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Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

A qualitative analysis of worker subjectivity in production work in Vancouver's film and television industry

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a theory about creative labor through examining the tangible work experiences of 10 production workers in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada's film and television industry. Using a qualitative in-depth interviewing process, it intends to test the subsequent relevance of Marxist labor principles under industrial capitalism. The multi-billion dollar industry serves as a backdrop for Hollywood productions, and service center for its counterpart to profit off of a financially weaker dollar and qualify for substantial tax incentives. The majority of productions are comprised of a union-regulated department breakdown of above (producers, actors) and below the line workers (trades-based crew members). Below the line yet highly-skilled creative workers average 12-15 hours a day on a capped pay scale — many of which engage in crucial creative decisions yet are invisible to the public in an industry that profits off of being seen. The resulting tension blurs an affective boundary between capitalism and creativity where exploitation, self-actualization, and alienation are risked without constraints. This ensuing research intends to provide a new discourse about the nature of such labor practices in Vancouver, and how creative and capitalist incentives are mediated under a Marxist industrial structure.

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

INTRODUCTION

The film and television industry is an invariably creative enterprise compelled by the intention of producing commercially viable products for consumption. The intermixing of storytelling with economic conditions, rearing high costs and risky situations, manufactures a system of project-based networks comprised of “diverse teams of highly skilled [where] individuals are assembled for limited periods of time and disbanded once their part in a production is completed” (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 659). Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada has emerged as a \$3.8 billion dollar center for film and television, primarily servicing its American correlative where development is centered around Los Angeles, California (City of Vancouver, 2018). Employing 71,000 full-time equivalent jobs a year, Vancouver’s entertainment sector has become a principal contributor to the provincial economy, and a huge source of revenue for Hollywood with the ability to capitalize on tax breaks, a breadth of locations, and a weaker national dollar (City of Vancouver, 2018).

Vancouver has situated its labor force through the creation of multiple unions intended to shelter worker safety, but of which often have little bearing in protecting the legal and compensation rights of their members. This research looks to the creative labor model of passionate work under the current capitalist structure, through a Marxist critique of industrial capitalism that addresses the inherent issues of overwork, and the ratio of labor to value. By questioning the relevancy of this model in the present and evolving structure of creative labor, the institutional arrangements of the industry will be examined accordingly.

Using qualitative analysis via interviews, I conducted a study of 10 crew members from Vancouver to test my conceptual framework. The following findings are situated based on a review of prior literature and methodology, exploring the ethical reflexivity of this project and informed by deductive reasoning, concluded by an inductive, data-driven analysis. This study intends to contribute a new discourse to the field of creative industries through a data-driven approach that introduces a new dialectical angle challenging the tension between creativity and capitalism.

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

By intending to close the gap between labor studies and creative self-actualization, the purpose of this paper is to explore the incongruence between passionate production and the creation of consumable products. While the supply of local talent has blossomed, workers have consequently experienced mass burnout and incidents of alienation and exploitation, with little public perception involved in the discourse. Vancouver's industry provides a relevant case study in building data off of to showcase subjective decision-making in production, potentially leading to a Marxian presage of exploitative and alienating praxis, that is complicated by economic enticement.

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

Aiming to draw a relationship between the condition of labor relations and the creative production economy, this research is challenging the gap in preexisting literature. Within cultural industries, the ongoing debate on how to quantify creative labor as real and viable work remains central to the argument that labor inherently diminishes well-being. Within the film industry, the blending of the two elicits a tension embedded in a Marxist critique under industrial capitalism. Artistic capacities are lauded for being 'creative and expressive', an affective respite from the industrial complex, with a wider range of possibilities for self-actualization (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 1). Vancouver's film industry provides a laudable case study to examine such conditions, synthesizing a new assessment of creative labor that has yet to be widely explored.

Vancouver's film production complex poses a challenge to the respite that creative labor proposes because it perpetuates the limitations of capitalist production within the realm of cultural industry. The film industry is comprised of a complex ecosystem akin to the Fordist system, complicated by the implication of passionate, subjective experience. The mediation of creativity and commerce blurs the boundary of cultural relevance, autonomy, recognition, leisure, and labor under the demands of modern capitalism, from which will be explored in

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

this analysis. There is thus a theoretical disconnect between the process of film production and its thematic implications on creative labor.

The emergence of creative industries, in the wake of the industrial and technological revolution, was intended to replace the presence of manufacturing in the national economy. However, it arguably sustained Marx's conditions under the pretense of an affective turn (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 4). The film industry functions somewhere in the middle. The Marxist model upholds that an autonomous 'desire and yearning for rewarding work' can be attainable within the social factory that encourages 'ideas of creativity and the demands of self-organization' (McRobbie, 2016: 93). However, the refusal of conventional 'work' that occurs as a result of this desire often then serves to cyclically reproduce the industrial unit. Creative labor, in this case gig work, is inherently limited by the capitalist structure.

Limits to creative labor and self-actualization under Marx's industrial model

Industrial capitalism is defined by a division of ownership in social production between those who employ wage labor and those who possess "no means of production of their own, [and] are reduced to selling their labor power in order to live" (Marx *et al.*, 2012: 74). Below the line crew workers are subjected to a process of creative capitalization, which is intended to be inherently self-actualizing, at the indulgence of hegemonic influence. The precarious and unsustainable conditions of capitalism are dependent on a workforce that socially systematizes class disparity. The system of creative labor is predicated on an independent production model where individuals have authority over how products are created and the world surrounding them. While the film industry employs individuals who intend to uphold this paradigm, the majority of workers remain in cyclical service to the system. The deductive aim of my findings is to illustrate how Vancouver's film production complex has reproduced Marx's system under the facade of affective gratification.

Exploitation of the worker preserves a model where material and intellectual creations eventuate under universal ownership at the expense of the product (Marx *et al.*, 2012: 77). A film can be credited to a producer who may have never spent a day on set and thus, the outsourcing of labor can be utilized to disproportionately stratify the hegemony in favor of

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

those who supply the resources. Capital in turn becomes a social, not personal power (Marx *et al.*, 2012: 86). Marx's labor theory of value (LTV) reduces labor to measures of time, evaluating the value of a product in regard to the average number of hours required to produce it, as well as social necessity (Ganssmann, 1983: 281). Capitalism's political domination of the worker, rooted in the extraction of surplus, is the same as when labor power and production cannot be separated (Wolff, 1981, p.119). Exploring this tension between exploitation and self-actualization under a capitalist hierarchy is why film work is a critical case study.

