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Works of Art: Narratives of Aspiration and the Identity Formation of Creative Workers

Despite proclamations made by the new economy prophets, genuinely creative jobs are scarce. Young people with creative vocational goals spend long periods of time in casual employment/freelancing before they break into the primary labour market and find steady employment. The initial acquisition and preservation of steady employment relies on the 'creative network', which is functional to the needs of both cultural corporations and to creative workers themselves. Creative networks serve as sites for skill and information sharing, and can also serve as points of contact for corporations (or agents representing those corporations). As capitalism colonises more and more of the life world, these networks come to represent something between friendship, interest and professional groups. Judgments made about worthiness (who is and who is not accepted into the network) are made by informal criteria (as opposed to formal measurements of work performance) and are free from formal requirements for equity and accountability. Networks therefore also serve as filters and those lacking social and cultural capital are more likely to be peripheral. They are rejected on 'taste' grounds or they lack the social capital to make contact with the network in the first place.

Through life history interviews this paper will explore the lived experiences of young people aspiring to work in film production. It will examine the ways creative ambitions are formed, and how a sense of self is constructed around the social and cultural forces that shape vocational identities. I will measure the degree to which social and cultural capital influence 'creative network' inclusion/exclusion, and the ways in which social and cultural forces shape the creative identities and creative career goals of young people from diverse cultural backgrounds.