d.).² Insofar as these promotional narratives and CSR commitments form part of companies’ self-presentation, we can view them as a form of the emotive “happy talk” Sara Ahmed (2012, p. 10) finds to be common in diversity initiatives – “a way of telling a happy story of the institution that is at once a story of the institution as happy”. Here, such stories become ‘passion talk’: blending diversity with passion to present connotations of cultural vibrancy, associated with a positive institutional aesthetic and ethic (or brand) that becomes a resource for both marketing and Human Resources (HR) departments (c.f. Ahmed, 2012, pp. 52-53). Of course, the positivity of passion papers over a certain friction. That the music industry should be associated with fame and glamor, alongside a culture of licentious excess and hedonism, is a source of moral concern as well as enduring appeal: a dark side to creative work instituting a tension that structures the field.

My argument in this chapter is that we need to move beyond a simplistic dichotomy between genuine, authentic creative passion and the inauthentic manipulations of commercial rhetoric, which does not necessarily speak to the experience of those working in the interstices of complex economic realities. I focus on (not necessarily creative) work within creative industries to push at its contradictions. Empty ‘passion talk’ is indeed common but this does not exhaust the qualitative experiences of these worlds. We need closer readings of passionate work among the assorted groups, networks, industries and institutions that make up what Georgina Born calls “musical capitalism”: taking, that is, an “anti-essentialist” view of the economic system as open and dynamic, rather than closed and “monolithic”; and asking how this system is mediated by music in various ways that produce “specific properties and potentialities linked to music’s socio-material qualities” (Born 2013, p.51).³

² Cultural labor market inequalities remain (Oakley and O’Brien, 2016) and a number of surveys point to statistical imbalances across gender and ethnicity in music, particularly amongst older workers and more senior roles (e.g. CC Skills, 2011). ‘Passion’, with its associated lexicon of fiery intensity, commitment, resilience, and even aggression, is hardly innocent in reproducing such inequalities discursively, particularly in relation to gender.

³ With the term “musical capitalism”, Born (2013) signals the deep imbrication of culture with the social-institutional spheres in which it is produced and reproduced – equally present for other (non-capitalist) forms of economic organization, such as public subsidy, patronage or small-scale market exchange. Resonating with this chapter’s argument, she seeks to avoid deterministic portrayals of musical practice: as wholly swallowed up and exploited by ‘capitalism’ as a monolithic force; or, alternatively, one in which music’s generative creativity somehow necessarily resists, escapes or prefigures such a force. Instead, she argues for the need to empirically trace specific material mediations of (a passion for) music in close-knit social practices, and larger imagined communities, identity formations, and institutions (c.f. Born 2011, p. 378).

Put simply, for workers under musical capitalism, “music matters”: it matters in the sense that its generalized circulation through societies does not simply provide pleasant aesthetic wallpaper for routine drudgery (in the dreary, caricatured pseudo-Adornian critique of industrial culture) but contributes, in myriad ways, to making lives sensuous, communal and meaningful (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). It is this which motivates and sustains creative industry workers as much as (or more than) high wages or predictable work patterns, even if experiences will differ according to material-organizational context. These principles inform my subsequent argument that passion orients the subjects and objects of creative work to one another, forging attachments between personal experiences and broader social and economic worlds.

Passion, Creative Work, Political Economy

The proliferation of critical research on work in relation to mediated cultural forms has seen a growing concern with the value placed on individual passion (see Hermes, 2015; Hill and Hermes, 2016). The aesthetics and ethics of work-as-play (or “Do What You Love”) associated with creative entrepreneurial figures like Apple’s Steve Jobs perhaps make this most stark (Gregg, 2011, pp. 169-174). In a less singular manner, passion is diagnosed as a defining feature of cultural industries (Arvidsson et al., 2010; Gill and Pratt, 2008; McRobbie, 2016; Petersson McIntyre, 2014), as well as the knowledge and service sectors of ‘new’ economies, including digital work (Duffy, 2017; Gandini, 2016; Himanen, 2001; Thrift, 2001) and higher education (Cannizzo, 2018; Hey and Leathwood, 2009). Outside these still rarefied professional fields, critical sociologists have explored how workplace management regimes in less passion-driven contexts also seek to align and regulate individual and institutional identities – from the demands placed on call-center workers to show personality, to CSR initiatives in the ethical organization (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002; Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Costas and Kärreman, 2013; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009; Kenny, 2010). Broadly, this sets the terrain for studies of creative work, in the context of which Gill and Pratt note as “one of the most consistent findings”:

that it is experienced by most who are involved with it as profoundly satisfying and intensely pleasurable (at least some of the time). A vocabulary of love is repeatedly evinced in such studies . . . Research speaks of deep attachment, affective bindings, and to the idea of self-expression and self-actualization through work. (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p. 15)

Registering the genuine pleasures of what they name “passionate work”, they also note its sacrificial ethos, whereby material rewards are foregone for the opportunity to ‘live the dream’, as well as the resistance that such pleasures appear to erect to criticism of these less savory aspects.

Focusing on case studies of fashion production, McRobbie (2016) has developed one of the more overarching critiques, viewing a discourse of passion as instrumental in the formation of new economic subjects with horizons shaped by austere and neoliberal political agendas. Drawing on Foucault (and those in his wake, e.g. Donzelot, 1991), her account posits a “creativity dispositif”: a discursive regime in which “the idea of work corresponding to one’s inner dreams or childhood fantasies . . . banishes, to some separate realm entirely, the idea of organized labour”; disciplining labor to embrace self-enterprise, a passion for one’s work is “inherently individualistic and conservative” (McRobbie, 2016, p. 107). Although less totalizing in their claims than McRobbie, Arvidsson et al. (2010, pp. 305-307) also find fashion workers to consider “the production of value and the production of subjectivity” coextensive, drawing great satisfaction from their “identity value” of “belonging to a particular creative scene, with the accompanying consumer-based lifestyle: a ‘common world’ made up of parties, intense socialization among colleagues, the occasional ‘celebrity moment’, common consumption interests and a common lifestyle” (even if their “monetary value” leaves much to be desired).