A film set employs over 250 people on average a day in crew-based roles, and upwards of a thousand on larger budget productions ('How many,' 2020). The perception of individuality becomes collective, social power, 'to be a capitalist is to have not only a purely personal, but a social status in production' (Marx *et al.*, 2012: 86). Within entertainment and the media economy, the obscuring of this boundary elicits complexities of ownership and agency. There has been limited academic analysis examining creative labor from this angle which underlines the importance of introducing a new perspective to the discipline, using film as the point of inquiry.

Creative and self-reflexive alienation

Marx *et al.* (2012:86) outlines wage-labor as 'the means of subsistence that is absolutely requisite to keep the laborer in existence *as a laborer*' in the perpetuation of a banal existence. The subsequent appropriation of products of labor abolishes individuality and freedom (Marx *et al.*, 2012: 87). Conducting 'an ethical analysis of labor' requires an attempt to uncover 'the hidden abode of production' that Marx avows leads to 'alienation or estrangement from the labor process' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 25-26). Within film, this phenomenon is compounded by extreme and demanding labor conditions. This theory is divided into four types: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, and self-estrangement that foster an environment of 'competitive individualism' (Blauner, 1964; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 33). It is essential to study the symbolic and economic intersection of creative labor as a neglected area of cultural production studies, and especially in film wherein these conditions appear everyday.

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

By subjugating the labor of others, in this instance above the line production workers to below the line, individuality disappears in lieu of the collective. This concept intersects with Marx's theory of alienation, that is for man to 'alienate something from himself' or 'alienate himself from something,' such as 'alienating the products of his material activity in the form of commodity and money (Petrović, 1963: 420). Man is successively alienated from himself, as a result of his own labor that produces alien objects, 'which constitute(s) a separate world of objects which is alien to him, which dominates him, and which enslaves him' (Petrović, 1963: 421). Benjamin (1969: 11) argues that during shooting, there is little market contact 'just as any article made in a factory,' because the production of such art is cut off from the world. This phenomenon perpetuates an invisible livelihood where man is alienated from not only the product, but their own life.

In April of 2022, the Directors Guild of Canada, British Columbia called a strike authorization vote after failing to ratify their contract with the negotiating producers, the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers along with local correlative, the Canadian Media Producers Association (Vlessing, 2021). The CMPA's body serves to 'negotiate labour agreements with local guilds and unions to set rates of pay, hours of work and other conditions of employment,' and DGC BC's collective bargaining intention was to match basic unionized standards (meal penalty, COVID pay) guaranteed by other provinces like Alberta and Ontario (Vlessing, 2021). The lack of success in securing baseline labor practices emphasizes the importance of looking to Vancouver in unintentionally sustaining Marx's framework. A Memorandum of Agreement was only reached in June of 2022 which highlighted wage increases, and mandatory accommodation and transportation for long working hours.

Production is limited by its conditions of capitalist subservience. A film or television project is ultimately a product employing a symbiotic ecosystem of skilled labor in order to capitalize on creative license under strict content regulations. Departmental positions tend to have little agency over creative decisions. Following suit to Marx's definition, man is 'a creative, practical being' and when 'he alienates his creative activity from himself, he alienates his human essence from himself' — and man ceases to remain man (Petrović, 1963: 421). Not only are laborers alienated from the work itself, but from the world around them as a result of the expected

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

demands. The film industry is in the business of producing creative products by design, but its institutionalized model of production upholds and perpetuates Marx's model of human development while reproducing the same conventions.

Exploitative labor practice

Utilizing another's vulnerability to one's own benefit is at the center of the disproportionate power structure outlined by Marx's exploitation doctrine. He contends that: 'workers in a capitalist society are exploited insofar as they are forced to sell their labor power to capitalists for less than the full value of the commodities they produce with their labor' (Zwolinski and Wertheimer, 2017). In this instance, film and television production workers lend their labor to products that will be distributed, exhibited, and streamed for exponential profit without residuals. Exploitation and domination in relation to production involves when 'direct producers are deprived of a part of the product of their labor for the benefit of non-producers who control the conditions of production' (Terray and Serrano, 2019: 412).

At the height of the creative entertainment media force, 'producers, writers and directors complain about the loss of creative control and tighter production deadlines and budgets, as well as loss of residual payments that sustain them financially during the dry periods when they are not employed on a project,' which illustrates the impact of nullified creativity across positions in service to the studio, and ultimately the consumers (Christopherson, 2008: 85). This 'unequal distribution of power' involves above the line laborers commanding others who obey, parceling out commands, and then yielding the benefits of such propagation (Terray and Serrano, 2019: 412). It is justified through an assertion of self-exploitation, as opposed to exploitation through corporate dominance.

Within entertainment, the encouragement of a collective, creative product is employed to mask exploitative practice. When one group is unfairly advantaged over the other, the imbalance establishes a structural inequality that Marx believes is fundamental to the institutions of capitalism (Zwolinski and Wertheimer, 2017). Without a restraining body to mandate the pressures of environmental demands and fair wage compensation, 'the coercive laws of competition in the market force individual capitalists to extend the working day to the utmost,

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

threatening the life and well-being of the laborer,' which especially concerns the contexts of film labor explored in this analysis (Harvey, 2018: 3).

Value is formed in tandem with adapting conditions of labor. Under the 'sweatshop' model, 'the large reservoir from which the cultural industries can select its employees... enables a form of exploitation of junior workers in the form of low pay,' as well as extended hours and unsafe conditions that are justified in order to 'accrue experience needed to eventually attain better (paid) positions' (Zwolinski and Wertheimer, 2017; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 114). In a supply and demand economy, an excessive pool of labor generates a discrepancy where 'workers [are] not getting paid commensurate to the hours actually worked' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 116). While the realm of freelance labor allows for workers to choose whether or not they decide to work such demanding hours which is used as a justification against maltreatment, but at the expense of their job security and physical safety. On July 28th, 2022, 14 crew members were rushed to the hospital due to extreme heat exhaustion on the set of *Snowpiercer* filming in Vancouver (Rice, 2022). This incident is demonstrative of the grueling conditions forced upon workers who feel like they don't have a voice in reconciling between the two.

