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Creative Sweatshops: Cultural Workers in the New Economy

Policy makers are increasingly looking to the economic potential of creative industries. In the 'new' or 'creative' economy the value of goods and services depends on intangible symbolic/intellectual inputs more than on raw materials and manual labour. Those with 'aesthetic skills' are recruited to diverse occupations that promise to mobilise those skills. However, this brave new world of art and work is not what it seems. Recent research suggests exploitative employment practices work are rife in 'creative industries' with most workers performing precarious or even unpaid labour, in routine and repetitive work with few creative opportunities. The careers of members of the 'creative under-class' are fragmented. To enter the primary labour market they often take on administrative work or are paid to brand and market the products of new capitalism (web designers, copywriters image makers). This panel invites presentations on 'creative work' and workers. Possible themes include the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure time and space; between the occupational communities and friendship groups; and the notion of flexibility, as applied to skills and workers.