If a lexicon of passion has gained critical currency, it covers similar ground to other terms that also trace the entanglement of the personal and the professional. How does an emphasis on ‘passion’ push beyond the “emotional labor” of providing ‘service with a smile’ (Hochschild, 2003); the “affective labor” involved in the need to convince, reassure and persuade others (Hardt, 1999); or the “identity work” of cultivating, defining and understanding oneself in largely professional terms (Leidner, 2006)? Certainly, a productive conceptual dialogue can (or should) be formed but, while these largely descriptive sociological terms train attention on *how* certain forms of work are performed, I want to suggest that the distinctive contribution of passion is to highlight *why*. That is, in a more moral-philosophical mode, it seeks (partial) explanation for individuals’ motivations to participate in a particular economic system – in so doing, moving away from a (neoclassical) economic concept of ‘incentives’ and towards a sense of enthusiasm, in and of itself. Thus, putting passion at the heart of contemporary work – valorizing it not just as a source of

income but of pleasure (Donzelot, 1991; Nixon and Crewe, 2003) – binds it to much longer theoretical traditions.

The term's theological overtones, indicating a labor of suffering (Hermes, 2015, p. 112), carry through to Romantic conceptions of artistic genius and expressive individuality (Luhmann, 1986). Corner (2016) sees a “contested relationship” between passion and reason running through this tradition to present-day media and political discourse, wherein the affirmations of individual pleasure and romantic attachment that reject progressive rationalization are later criticized for inspiring the emotional manipulations of consumer capitalism. Less deterministic accounts, he notes, recognize how passion complements and informs, rather than opposes, deliberative reasoning (c.f. Hall, 2007). Indeed, others have viewed the success of liberal capitalism as a political project to be a matter of taming both the abstraction of reason and the unruliness of the “passions” (Hirschman, 1997; c.f. Weber, 2001): that is, putting passion to work. If early political economy recognized the entwinement of structural management with felt experience, even as a problem, contemporary economic disciplines' appeal to individual rationality and ever-greater abstraction is in line with post-Enlightenment societal development (Milonakis and Fine, 2009). Here, the unpredictability of “animal spirits” (John Maynard Keynes) or “irrational exuberance” (Alan Greenspan) are regrettable aberrations – even if, more recently, this has been encountered as a different, hidden logic, to be revealed by the complementary science of behavioral psychology (Akerlof and Shiller, 2009).

The ‘turn to passion’ then, is better considered a ‘return’, signaling theoretically “the renewed combination of political economy and media and cultural studies” (Hermes, 2015, p. 112). To study the passion in creative work is to set out to explain enthusiastic motivations for such work in such terms: not just to ask *what* is being done but also *why*. Do individuals willingly come into alignment with a broader economic project through the cynical seduction and manipulation of PR rhetoric? Because of work's capacity to satisfy immediate self-interest? In its ability to couple private pleasures to a collective good? Or otherwise? To speak of ‘passion’ is to be concerned with *normative* judgements over what constitutes good and bad work; it is thereby understood here as the entwinement of moral with emotional or affective dispositions towards an object or activity. In cultural and creative contexts in particular (more so perhaps than elsewhere), the *specificity* of passionate work is central. Creative workers are working in, on and for different symbolic and aesthetic objects and contexts – fashion, music,

fine art, television, software design or whatever – that have particular qualities generating particular attachments (Born, 2010; Hennion, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). That researchers should endeavor to recognize these qualities and attachments is then an ethical matter, of “doing justice” to creative work (Banks, 2017).

Methodological Approach

The chapter’s second section explores these questions within the specific context of the commercial music industry. First, I recast the recorded music sector’s recent history of digital ‘crisis’ as a struggle for cultural legitimacy, as well as one of innovation and economic reproduction. Then, more substantively, I discuss work that is not primarily cultural or creative in character, but which is nonetheless characterized as ‘passionate’, in terms of an ethical orientation to this creative-industrial world. This draws on empirical research that followed and built on my own career but here highlights those of three interviewees: Graham, an educator heading a vocational music industry HE program; Alan, a communications executive for a major record label; and Ian, a trade journalist.⁴ The normative dimension of passionate work renders it amenable to the approach found in Luc Boltanski’s sociology of critique, justification and evaluation (Boltanski, 2011; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999), as well as fellow travelers associated with so-called ‘French pragmatism’, concerned with the way in which people take account of their actions. In this light, economic transformation is assumed to be warranted by internal and external criticisms (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005), while music industry workers are assumed to have situated judgment, being reflexively aware of relations of domination (sometimes painfully so). In Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) epistemologically pluralist framework, people legitimate and value one another within competing (coherent, if implicit) moral regimes – ‘domestic’, ‘civil’, ‘market’, ‘industrial’ and so on – wherein ‘passion’ is mostly located within an artistic and quasi-theological regime of ‘inspiration’. In line with its evolving conceptual history, I explore the terrain of

⁴ Interviewees’ names are changed and roles approximated to preserve anonymity. The study involved twenty-three interviews between 2013 and 2015 with individuals, predominantly in non-creative roles, working in or around the three ‘majors’: Sony Music, Universal Music, Warner Music. This was informed by an (auto-)ethnographic inquiry into my own career ‘in the field’: 2007-2012 (pre-research), as a full-time employee at a London major record label; and 2013, as a ‘temp’ worker in participant-observer mode. A large textual corpus of popular and managerial books, online trade commentary and policy gray literature was also surveyed during this period – relevant here insofar as they perform an intermediary role between theory and practice, as well as informing the account in the next section.