Hourly wages in media industries appear notoriously high, but the work is 'arduous and unpredictable,' and producers will cut costs anyway they can to reduce shooting days, incurring 'legendary' long working hours (Christopherson, 2008: 86). Workers believe they are being paid well while routinely doing twelve to fifteen hour shifts with limited guaranteed turnaround. While unions have perceivably grown stronger, the proliferation of productions has caused them to lose their grip over industry policy, cultivating less stringent boundaries to combat abuse (Christopherson, 2008: 86). The inability to meet compliant labor standards, as evidenced by Vancouver's recent struggle to ratify the DGC BC's contract just to ensure basic needs are met, is a 'symptom of a broader failure to respect workers as persons' as capitalistic advantage incentivizes the stakeholders (Zwolinski & Wertheimer, 2017).

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

Objections to the Marxist model

David Harvey's (1998:6) rebuttal to Marxist policy, amidst methodological limitations, suggests that 'the structural dependency on labor exploitation' serves as an anchor within the capitalist mode of production. He contends that structures of capital are distinct from 'subjective forms of oppression,' and therefore affiliating 'the alienation flowing from labor's exploitation' with the capitalistic disruption of the cultural system is a delimiting belief (Harvey, 1998: 6-7). While his transformational argument is rooted in the acknowledgment of social conceptions it does not consider the components of creative labor that maintain a paradoxical position against capitalistic reproduction. Amidst a societal shift towards the subjectivist approach, encouraging knowledge production and the fostering the information economy, the development of service-based professions (while critical to economic sustainability) does not serve to validate oppressive treatment.

The emphasis of individual perceptions in mandating value is imperative to the subjective experience central to creative pursuits — the more enjoyment procured, the more willing one is to produce such labor (which discredits Marx's LTV). The entertainment industry complicates this notion because it employs labor to produce for recreational enjoyment, perpetuating a corporatized escape that is embedded in the same processes one is trying to escape from. Marx did not account for such evolution. Ganssmann (1983: 304) contends that: 'the goal of a society free from domination is thus tied to the goal of producers becoming the subject of their own social process' wherein capital 'usurps the role of the social subject only because it is the expropriation of labor by domination'. Thus forms of social labor and labor power are cyclically interlaced in the production model, and an "extraction of surplus values" leads to exploitation where more hours are extracted from the laborer in a day than value produced (Wolff, 1981: 97).

Distinguishing between exploitation and self-exploitation from political, industrial, and corporate domination is key to the scope of this research, because long hours, inequitable pay, and a negligible return on investment by choice, still inherently uphold the same structure (Wolff, 1981: 120). Self-actualizing within creative industries is complicated by those working to work, working to create, and working to live, sustaining the same conditions regardless of

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

their capitalist implication. Within film, the intermeshing of each of these motivations, many involved for the lure of seemingly competitive compensation, both undermines and carries Marx's tenet.

The film industry, in a service center like Vancouver, answers to an external body (Hollywood) at the expense of their labor and skilled personnel. To Harvey (1998:9), Marxist dependence is prolonged through a yearning for self-examination that seeks eclipsing the confines of the system. Although Marx's argument is dependent on the system it is trying to overhaul, it is not suggesting that the abolition of capitalism entirely (which will always endure) is the answer. The creative process under a capitalist system cannot be used to justify exploitative practice in maintaining cyclical longevity.

Harvey's (1998:15) rejection of the LTV, central to socio-economic policy, is situated in the reproduction of marginality, 'the working class is the class which most fully experiences the everyday alienation of capitalism. It knows, therefore, the full brunt of capital's exploitive system in a way no other class can'. However, Harvey's ultimate argument lacks 'empirical validity,' while "downplay[ing]" the importance of the class struggle at the point of production in favor of his other [arguments]' (Roberts, 2020, pp.95-98). Marx's 'theory of abstract labor exposes the exploitative nature of the capitalist mode of production,' while still addressing its inherent limitations (Roberts, 2020, p.96). The laborers that this study is concerned with comprise the class of technical film workers that involuntarily sustain this model, because the 'quest for rational self-certainty' obscures the oppression (Harvey, 1998: 9).

The business of value production is complicated within creative industries because market and value are intrinsically intertwined. The capitalist mode of mechanical reproduction calls to question the situation of changing ownership, capital, and consumption (Benjamin, 1969: 3). One of Harvey's primary objections is wage suppression occurring within the consumer model, and that establishing a higher standard of pay would solve the issue (Roberts, 2020: 97). Under capitalism, the granting of self-expression can be perceived salvation from the rigidity of the system, but without an actual responsibility to grant individuals such rights. On a film set, crew workers are in service to their head of department to produce creative decisions

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

(lighting cues, camera angles, costume changes) mandated by a studio potentially thousands of miles away. Art as distraction presents a “covert control” of the masses, which is an immense power to extend to laborers who are not adequately compensated for their role in perception (Benjamin, 1969: 19). The production of content devalues artistic authenticity on the grounds of cultural and capital authority, valuing the spectator in mandating relevancy. This ultimately complicates the position of the laborers who are in service to the product by command of an antiquated capitalistic standard.

Harvey’s argument, among other critiques referenced, is predicated on a framework that largely ignores the issues the scope of this paper is dealing with. Conceptually, my argument is challenging the pretense that reproducing the system cannot be used as a justification for labor exploitation in creative industries, which has been absent in labor studies. While facets of Harvey’s redirection are valid, they are not relevant to this paper and I hope to be able to uncover this dialectical tension through my research. While the overall transformation of capitalist production does not negate value, the exchange of such cannot be done out of unjust process. It is thus critical to discuss the complication of creative and capital product more definitively in relation to film and cultural industry.

Creative labor in Vancouver’s film-production complex

Within the contexts of film production, the factorized hierarchy is a revised labor force adapted to operate within the same confines as the industrial system. On a production basis, ‘the size and skills of the workforce available... are central to what is produced, where it is produced and how it is produced’ (Christopherson, 2008: 82-83). Consolidating the industry in production centers has become essential to bearing the viability of a stable market and “the majority of media entertainment productions now depend on access” to a large, skilled labor pool (Christopherson, 2008: 83).