passionate work through three contrasting theoretical and political frameworks, each provoked by a different interviewee's passionate defense of their industry.⁵

In what I will call the *affirmative* approach, primarily representing the positivism of neoclassical economics and positive psychology, passion is a way of understanding individuals' behavior as motivated by self-interest. A more social-constructivist *critical* approach (here tied to an emphasis within Marxist cultural studies on analyzing media representations) opposes the way in which affirmative discourses of passion distort social relations lying beneath the surface. Seeking an alternative to both – one which problematizes a view of passion as either the agency of deliberate choice or as passivity in the face of manipulation – a *pragmatic* approach deals instead with the practice of attachments (here to the production of music commodities) as a form of lay expertise. Bringing actors' justifications into dialogue with more formal theoretical texts (assuming some continuity between the two), I do not suggest that the former consciously draw on the latter; rather, that interviewees' arguments "are clarified and formalized" by the academic works, providing "general grammars of the political bond", but which nevertheless may indeed be found "in the core of a large number of ordinary institutions and social devices" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, p. 366).⁶ This is particularly the case where passion comes into contact with professional pedagogy – in the critical thinking of a humanities education, the positive psychology of HR training, or the rudimentary economics in a management handbook – institutions or devices that couple theory to practice, furnishing resources for articulating, understanding and justifying one's position.

Music: a Passion Industry

Disruption and Legitimation in Recorded Music Industries

A common narrative that circulates through popular, journalistic and insider accounts of industrial disruption goes as follows. The 1990s saw the flourishing of popular music's commercial cynicism, characterized by the forced reformatting of consumers' music collections, from analogue (tape and vinyl) to digital (CDs). The corporate conglomeration of

⁵ The three conceptual frames owe something to Corner (2016).

⁶ Inevitably, the extracts suggest rather purer positions than is evidently the case. My analyses try to represent interviewees faithfully: I assume they mean what they say and situate their words in different professional histories; but, as complex and contradictory subjects, clearly they do not merely parrot the philosophical positions I ascribe to them.

mergers, acquisitions and takeovers concentrated catalogue ownership in fewer hands – a ‘big six’ ‘major’ record labels at the start of the decade had become a ‘big four’ by its end. This “golden era”, during which the industry “enjoyed about fifteen years of steady growth”, was a manufactured boom that heightened the sense of “significant break” which followed (Leyshon, 2014, p. 80). In former A&R man John Niven’s (2009) fictional account, it was an industry filled with chancers, sociopaths, fat cats and dinosaurs: greed, exploitation and complacency filled the air, as in the last days of Rome. After the technological shock of Napster and associated services, the industry – and especially the majors, too institutionalized and bulky to adapt swiftly – received well-deserved retribution from “informed consumers”, who became a “dangerous variable to an industry largely based on bullshit” (Barfe, 2006, n.p.).

In this narrative then, the “crisis of reproduction” faced by the recorded music sector (Leyshon, 2014) is accompanied by a “crisis of legitimation” (Habermas, 1975): its decline of *value*, that is, was foreshadowed by a decline of *values*, which registered in the depleted positive sentiment towards the industry. Setting this more firmly against the real effects of digital crisis in the political economy of contemporary musical capitalism, an era of ‘disruptive innovation’ fostered a permanent climate of uncertainty and innovation-led austerity, sanctioning multiple waves of restructuring and redundancy. Those with fulltime jobs, in receipt of employment benefits (such as holiday, sick pay, maternity leave and so on) of which creative freelancers might only dream, feel this threat as pervasive. Furthermore, these non-creative workers justify redundancies in economic terms (in the austerity climate of digital crisis) but also culturally: given the requirement for a young, flexible and perpetually renewable workforce, highly literate with the habits and trends of popular culture; and given a highly competitive business culture, where one must be (seen to be) passionate in order to keep one’s job. In major corporations, the performance of passion is systematized (and aestheticized), for example, in annual appraisals that earmark “Hot Pinks” (high-value individuals) to be “managed up”, while “Reds” (poor performers) are to be “managed out” of the company altogether (Colbourne, 2011, pp. 215-216).

The moral narrative of transformation continues apace, although a certain stability has been regained. One globally significant strategy involved transforming traditional A&R expertise – spotting the ‘x factor’ in the raw unpolished talent – into the global *X Factor* brand, whereby this unmeasurable and unnameable metric became a central economic resource for the

corporate end of the sector at the precise time that the market value of recordings was dramatically crashing (Wall, 2013). A broader requalification of musical capitalism continues to incorporate and extend the ability of both producers and consumers to align an emotional and financial investment in music: crowdfunding platforms have, for instance, become a key means of “leveraging affect”, alongside an array of other techniques promoting “the harnessing of fans to the interests of capitalism” in the broader ‘experience economy’ (Leyshon et al., 2016, p. 251). At highest levels, the glee associated with the story of the industry’s decline forms the backdrop to a subsequent creative industries policy discourse, reasserting the moral worth of copyright regimes in protecting creators. Industry’s ‘anti-piracy’ appeals stopped being linked to tumbling profits and punitive measures and began to emphasize, in a more instructional manner, how sustainable careers are built on authentic connections and just rewards, ‘educating’ fans that piracy undercuts their ability to forge meaningful relationships with the artists they love (Edwards et al., 2015).

The institutional performance of passion was seen in the high-profile acquisition of one failing major label – EMI Group – by an even larger one – Universal Music Group, owned by the French media conglomerate Vivendi. The former, custodians of the famed Abbey Road Studios alongside much of the UK’s rock royalty, had been entangled in its own authenticity narrative: having been bought first by private equity investors Terra Firma, then the Citigroup bank, before being sold off to the highest bidder, subject to European competition law. The “great British music company”, so the popular rendition goes, had been subjected to attempts by financial ‘suits’ to strip assets, increase efficiencies and return the company to profitability, creating uproar and disbelief across the music industry (Southall, 2009, p. 1). Vivendi’s purchase could then be celebrated by the Rolling Stones’ Mick Jagger for “the fact that EMI will once again be owned by people who really do have music in their blood” (quoted in Lindvall, 2011). And he should know: the Rolling Stones had switched contracts and moved their catalogue from EMI to Universal a few years previous.

Whether the trials experienced by corporations in the 2000s have presaged a “new spirit” (à la Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) of musical capitalism – and whether it does indeed shape authentic, harmonious relations between the interests of creators, audiences and business, or constitutes yet more insidious manipulation – remains unclear. Certainly they attest to the idea that support for its continued public and political legitimacy has been sought by binding commercial structures more intimately with the emotional and ethical concerns of ‘the

passions'. But, as in Long and Barber's (2015) appraisal, there appears *a priori* a chasm between the emotion, intensity and expressive performativity of passion (as mediated through the creative work of songwriting) and the deployment of such qualities in relation to corporate machinations. Acknowledging this industry's complex entanglement of art and commerce, they suggest that the former, in the process of making music for money, use passion as a means of navigating different modes of valuation: between deeply-felt emotions, audience expectations and market conventions. The latter – as in the wheeling out of Jagger, another 'great British music' icon, to legitimate corporate takeover – might be seen as yet more cynical PR spin.

A disenchanted record-buying public is one problem; a disenchanted workforce is yet another. Strikingly, however, the narrative of commercial cynicism echoes those given by insiders themselves – often fans turned entrepreneurs and custodians, who tell stories to make sense of their own position and assert their legitimacy to participate (Wheeldon, 2014) – while the tellingly embodied and sanguine metaphor of people with "music in their blood" is not (or not just) 'rhetoric'. In multi-modal fashion, employees also 'feel' this: visually, aurally, architecturally, digitally; in themselves, their colleagues and the objects that surround them. The feeling of passionate work is channeled, legitimated and reproduced by companies through the figure of the worker – who is not just an employee but the *ideal consumer* – hailed by their deep love of music. It is to such accounts in the face of present-day anxieties over the nature of creative work that I now turn.

Graham's Passionate Affirmation

The last Creative & Cultural Skills report, where it looked at employment in the music industry, came to the conclusion that there are an awful lot of people in the music industry who are, in a sense, academically overqualified for the jobs that they were doing. But then my retort to that was "has no one ever heard of Maslow's hierarchy of needs?" You know, the reason I came into music when all my friends were going and working in computing is because I wanted to work in something I really believed in passionately. . . . They wanna work at something they're really passionate about and that's what drives so much of the engagement. (Graham)

Graham is an educator with a long background in artist and rights management. He now works on a UK undergraduate degree program equipping students with academic and vocational skills appropriate to music industry careers. The policy report to which he refers was produced by the creative sector skills council and had highlighted a perceived "skills

gap” in this regard, as well as identifying some aspects of the industry that help to replicate persistent inequalities (CC Skills, 2011). If the rapid growth of vocational music business programs provides opportunities to address persistent skills shortages and diversity issues, it has equally caused anxieties for the sector (Bennett, 2015) – with, for example, seasoned A&R executives recoiling from the concept of a “Graduate Training Scheme” that paints music as “just another career option” for young people who do not have to prove their talent, entrepreneurship or creative spark (Wardle, 2008). In response, Graham feels a need to defend his students (and in turn his own institution) against the views of the industry representatives surveyed by the policy body, turning to the primacy of passion, over material rewards, as an incentive for work. We get a sense of this in Graham’s contrasting image of “working in computing” as a comparable but rather more dispassionate career option that apparently does not require the belief and the sacrifice of music work.⁷

The explicit reference to Abraham Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs – in which fulfilling and creative “self-actualization” is understood as the highest need that must be satisfied after physiological and psychological security has been achieved – is worth dwelling on. Hinting at the way in which theoretical models move through creative contexts, presenting discursive scripts to justify action, it grounds Graham’s affirmation of passion in a philosophical anthropology aligning with ‘positive’ humanist psychological traditions. Elsewhere, the notion of “flow” has been used to understand the intense states of absorption, where mind and body work in unison and ‘time flies’ unnoticed, that characterize much creative and sporting activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) – sometimes described as “being in the zone” (Banks, 2014). The appeal to passionate states of activity as optimal for individual creative production, while the social is viewed as a constraint, is characteristic of this tradition (Brouillette, 2013). It forms the academic orthodoxy grounding much HR policy and training, emphasizing employees as emotional beings who respond more effectively and efficiently through consent than coercion (Hollway, 1991; Illouz, 2008); there are further resonances with the normative appeals to ‘passion’ in popular and managerial literatures which routinely draw on psychological models (Brouillette, 2013). The need for workers to feel self-determining and able to achieve such states – to transcend the everyday and be ‘the best

⁷ Although see Himanen’s (2001) notion of a “hacker ethic” for an argument, also grounded in Maslow’s hierarchy, that software programming is equally passionate.

version of yourself” – is understood to be intrinsically worthwhile and vital to performance, obliging managers to “influence the level of creativity in their organizations by establishing work environments that support passion for the work” (Amabile and Fisher, 2009, p. 481). In affirmative models of passionate work, the causal link is simple: happy workers are productive workers.

The alignment of workers with industry is evident in a pamphlet aimed at aspiring professionals, titled *Everything you need to know, to get a job in music*, produced by Universal Music Group in collaboration with the trade publication Music Week (UMG and Music Week, n.d.). Given that demand for music industry jobs massively outstrips supply, this joint venture would historically have been an unusual intervention – although consistent with a “turn to passion” in an expanding market for career guides, advocating that applicants develop a bullet-proof commitment to self-fulfilment in the face of unstable labor markets (Hong, 2015). Inside its artfully decorated pages, the pamphlet, and particularly an interview with Universal’s Director of HR, purports to offer insider insight, giving applicants the key to success – but, ultimately, it equivocates.