Vancouver accommodates a multi-billion dollar industry with over thirty television productions and high-profile feature films a year (BC Business). Neil Coe (2001: 1754) stated: ‘Vancouver’s production complex is unique in Canada in that a large proportion of its revenue, estimated at over 80 per cent, is directly attributable to runaway production’ that has become

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

one of the largest industries, especially in the province of British Columbia. It can be quantified as a satellite center that is a part 'a contemporaneous epidemic of location shooting by Hollywood production companies,' that evokes political concerns about the nature of manipulating local economies to their own benefit (Scott and Pope, 2007: 1364). Labor outsourcing and decentralization from Hollywood functions as an economic ploy for runaway productions to reduce costs and achieve aesthetic goals (Scott and Pope, 2007: 1365).

Vancouver, a 3-hour flight from Los Angeles, is on the same temporal axis, and offers competitive subsidies, tax incentives, and a weaker national dollar (CAD). Although 'relevant data on the Hollywood-Vancouver connection is hard to come by,' which only substantially materialized in the mid to late 1980s, the ensuing thirty decades have ensured its trajectory as a sustainable and profitable decentralized market which requires further analysis (Scott and Pope, 2007: 1365-1372). Vancouver's proximity, which 'eases the tasks of coordinating production activities,' and robust locations, from 'on-location shooting, open plains, mountains, and ocean views to generic urban and small-town scenes,' has solidified its status (Scott and Pope, 2007: 1372).

Both local and foreign companies have realized the potential of the local industry and acquired studio space. Skewing competitive advantage, illustrating 'Von Thünen's land-use theory,' production companies and offices are clustered around the central business district of the city, while studios are often more than ten miles outside of the city center requiring extensive commutes (Scott and Pope, 2007: 1373). Both the federal and provincial government provide financial incentives where 'subsidies are based on the percentage of total labor costs accounted for by Canadian citizens,' and in the case of the Government of Canada's Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit, more than 50% of activities have to benefit 'the permanent establishment in Canada of a film or video production business, or a film or video production services business' (Scott and Pope, 2007: 1374; Government of Canada, 2022).

There is a significant gap surrounding labor research on production cultures, as opposed to economic procedure, because affective labor is difficult to quantify. Film operates at a convergence that employs a class of laborers that are doing intrinsically creative work with

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

high-power decisions in a technical capacity. The skilled craft-force that has arisen in centers like Vancouver are subject to 'the expansion of low-budget production for cable, the growing labor pool, and slow growth in the more lucrative (for labor) production segments' (Christopherson, 2008: 87). A dissatisfied working body is therefore risking not only in their health, but job security in a project-based economy without long-term contract based positions. The growth of regional jobs has fortified the existence of centralized workforces dependent on sustainable industry practice. However, unlike concentrated technology hubs, Vancouver's film industry is an unpredictable project-based economy at the mercy of financing from a market that depends on fluctuating inflation and political influence.

The film industry is a freelance economy bound together by protective unions that "are divided between craft unions intended to protect the pay and conditions of particular groups of workers, and general unions with more inclusive goals of solidarity and equality" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 232). Unions are essential for mandating insecurity to combat exploitative practice in an unstable creative economy. However, not all interests are universally represented as 'an already complex union and guild terrain has become more difficult to interpret because of shifts of power among collective bargaining units,' and especially within the world of television, which is contributing to more total income for unions such as the Directors Guild, who continue to 'experience more growth and increasing work hours for their membership' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 88). The primary representatives of creative labor membership in Vancouver outlined in this paper are: IATSE Locals 669 and 891, Teamsters' Local 155, and the Directors' Guild of Canada (BC).

Within film, 'outsourcing production, relying more on freelance labor, and assembling teams on a project-by-project basis' has made viable careers insecure and unpredictable which has led to an abundance of capable workers without the jobs to fulfill the demand in gaps of employment (Murdock, 2003: 31). The establishment of a local creative labor market in Vancouver's film industry has ultimately intensified the role of Marx's critique under the current capitalist system, substantiating a theoretical gap in media and communications research.

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

Conceptual Framework

Creative labor functions at an intersection of self-actualization within a capitalist structure that values a hierarchy of social production. Within the context of Vancouver's film industry, the capital and creative tension invokes a debate regarding the nature of fair practice in an inherently artistic field. Under industrial capitalism, what constitutes labor is at odds with what creative labor contends — an ability for individuals to retain ownership over their products. Marx's labor model was limited to the conditions of hegemonic oversight, complicated by the evolution of worker subjectivity and self-actualization.

However, this dissertation will inquire if his application of exploitation and alienation under this model still remains relevant within Vancouver's film industry which has crafted a service-based model predicated on demanding working hours and stark conditions with limited public perception. By manipulating the boundaries of what are considered acceptable labor practices comparative to other industries, the film industry operates on a variegated scale of capitalization obscured by creative output. While there are exceptions to this model, Vancouver poses a complex analysis that both upholds and rejects this idea. This case study will employ deductive methodology and inductive reasoning using Marxist analysis to test its efficacy.

The two research questions I will be trialing and examining throughout this analysis are as follows:

RQ1: What are the institutional arrangements and tangible work experiences in the creative labor process of production work in Vancouver, Canada's film and television industry?

RQ2: Comparative to the labor conditions tied to the industrial capitalism outlined by Marx, to what extent are the tenets of alienation and exploitation still relevant to creative labor and production work in the film industry?

For the purposes of this paper, production work refers primarily to experiences on set, as the corresponding administrative component requires a deeper breadth of understanding than is covered here. The entertainment industry is illustriously shrouded in glamour, secrecy, and

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

exclusivity. The objective behind this research is to anatomize the complications of labor practice within the creative realm at a smaller scale, utilizing data from participants to supplement its findings. Within the field of labor and media studies, there has been little focus on the militaristic division of labor within filmmaking and the implications it has on worker subjectivity in a capitalist system. This dissertation intends to close that gap and introduce new findings to supplement the preexisting research which historically focuses on preconditions as opposed to empirical evaluation of elicited practices.

METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

To conduct this research I employed qualitative methodology, specifically interviews, to examine my research questions as founded by my conceptual framework. This section will address the sampling process, ethical implications, and thematic analysis procedure utilized to oversee my findings, analyzing the reflexivity throughout the process.

Methodological rationale

I carried out 10 semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 5 women and 5 men varying in age, role, union, and level of management. A qualitative interview is a conversation, either virtually or in-person, intended to provide first-hand accounts pertaining to the research topic (McIntosh and Morse, 2015: 1). The purpose of this type of methodology beckons deep but organized probing that invites nuanced and detailed collaborative data collection. Allowing for open-ended discussions bears a breadth of answers within an organized frame of reference to uncover intrinsic motivations behind behavior. Under a semi-structured format, rapport and general background information are first set to establish comfort and authenticity. Then the interview guide of pre-determined questions is utilized from which to be built upon and tailored to each participant to maintain a cohesive narrative (Brennen, 2017: 29; Goldstein, 2002: 669). My interview guide consisted of 20 core questions that varied based on responsibility, seniority, and realm of experience.

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

Anonymous interviews provided the best format for my research to explore the unfiltered experiences of crew members across departments. This method is advantageous because interviewees are free to express their opinions in a semi-structured setting without substantive boundaries. Once the trust is established, then ‘unexpected information’ and rationale can arise and adapt as new topics surface (Berger, 1998: 57). When gaining access to sensitive topics where professional welfare and power relationships could be jeopardized, it is imperative to create a secure environment. While a limitation of interviewing can be eliciting meaningful responses in such a regimented format, the opportunity to reorient questions steers the conversation towards new interpretations. To gauge a well-rounded perspective, interviewing was the most effective avenue for my research, as opposed to focus groups or surveying, because it allowed for participants to uncover potentially subconscious beliefs surrounding fair labor practice, and analyze the ‘why’ behind their actions in real-time (Berger, 1998: 57).

Research design

Sampling range and ethical reflexivity

Sampling commenced after the ethics framework had been approved. I focused on sourcing my sample as methodologically responsible as possible. As a member of the Director’s Guild of Canada, I acknowledge that my prior involvement in Vancouver’s film industry could potentially impact my findings, and it was critical to this project that I eliminated as much bias as possible in the ensuing analysis. However, as my research deals with subjective accounts that could be perceived through a slanted lens, it is important to leave my findings open to reinterpretation. The layered ethical considerations of this project were nuanced, “implicated at all stages of research,” from before, during, and after the interviews, particularly in regard to sampling, sensitive power dynamics, and issues of exploitative practice (Leahy, 2021: 4-10). Maintaining anonymity was imperative.

Deciding on a sample size considers both theoretical and practical implications, and in this case taking an idiographic approach (looking at the unique personal experiences of a particular group) with a guideline of 3-16 participants, I decided on 10 candidates to avoid becoming overburdened with data to synthesize (Robinson, 2014: 29). When selecting a sample, in this

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

case elite senior professionals such as directors, it can pose a methodological challenge to gain access to an adequate number of participants to contribute to a study (Empson, 2017: 58). Elite interviewing refers to ‘power asymmetry and relative privilege between interviewer and interviewee,’ combined with an amalgam of status, rank, and reputation (Empson, 2017: 59). For the purposes of my study, I needed a mix of elite and non-elite participants to explore variegated perspectives in Vancouver’s film industry. The difficulty of accessing such individuals lies in their 80+ hour work weeks and tight non-disclosure contracts (until a project is released) which can present scheduling challenges. By keeping the sample size manageable, there was flexibility if someone became unavailable and had to be swapped out.

After defining the scope of my sample, I utilized the convenience and purposive method to ensure equitable representation. To begin, I ‘located a nearby source of potential participants who were convenient in their proximity and willingness to participate,’ which was aided by my prior work in the industry to which I could snowball from (asking participants who else would qualify for the study) (Robinson, 2014: 32-37). I was limited to metro Vancouver’s film industry which already significantly narrowed the jurisdiction. I began with reaching out to people I had worked with previously, which comprised half the sample. Then referral chains through social media outreach and references allowed me to create a diversified sample that ‘ensured particular categories of cases within a sampling universe were represented in the final sample of a project’ (Robinson, 2014: 32). I wanted to illustrate both male and female experiences across different departments and positions of hierarchy which required maneuvering.

The contact process was then initiated for each individual participant via email or phone where a meeting was set up (either in-person or virtually), a topic guide was sent (Appendix B), and a consent form was signed (Appendix C). The form consisted of preliminary demographic information (sex, age, position, union) and outlined the procedure (see Figure 1). The careful selection process of participants allowed for a willingness to communicate that greatly contributed to the outcome of my study and the nature of my research. Furthermore, having experienced the findings discussed in this paper firsthand, I understand that the subjectivity and possible bias is susceptible to interpretation. However, even when

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

interviewing people I knew, the structure of my interview guide ensured impartiality based on participant experiences on projects I had not been involved in.

Figure 1 Participant profiles

Participants	Gender	Age	Position	Union Designation
Participant 1	Female	55	Director	DGC BC
Participant 2	Male	25	Lighting Technician, Lamp Operator (LX)	IATSE Local 891
Participant 3	Male	27	Assistant Chef of Film Catering Vehicle	Teamsters Union Local No. 155
Participant 4	Female	24	3rd Assistant Director (AD)	DGC BC
Participant 5	Male	70	Stills Photographer	IATSE Local 669
Participant 6	Male	24	Sustainability Coordinator	Non-union
Participant 7	Female	23	Locations Office Production Assistant (PA)	DGC BC
Participant 8	Female	31	Assistant Art Director	IATSE Local 891
Participant 9	Female	59	Production Manager	DGC BC
Participant 10	Male	54	Lead Set Decorator/Dresser	IATSE Local 891; ACFC West, Local 2020 Unifor

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

Interviewing process

My interview topic guide (Appendix B) was created as a foundation and tailored to each participant based on their level of experience and position. After outlining the procedure prior to the interview, the guide served as a framework to expand from in conversation. It is imperative that the questions were a balance between main questions, follow-ups and probes to establish authentic elaboration and evidence (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 5). I started with gathering general information and then narrowed the sphere to probes that were still open-ended to allow for speculation and opinion to arise (Berger, 1998: 59). By drawing correlation between concepts I was able to group categories according to my conceptual framework to build upon in my thematic analysis. In order to test the efficacy of my interview guide and chosen sample, I conducted an initial pilot study that involved Participants 6, 7, and 8. While the data was absorbed into the final analysis, this process allowed for amendment of the types of questions asked to eliminate redundancy, and reframe wording to avoid superfluous data and foster direction without elucidation.