There honestly isn’t a typical background – other than our passion for music. Our people are innovative, creative and driven. (UMG and Music Week, n.d., n.p.)

Major label employees are framed as diverse and idiosyncratic, united only by their passion. The denial of a “typical background” has egalitarian overtones, emphasizing that passion and creativity prevail over any other judgment. Implicitly, it reframes popular perceptions of the music industry away from the historical image of an ‘old boys’ club’, which is consistent with an increased institutional and sectoral emphasis on improving ‘equality and diversity’. Much like ‘talent’, the “passion for music” is presented as an inbuilt natural resource – a credential for those without qualifications and a signal for those without connections – in a discourse of meritocratic worth that seeks a ‘level playing field’ (Banks, 2017, ch. 4; Littler, 2013).

Herein lies the link to existing economic models of human behavior in terms of the rational negotiation of incentives and preferences. Graham’s depiction of how he and his students had made career choices based on passion is a normative one of maximizing personal utility. In this utilitarian view of creative work there is a transactional relationship between motivations and rewards: *employees* are in demand where they are highly motivated; *employers* are in

demand where the work is fulfilling (Caves, 2000). With this model in place, there is little need to explicitly theorize passion, other than as ‘opportunity cost’: by the sacrifices people are willing to make, and prices to pay, in order to satisfy their preferences. One account explains the existential difficulties of passionate work in terms of “a variety of non-monetary compensating factors working to affect the relative desirability of work within the creative sector such that precarity might actually be a dimension against which other terms of compensation of are traded” (Potts and Shehadeh, 2014, p. 47). That is, “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” motivations are negotiated to deliver the most happiness to both sides and achieve market equilibrium (Frey and Osterloh, 2002). The dynamic and distributed nature of markets and prices appear here as the best methods for valuing and allocating the distribution of happiness (Davies, 2013). The worker is not sated by being ‘kept happy’ (as some more totalizing critical theories might have it), but through the passionate *pursuit* of happiness. Nonetheless, the objects and conditions of motivation in creative contexts are not easily rationalized or rendered consistent and predictable; the cultural specificity of decision-making in artistic labor markets, based on passionate attachments to creative products and processes, is complex and rarely accorded much significance by economists (Towse, 2006).

Alan’s Critique of ‘Passion’

I think with things like X Factor and Simon Cowell, there’s possibly a false image that’s projected around music. So, you look at the average man [*sic*] in [the company] and you go, “right, he’s a really big music fan, and there’s a guy in a Cure t-shirt, and there’s a guy that puts a club night on”, you know, it’s about a wider love of music, that’s beyond just these people’s day jobs. For a lot of people it’s a lot more than just a job, it’s a lifestyle for a lot of people. And being able to remind the outside world of that, that it’s about a passion for music and that’s what brings us all together, throws off the image of being a big, scary, corporate place. . . . I love what I do because— It— I love music. And actually now, you know, looking back on three years, there’s— I feel quite protective about the industry. (Alan)

As a Communications executive with (at the time of interview) a three-year tenure at a major record label, Alan is positioned at the PR nexus of the corporate music industry that forms the object of so much critique. At the end of a wide-ranging conversation, given the majors’ historically negative associations by external observers, he felt moved to justify and defend his career choice. But, as Alan attempts to articulate “the point of working in music”, as he put it, his speech becomes disjointed, restarting and working over the same formulation. With much less confidence than he had previously projected, he rapidly slips between three affective bonds: love for his job; love of music as a cultural object; protectiveness towards

the music industry. These subtle semantic shifts suggest a negotiation between multiple allegiances, or at least a less precise set of feelings than Graham imparts, and it is this slippage which I particularly wish to highlight and explore here.

Alan reported being equally inspired and frustrated by the aesthetic romanticism of his fine arts degree. Accordingly, like Graham, he is keen to emphasize how workers routinely self-identify, first and foremost, as genuine music fans – yet he also knows first-hand the brand value this holds for the company: indeed, this is what he is paid for! Perhaps, then, his role in Communications as a company representative presents an unresolved anxiety, disrupting his own ‘communication’, as he attempts to avoid wooden ‘passion talk’. Institutions persist because they present official, quasi-objective certainty in worlds of unstable meaning, yet must do so through embodiment in subjective spokespersons – what Boltanski (2011, pp. 84-87) calls a “hermeneutic contradiction”. Recognizing this double-bind (but wishing to avoid misrepresenting himself, his colleagues and his industry) Alan populates the apparently faceless and monolithic company with equally real, embodied people; other passionate fans. Meanwhile, his critique (and his uncertainty) rests on a discomfort towards the “false image” present in popular media representations of a glamorous and superficial industry, associated in his mind with “things like *X Factor* and Simon Cowell”.

Competitive ‘reality TV’ shows like *X Factor* have provided a common contemporary object of passion critique, linking culture, politics and spectacle. Such shows, critics argue, offer a normative model for governing one’s life by explicitly marshalling passion as part of a theatrical performance (Couldry, 2008; Wood and Skeggs, 2011) – that is, they are marked by the divergence between front-stage appearance from back-stage reality. Critics consider *X Factor* to have an alluring appeal partly for its apparent uncovering of the back-room industrial processes of music industry talent-selection; partly for its meritocratic promise to open up participation to the everyday ‘masses’; and partly for the incorporation and narration of their lived experiences and emotive “journeys” on-screen – all of which worked to provide richly resonant “strategies for negotiating contemporary economic conditions” (Stahl, 2004, p. 227). If *X Factor* is indicative here, then *The Apprentice*, in which entrepreneurs aggressively compete to win the mentorship of a successful boss figure, is arguably paradigmatic. The expression and performance of passion is a crucial measure of the extent to which *Apprentice* candidates have internalized business values. Being passionate, note Couldry and Littler (2011, p. 270), “captures the excessive (and therefore in principle

unlimited) commitment to the employer's needs and values, performative evidence of which the successful employee is required to provide, that is, act out, at all times". Passionate work is, in this sense, emotional labor – but:

ratcheted up and channelled through the individualization demanded by the chaotic neoliberal cultures of the 2000s. The inevitable gap between unceasing demand and the finite resources that each worker has to supply must be filled, notionally, by something – 'passion'. (Couldry and Littler, 2011, p. 270)

Music workers like Alan were also sharply critical of the *X Factor*, not for its neoliberal complicity but for misrepresenting, first, the transformation for mass consumption of 'talent' into 'success' and, second, *working with and for* talent without acknowledging the complex characteristics of labor behind the scenes. 'Mainstream' music industries are sustained (structurally and culturally) by notions of fame and celebrity: that is, by pop stars "embodying the glamor and intensity of the pop experience" which is "at least as complementary to the commercialization of music as it is contradictory" (Marshall, 2013, p. 578). Alan and colleagues typically objected to the shameless misuse of terms like 'passion' to refer to the mediated glamor, spectacle and selling of pop. Those concerned with cultural authenticity tended to lament it perpetuating an impression of commercial cynicism and exploitation: while respectful of Cowell's business nous, and to some extent acknowledging the success of the format in stimulating the music market during the crucial Christmas season, it was typically at odds with their own musical tastes and did not put enough distance between music and the corporate 'suit'. Even among those who embraced the popular mainstream, however, the show's sensational aspects were thought to obscure the deep commitments and complex banalities of their work. If it is important to recognize the investment of the worker-as-fan in the cultural commodities that surround them, the spectacular nature of pop stardom contrasts with the everyday nature of much of the work – organizing, filing, securing agreements, product meetings – especially its administrative banalities: spreadsheets, software systems, lengthy email chains, profit and loss statements, schedules, and so on. Beyond simple indignation towards the viewing public's misrecognition of industry insiders, many (more senior) workers expressed frustration with what they saw as an 'X Factor generation': young, aspiring music professionals who identified too closely with the perceived values of the show, seeking to be 'spotted' and

turned into an overnight success, without first paying their dues. In a different register, one digital marketer denounced job applicants that she considered attracted by the industry “bling” of spectacle, access to gigs, backstage passes and other perks.

The critical mindset emphasizes the more complicated realities beneath the glamorous image of celebrity and excess as inevitably disappointing. For Arvidsson et al. (2010, p. 305), passion signifies less *what one does* at work, than *who one is*: “a matter of identity, rather than practice”. These authors understand creative workers’ passionate self-understanding in terms of “the ability to belong, or imagine themselves as belonging in the future, to a particular scene and lifestyle (even if vicariously lived), which their job gives them”. For such reasons, orthodox notions of creative work as desirable and glamorous come under criticism for preying upon young professionals’ dreams, fantasies and aspirations (c.f. Duffy, 2017). The latter are “seduced by the promise of wealth and fame deeply embedded in creative industry discourse” and “encouraged to imagine themselves as the ‘star’ at the centre of their own unfolding occupational drama” (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009, p. 418). The ‘glamor’ of spectacle acts as the obverse face of ‘passion’ here. New entrants are accused by critics and music professionals of being distracted and manipulated by the imagery and rhetoric of celebrity sparkle. It is difficult, however, not to be struck by the dismissive tone in some of these accounts which, in presenting a normative account of what positive passionate work ‘should’ look like, strip workers of their reflexive agency to a great extent.

Ian’s Passionate Practice

My argument here is that the affirmative and critical positions on passion (self-motivation or manipulative rhetoric) do not do adequate justice to why people persist in participating in creative work. Indeed, these divergent readings share two common absences. First, neither assign any particular content to passionate work. Second, both assume passion to be an internal, intrinsic property of human actors: it simply is there, being enabled, constrained or harnessed in some way. From the Boltanskian perspective, individuals are stripped of reflexive agency. French pragmatism prefers to theorize with and through, rather than in advance of, empirical work; nonetheless, if it has a political philosophy then it is grounded in the conviction that economic interests are not simply about the progress of rational

calculation but their mutually constitutive entwinement with 'the passions'.⁸ Antoine Hennion (2007; 2015) has perhaps been foremost in relating his account of how individuals become passionately attached to objects in creative endeavors, developing their “passion for music”. His position is articulated neatly by Ian, a journalist who, after a short-lived academic career, now writes about the workings of the UK music industry for trade press. Although his institutional trajectory is the reverse of Graham’s (academy-industry), he is equally bound up with the construction and communication of specialist knowledge. Here he depicts a younger version of himself as a music fan, naturally foreshadowing his current position:

You would read sleeve notes and you would know about, you would know that Atlantic [Records] were in Rockefeller Plaza in New York without having been there. You would know that this *meant something*, this, this resonated – and then you read about [Atlantic founder] Ahmet Ertegun and you learn about the history of Atlantic, and then... how that model, kind of, then applied. So I think you should, kind of, always have that, be able to make those connections, but you’ve gotta have that, kind of, thirst for the knowledge otherwise... otherwise I’d just get really desperately bored. . . . *All* I’m paid to do, is to read about the music industry, speak to people about the music industry, and write about the music industry. That’s *all* I do. . . . Within academia, you’ll have a particular subject . . . you go in *very* intensely and it’s very passionate up to a point – and then you move on to the next thing. Whereas, I dunno, I’m just the, the, the kind of, childhood sweetheart. You’re always kind of there and yeah you can nag at them and whatever else. And kind of, they wind you up and they kind of annoy you like no other. But you’re constantly there, you can’t... There’s a kind of emotional dependency, just because you’re so interested in it. (Ian)