Conducting the actual interviews involved 5 virtual meetings via Zoom, 2 phone calls, 2 in-person meetups in Vancouver, and one email interaction (followed by a phone call) based on scheduling restrictions, dependent on preference and accessibility. They spanned from 30 to 150 minutes in duration, with consented recordings (for both formats with screen and audio) and manual verbatim transcriptions completed before analysis began. The diversity of interview formats provided assorted levels of depth and explanation. I was able to follow-up with every participant on an as-needed basis.

Thematic analysis

Using a data-forward, inductive coding framework (motivated by RQ1) to analyze each interview transcript, I constructed a thematic analysis grid based on a series of encompassing themes broken down into sections (Appendix A). This format allowed for data to emerge into themes and sub-themes guided by RQ2 and the deductively focused interview guide (Appendix B). Coding for similarities between each participant “involves identifying interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set” to extract nuance and

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

assess suitability (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018: 809). By clustering information into thematic networks (global, organizing, and basic) based on similar topics, I extracted quotes to facilitate and structure the depiction of each theme as will be discussed below (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 387). Through interpreting the patterns encountered in the data, I was able to address the theoretical and tangible relevancy of RQ1 and RQ2 in my findings.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

This analysis applies the conceptual framework, combining the findings from the literature review and new literature evidenced in the thematic analysis grid (Appendix A). These results were obtained through the 10 anonymized interviews I conducted in April-July of 2022 (see Figure 1 for participant profiles). The following interpretations are subjective to the experience of each crew member and intended to provide an overview of the institutional arrangements under an industrial capitalist approach to creative labor in Vancouver's film and television industry. Split into five topics divided into sub-themes — creative labor, self-actualization, alienation, exploitation, and public perception — I will also be discussing general findings and obstacles faced. The results are ultimately consistent with the tension introduced by the conceptual framework. This case study acts as a pilot of a larger phenomenon that occurs within the workforce, but through a creative, Marxian lens.

Each interview began with an encapsulation of career trajectory, positions held, and length in the industry, ranging from 1-50+ years, which offered diversified merit to each response. The varying roles consisted of a Director, a Lamp Operator, an Assistant Chef of a Film Catering Vehicle, a Third Assistant Director (AD), a Stills Photographer, a Sustainability Coordinator, a Locations Production Assistant, an Assistant Art Director, a Production Manager, and a Lead Set Decorator. Ranging in high-level management, administrative capacity, and levels of creative input, the range of this sample imparts a well-rounded analysis of industry perspectives. Through an investigation of surplus-value, my initial findings sustained that Marx's analysis of labor conditions under industrial capitalism still remain relevant in

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

production work. Vancouver's film industry provides a complex case study amidst the emergence and complication of creative labor to capitalistic intention.

Creative labor within a service center: the paradox of art and labor

The intention of creative industries is rooted in the tenet that 'to create is simply to bring something into being...newness, invention, innovation, making something afresh' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 3). Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2010: 9) refer to creative labor as the division within cultural production that involves the primary creative personnel 'as part of an organisational division of labor, while recognizing that the input of different groups of workers into 'creative' outputs varies, and that this variety can be the source of important hierarchies and distinctions in cultural production'.

Within film, this notion is complicated by the division, both between above and below the line workers (which subjugates the crew based on a project's gross profit), and the assertion of relative value. Unions are established to protect the rights of, in this case, creative workers by controlling hours, compensation, and working conditions. In order to implement regulations for creative workers, the unionization in Vancouver's industry provides an opportunity to regulate expectations (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 19). However, the internal hierarchy facilitates a competitive advantage to those in power, as Vancouver's industry is in service to Hollywood, and the below the line workers are in service to those above the line in the chain of command. While effective management is crucial to maintain a balanced working ecosystem, the boundary of abusive practice has to be mitigated. Competing odds are often at interest as a result.

When you're not in management, you don't know how management works exactly. And basically nothing is transparent in this industry or on a show. This is a hierarchy. And it's very hierarchical. And I used to say, you know, it's nobody, nobody cares what the hair person wants to do for this shot. They're told what they need to do, either by the actors, the director, or, you know, so on... Some people don't like it, and they think that this is unfair. But they chose to be doing it (Participant 9).

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

The current film industry is fair for some, and unequal for many others. The overall system is not at its highest level. With many unions going on strike asking for fair accommodation, pay, rights, ... unions have to advocate for their members but members also have to advocate for themselves (Participant 8).

It is hard to understand how a union, whose mandate is to protect the best interest of workers, can effectively bridge the fundamental conflicts of interest between the two groups of membership [above and below the line]... What you see on a film set is never fair or just, it revolves around the whims and personality of those who hold the power and influence over said set (Participant 7).

The divisiveness central to the labor hierarchy breeds a habitually competitive and toxic environment that facilitates a shared sense of community around the negativity. Creative industries can be inherently alienating, as discussed below, but film sets provide an opportunity to formulate a collective identity around a project. Or alternatively, breed a site for contempt.

The sense of community on a film set is often one born out of frustration and hardship (Participant 6).

One thing that surprised me about film the most was how strongly the crew on a consistent production would bond over a season which became part of the appeal. People do recognize that the conditions are difficult so, and because of that, the trauma sympathizing brings people close together... However then the show is over and everyone disperses on to different productions and you won't see them again... No one has time to do anything (Participant 3).

So and, you know, trying to get everybody on the same page, and people working together is, is is the biggest challenge (Participant 9).

Some participants questioned whether film could be considered a creative industry. While workers can make creative decisions that do have a viable impact, they are often only in service to their superior who answers to a network or a company for approval. Defining what constitutes creativity between the management of autonomy and commerce is confuted when the goal of 'capitalists [is to] make a very nice profit out of cultural goods' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 81-84).

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

I don't feel like this is actually is a creative job, even though it is in theory. Although the problem solving element is inherently creative, my creative endeavors don't really apply (Participant 10).

The concept of creative labor to some can be contradictory, because under capitalism self-actualizing activities are often reduced to passions or hobbies. 'The making of products that entertain, inform and even enlighten us,' however, can offer productive value in enriching the social and political climate (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 2). The spectrum of film can operate somewhere between the two, supplemented by personal projects, but within Vancouver, the creativity is largely negated in its existence to serve someone, and somewhere else. Creativity no longer becomes a respite from the industrial cycle, but a reproduction of the same model with the semblance of fulfillment.

Self-actualization: The issue of visibility and fulfillment

In the shift towards a creative, entrepreneurial economy, workers strive to feel actualized, sometimes to the point of self-exploitation, 'push[ing] themselves to the limits of their physical and emotional endurance' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 6). However, within the production of passionate work on the spectrum of psychological development, capitalistic motivations can still emerge. Under the travails of management, ownership practices are complicated through an assertion of visibility and credit, as "relinquishing ownership of work at the end of projects creates a recurrent and painful sense of alienation" (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 675). And, furthermore, through the tension between Canadian and American praxis. The undertone of economic intention applied in a large-scale setting disparages the creative value of the product and those involved below the line.

I think the credit is vastly given to the decision makers instead of the people that actually make it happen. Those people are important, but there's having an idea and actually putting it into practice that are two very different things. Decision makers are ignorant of the many challenges deemed beneath them (Participant 6).

There is an Executive Producer on our show right now who's never been to one meeting, never sent one email, and as a Director, I've had one line of communication from him. The project will be attached to his name and he has no direct or

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

transparent involvement. You can be listed if you brought the project to the company and your only involvement is financing as a producer (Participant 1).

Everyone deserves to have a credit, we're all working our ass off. Some form of appreciation for what they've done on the project. Slaved for hours and hours, neglected their families, incredibly tired for the run of the show. All for what? The actors get all the praise and glory and they might mention the crew in an Instagram post but we don't get all that much more than that. Maybe a wrap gift! (Participant 4).

While not every crew member is vying for recognition, the tension between making entertainment for self-actualization purposes, economic gain, and capitalistic advantage is always present. Furthermore, the extent of fulfillment perpetuates a disunity fostered by level of management and personal limitations. For some, the reward is deemed worth it, while others can no longer tolerate the environment.

When the first episode I directed aired on TV, I'm like, oh my god, I'm getting choked up over my own show that I know, I did it. I did it. And I thought, okay, it worked. It did what it's supposed to do. And so you feel really proud of that. But yeah, it's funny, I find directing much easier. It's like the big reward I think, for all the years and all the bullshit that I've ever put up with. I feel like I now have the job that I always wanted to do (Participant 1).

This is not my dream job, I did not want to be the bean counter. On some level. I'm not sure. Because to be quite honest, at 59, I'm looking more at my life, as opposed to my career. I've had a steady successful middle of the range career where I can work whenever I want to (Participant 9).

The expectation that you make good money, although through overtime, is true, but the trade off is working on other peoples projects and not your own (Participant 10).

Participant 9, a Production Manager, and Participant 1, a Director, offered conflicting perspectives under high levels of pressure and responsibility. Both women came from Assistant Directing backgrounds and eclipsed to management roles in traditionally male-dominated departments. Rubin and Rubin (2005: 16) state that, 'a labor organizer is likely to have a biased view toward management, whereas many in management can see no good whatsoever in labor,' which is a present contradiction here. Their evident difference in

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

actualization illustrates the breadth of creative niches that the film industry provides and how drastic the experiences can be as a result. Participant 1 emphasized creativity and vulnerability, whereas Participant 9 alternatively focused on the importance of hierarchy and obedience.

I have found that since becoming a director, it's very similar to being an actor, you are completely having to be vulnerable to creative criticism (Participant 1).

I don't look for fairness, I don't, I just look for equity... you shouldn't be looking for fair (Participant 9).

A further obstacle was presented with Participant 5, the oldest of my sample, a 70-year-old former Stills Photographer, who questioned the validity of my study when asked about the creative actuality of his work and his capacity of being overworked. The line of inquiry evidently struck emotional unease, and he was inclined to defend the system in which he has been a part of for over 50 years. Ultimately, the allure of the expressive and aesthetic quality of creative pursuits that segue into industry provide an opportunity for a wide array of subjective experiences under the confines of labor.

The layers of creative and capitalist alienation

Marx's theory of alienation upholds that the division of labor alienates the self from the ability to remain intellectually sovereign, straying oneself from human nature and from those around them. In turn, class stratification is further perpetuated. The inherent problem of creative labor for capitalism and capitalist businesses is that "it resists the abstractness and alienation that Marx attributes to pretty much all other work under capitalism" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010, p.84). Alienation in its many forms remains relevant to the contexts of this paper, most notably in the inability to maintain a work-life balance working in the industry under such a system. There was an overwhelming sentiment among responses that to work in film is not to have the same kind of lifestyle that the average person can maintain, as "the creative rewards of filmmaking came at a considerable cost to participants' health and non-work relationships" (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 668).

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

It's disturbing to see people have psychological dissonance about finally making good money but also not seeing their family in days and not existing in a healthy group working dynamic (Participant 2).

There needs to be an expectation that people have a life outside of work, because it sounds so dumb, after 14 hours, what you have a life outside of this what else do you have to do? The problem is the attitude that you can just continue working and there is no divide or work-life balance at least until you're above the line but even then if you're on set your hours are beholden to that (Participant 6).

To me, when I talk to people, I say work-life balance is that you need to save your money so that you can take time off as opposed to just working working all the time... Because no one cares about that for you, except you (Participant 9).

When an environment of overwork is encouraged, workers become accustomed to the practice and lose sight over what is considered an objective, healthy balance. While this experience is not exclusive to the film industry, the assertion that creative labor is an outlet that breeds fulfillment, is stilted by capitalist pressures that in turn complicates the matter. When a creative outlet becomes work, regimented by the confines of a Fordist-like system, then the same conditions and outcomes cannot be applied.