It is possible to read this extract both with an affirmative view of passion as positive internal motivating force *and* with a critique of the empty passion talk of identity-attracting discourse in mind. Again, passion communicates what a participant ‘should’ look like: a fan with a “thirst for knowledge”, insatiable curiosity, a *libido sciendi*. This professional boundary-work (Gieryn, 1983) locates the origins of his career in music in a past moment of impassioned consumption. The repeated impersonal pronoun “you” positions Ian not as a unique individual but one amongst an imagined community of similarly engaged listeners. Situating expertise in a discursive performance of identity thus sets normative expectations for

⁸ See the grounding of the *New spirit of capitalism* in Hirschmann’s *The passions and the interests* (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005, pp. 9-10); or Latour and Épinay’s (2009, pp. 1-3) will to replace Marx’s *Capital* with Gabriel Tarde’s *Science of passionate interests*.

inclusion in his field: he did not *choose* music, he was always this way – as anyone seeking success should be.

For Hennion (2007) passion involves reflexive work on one's attachments. If critical approaches seek the hidden forces behind an appearance of natural spontaneity and to which individuals themselves are apparently blind, a pragmatic approach explores how individuals are aware of, cope with and negotiate such forces: how they develop a lay expertise. The paradigmatic passionate figure, he suggests, is the amateur enthusiast – with 'amateur' understood not as 'unprofessional', absent of skill, but more etymologically: 'someone who loves'. As with Alan, the object of Ian's attachment and identification slips – or rather, it is strewn with "connections" – between the music on an album, the details on its packaging, and into the processes of its commodification. It is a site of learning, through which expertise is developed. Ian conjures an image of himself listening intently, on headphones perhaps, while poring over packaging ephemera. He experiences these logistical traces aesthetically: evidence not simply of a banal manufacturing process but of a *cultural* industrial practice, one which also (in an apt metaphor) "resonates". This company's building appears as a place populated by individuals, with histories, from whom lessons might still be learned – and so on... Passionate workers are thus "turned towards their object in a *perplexed* mode . . . on the lookout for what it does to them, attentive to traces of what it does to others" (Hennion, 2007, p. 104). The recorded music commodity acts as a boundary-crossing object for them. It does not arrive sealed-off, inert, to be 'consumed' absent-mindedly, but as a created object to be disassembled and reconstructed. It has its own agency, drawing listeners into a richly semiotic and affective world that offers a point of articulation *between* production and consumption.

If at times passion suggests the immersion of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), pragmatists emphasize that it moves beyond an emotional state. For François Cooren (2010, p. 59), the latter "tends to be short-lived and sudden, while a passion tends to refer to a state, condition, disposition that somehow endures, lasts, persists, lives on"; equally, passionate intensity is not simply about active intentional choice, since the impassioned individual "is moved, led, animated by her passion, a passion to which she cannot resist". And so, Ian cautions against confusing the sustained long-term relationship of his "emotional dependency" with the superficial romances of the academic (that is, his former self – and me). The value of his expertise emerges from being situated in a life-long practice of commitment, a relationship

with ups and down, rather than by achieving dispassionate distance. In an earlier paper, Gomart and Hennion (1999) compared the amateur love of music to the love of drugs: arguing that both involve the *practice* of cultural taste – involving tactics and techniques of selecting and arranging – and the emergence of “addictive” attachments to objects.⁹ Like McRobbie and others, they consider passion a matter of performance but, rather than the constraining and disciplining version of Foucault she calls on, more positively, they stress the positive, generative aspects of the “dispositif” through which passion operates. Passion is neither “the subject’s instrumental mastery of things, nor her mechanical determination by things” but rather “*the abandonment of forces to objects and the suspension of the self*” (Gomart and Hennion, 1999, p. 227, emphasis in original). To be passionate, then, involves conceiving of agency as an act of submission, or giving oneself over to an object or other. Rather than self-mastery and autonomy, this is the action of being acted upon: of engaging in *being animated by* something else.

Discussion

The value of a pragmatic approach to critique and justification attunes us to the heightened need for institutions in the ‘creative economy’ to attain legitimacy amongst their occupants. In this we are alerted to the shifting conceptual modalities at play when passion is called on to explain the energetic enthusiasm of putting creativity to work – for this is what workers themselves do. An affirmative stance emphasizes self-interest in work: individuals trade internal enthusiasms against the external motives of material gain in pursuit of activities that enable them to climb multiple levels of satisfaction, from basic sustenance to the higher pleasures of more transcendent cultural forms. The critical stance is suspicious of ‘passion talk’: a discourse deployed to sell certain economic projects, and the modes of work that accompany and enable them, while obscuring the more complex and often harsher realities in which some are more encouraged or enabled to participate than others. Yet these two approaches are complementary. Both depend on a reductive, even ‘essentialist’, view of passion: the one reduced to the realization of an internal human force; the other to the manipulative forces of capitalist structures. Pragmatists view passion as a more subtle,

⁹ If the coupling of ‘users’ and ‘addicts’ of music and drugs seems a rather glib analogy, note that the connection is often made explicit in popular music discourse (e.g. Napier-Bell, 2002) – deployed to highlight a culture of excess, abandon, transgression and so on – and typically to load an argument with moral weight: that is, either to endorse or condemn (the) popular music (industry). Pragmatically, such associations suggest many paths to follow; regrettably, there is no space to explore them here.

dynamic and emergent quality, reducible neither to individuals' active decision-making processes, nor their passive submission to manipulative forces. In this way, it makes little sense to speak of passion in the abstract or as an eternal quality. Rather, passion is attached to objects and circumstances – a passion *for* music – and as such may emerge, endure, fade, even become addictive in accordance with the conditions in which it is practiced. Passion is not opposed to ‘rationality’, according to this perspective; rather, it equips people with embodied expertise and furnishes them with reasons to act (or justify their actions). Thus passion is bound to the (‘amateur’) practices and identifications of particular people situated in particular contexts – demonstrated when they move between different creative contexts to describe, confirm and defend their attachments in different ways – whether learning, playing, listening to, discussing or working in music.

Concluding Comments

If creativity and passion are often thought to be indissociably paired, at work the two are frequently misaligned. Instead, the chapter suggests conceiving of passionate work as an orientation towards creative activity. With affective and ethical characteristics, to study passionate work is to ask why individuals (seek to or continue to) participate in creative worlds. I return therefore to the chapter’s opening reflections on my own recruitment process into creative industry administrative work. It now seems to me that recruiters’ common demand for a ‘passion for music’ encodes certain expectations, even of non-creative workers – that they be oriented and sensitive to norms of creativity; that they are curious about its production processes and motivated to pursue their curiosity, developing a focused expertise in their subject matter; that they do so in concert with a like-minded community – and such expectations seem entirely understandable, even laudable. But in these final comments, I wish to reclaim something of a critical mood and to retain a place for structural questions. For I also noted a confusion over how to perform *my* passion for music – and subsequent discovery that educational qualifications were not the way to do so. From my perspective (and contra Ian), university had been about deepening, extending and complicating my relationship with music, generating other attachments, rather than merely instrumentalizing, rationalizing or correcting a naïve romanticism. Dismayingly, this was not recognized as valuable. It therefore seems to me that critics’ distinction between the *pragmatics* of passion and the manner through which this practice is *displayed* and *registered* is well-warranted, for it is the latter which would appear to render some opinions and behaviors legitimate and not others.

Of course, beyond initial disenchantment, my own passion *was* ultimately deemed acceptable: I got the job; to an extent, I was able to adhere to normative industry expectations. But the experience signals how others may be excluded on similar grounds. It is clear in this chapter that questions of identity are at the heart of how passion becomes a site of contest: over how creative endeavors such as music are valued (c.f. Frith, 1996); but equally how people are judged appropriate to participate in such endeavors. If passion articulates intersections between production and consumption, it is a fertile site to explore how the reproduction of inequalities are co-mediated by both (Oakley and O'Brien, 2016). In this I would wish to emphasize individuals' practices and justifications, resisting pitting essentialist notions of 'true creative passion' against PR-esque 'passion talk'. I argue these move together and too quickly: for instance, in the premise and the critique of *X Factor* (a recurring theme in the chapter), a genuinely emotive performance enables the manipulation of audiences. These readings motivate, as in Sara Ahmed's (2014, pp. 9-10) diagnosis, a dualist emotional politics: an "inside out" perspective, in which passion is the affirmation of our inner creative selves (we 'let it out'); and an "outside in" perspective, where passion blinds and manipulates us (we are 'taken in').

In workplaces and labor markets, whilst wary of calls to 'express' ourselves, equally we should be skeptical that individuals are merely seduced and deluded by such calls. We may certainly question the need to promote, aestheticize and romanticize work in worlds that are marked by profound inequity, exclusion, precarity and even ('passionate') violence (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Gill and Pratt, 2008): where, indeed, to speak of "seduction" may not be merely metaphorical. But at this discursive level, such denunciations bring a rich set of semantics: "bling" being the term popularized through hip hop culture to capture the 'sound' of gleaming jewelry, for instance (Huq, 2006, p. 115); while 'Reality TV' is a common signifier of a massified underclass (Biressi and Nunn, 2005; Wood and Skeggs, 2011). Persistent gendered, raced and classed caricatures of lurk in the background even of passion's ostensible critics. Drawing parallels between job-seeking, conspicuous consumption and the postmodern performance of a marketable identity, in turn conveys undertones of superficiality and 'bad taste'. How such connotations are marshalled and navigated in creative labor markets requires further research. At a further turn, they are mediated through generational anxieties associated with workforce renewal. Importantly, although based in experience, interviewees directed critiques not towards particular individuals but to a generic

(younger) cohort of workers: that is, insiders express ‘distaste’ towards new or aspiring workers who, they believe, cannot see past (or through) the industry’s glamorous image.

I have highlighted some ways in which particular imaginaries around creative passion are troublingly deemed ‘essential’ to demarcate boundaries of legitimate participation – but these perspectives are neither exhaustive, nor mutually exclusive. In particular, there has not been adequate space here to explore the gendering of passion (as ‘girlishness’, ‘hysteria’ or aggression, for example) or the insinuations of sex, class and race in denigrating or romanticizing passion: arguing that economic interests tame the ‘base instincts’ (Hirschmann, 1997); or how popular music authenticities have been tied to “primitive” forms of life, “innocent . . . uncorrupted . . . close to a human ‘essence’” (Frith, 1996, p. 127).¹⁰

Associations between immersion, intensity and transgressive excess have only been hinted at. Studies of passionate creative work that are more attentive to the role of particular emotions (beyond the positive psychology and sociology of attachments invoked here), through psycho-social theories or in relation to affect, intimacy and embodiment (e.g. Ahmed, 2014; de Boise, 2015; Gregg, 2011; Illouz, 2007) might sensitize more overarching inquiries into the causal mechanisms and material-organizational structures of ‘good work’ (e.g. Banks, 2017; Sayer, 2011). Pragmatically, these can be brought into productive dialogue with individuals’ reflexive defenses of a particular working disposition: for instance, coding passionate ambition in material frameworks – during the recruitment process and in governing employment contracts – relating them to pervasive anxieties over the capacity to gain work, in league with both cultural and business justifications. In this way, we might critically map how ‘passion’ (alongside cognate terms like ‘experience’ or ‘talent’) works in specific ways to communicate and sustain certain forms of participation and expertise within unstable creative worlds.

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¹⁰ Although see McRobbie (2016, pp. 107-110) on “girlish enthusiasm” and footnote two.

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