Of the tenured participants I interviewed, there was a shared sentiment that film becomes your life, not just your work. The setting perpetuates a situation where 'the film worker develops an increasingly addictive relationship with the industry [where] both the quality and quantity of other relationships is diminished' (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 661). The work environment begins stoking emotional needs in place of preexisting connections and friendship links (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 661). Furthermore, in an outsourced economy that takes advantage of a delimited labor pool, above the line crew are often traveling away from their friends and family to an environment where all they care about is work, to the detriment of their local team.

I don't think anybody really understands it unless you're in it. Even friends that have known me my whole life will still not quite understand what it's like to work 16 or 17 hours every single day. When you don't live it it's all the same experience. You can't and then you'll get friends are like yeah, I've worked overtime this

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

week... you don't quite understand that there is no balance whatsoever. You come home, you shower and you rush to bed so you can get up the next day (Participant 1).

It's very hard on you, physically and on your stress. You don't have like, you know, hobbies, and things like this. We watch people as we drive to our next location at six o'clock playing baseball, you know, after work, and we're like, oh, look at those people, we still haven't even had lunch yet. Right? So I think, yeah, I think that you don't actually, you kind of blink and go, oh, okay, all I did was work in my 30s (Participant 9).

I don't want to say I've lost my friends, but because I've been so immersed in this for 6 years, we're not on each others radar anymore, I don't do anything anyways. I spend most of my time off pretty quiet, and then doing laundry, groceries and catching up on sleep on the weekends, because it can leave you feeling alienated for sure, you have to make a real effort (Participant 10).

The alienation stems from an inability to disconnect oneself from the vortex which it makes it difficult to self-regulate. The pressure of both time and money on set are incredibly demanding, discrediting anyone that feigns having a life outside of their job. Work-life balance becomes a myth. One's well-being becomes so 'heavily invested in the one key relationship with the film industry,' that other connections are consequently suppressed (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 661). One participant, also a mother of three, spoke to the antagonism she would receive as a result of this strain:

Like honestly, I'm not tooting my own horn, but I really don't know how I even did it. Because I would never miss a soccer game on Saturdays. Even if I wrapped it like 7am. And I had worked 17 hours outside in the rain. There was so much pressure on women that were working at that time. You live your life in guilt, like, you have this pressure of work and which is so demanding in general, even for single people, you could never ever, ever talk about being a mother at work or your kids. Because you would get comments straight out like a producer that when says well, you can either have a career or be a mother (Participant 1).

The complication of above, to below, the line positions subjugates the livelihood of those who have to be in the office versus on set. The variety of positions is so vast that the experiences of those make it difficult to generalize such findings. While a Location Manager may be confined

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

to an office, they have more flexibility over their hours as compared to a First Assistant Director who is required to run a set. Those who demonstrate unwavering devotion are rewarded for their commitment, whereas those who dare object to a task are penalized with limited job security on the line. This “highly charged, emotionally and intellectually stimulating” environment is often followed by a period where workers are left “unemployed, physically and emotionally exhausted, socially isolated and unclear about their future prospects,” which fosters feelings of burnout (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 668).

If you're below the line, there is almost no job security, whereas if you're above the line there is. If you're above the line, the whole production shuts down if there's an issue, like testing positive for COVID, but your job is on the line if you're below. You are replaceable and you know it. Above the line jobs are largely protected and below the line you're on your own (Participant 6).

Comparative to other forms of artistic pursuits, film in theory provides a community-building environment that incentivizes opportunity for social connection, teamwork, and collaboration. However, while one can gain socialization from the collective disgruntlement, they become alienated from themselves, human nature, and those around them in the process. The positive characteristics that beget creative labor are in wide agreement, ‘yet these features are ultimately understood to be the basis of alienation and self-exploitation’ (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010: 8).

Exploitation: Hours and compensation

Turning to Marx's hypotheses on the length of the working day, ‘increasing absolute surplus value’ by lengthening the working day with consistent wages, increases the exploited surplus labor within a viable working capacity and provides an opportunity for the producers to surpass legal limitations (West, 1983: 267-268). Under this system, the rights of the capitalists and the rights of the workers do not fundamentally align. While Harvey and other critics challenged this notion of value formation, Marx's model is upheld using Vancouver's production economy as an example. The structure sustains this assertion through the exploitation of working hours, conditions and safety, and pay and compensation to formulate a system patently defined by overwork under the guise of an affective return. Within the film

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

industry, the seeming inflation of wages relative to hours worked appears advantageous, but at a disproportionate disadvantage to workers' well-being. This was the most common grievance that appeared among participants.

I'm currently in the process of exiting the film industry, I don't want to do these hours anymore they are so unsustainable. 75 hour weeks are too much... I wasn't expecting hours quite as long as we've been doing. I didn't know it was legal. I'm surprised there are not more legal protections against hours as long as we work (Participant 4).

The attitude of being content but not resisting the overwork is unusual because outside of the film world, you don't have companies willing to pay consistent overtime. People no longer care because they adjust to it and it becomes normalized (Participant 3).

15 hours is not fucking normal period. So, what I never understood is that we have in this country, and in the United States, labor laws. Bring me the British Columbia labor law forms. Let me see how they look. Now let's look at our DGC. And see our structure is because I don't think anywhere in the labor law of British Columbia, it says that 15 hours is acceptable or normal. And I'm surprised it was never ever challenged (Participant 5).

The DGC hires production assistants on a 15-hour day rate, subject to a typically 12-hour camera day, whereas IATSE, Teamsters, and ACFC work on an hourly with overtime after 12. Workers are continuously pressured into accepting the overtime whilst fearing for their livelihood (Christopherson, 2008: 86).

Members feel vulnerable in entry-level positions because they cannot be provided with safety and financial security (Participant 8).

I do [it is exploitative]... But it's almost like the currency for people is the dream. Like we can abuse the workers and you have to prove yourself that you are so fully committed. And that you may get an opportunity to move up. It's an addiction (Participant 1).

Entry-level positions are hired on a day-rate basis, while more senior roles are hired for either weekly deals or show calls. The resulting pressure 'is exacerbated within the film industry by

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

the lack of formal training opportunities, a strong reliance on experiential learning and the very high reputational and financial cost of mistakes,' which generates concerns over the working conditions and safety practices established on sets (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 659).

One time when I was a Production Assistant, I was left down in an alleyway in the rain with no food, no breaks, no communication and no spell-offs for 16 straight hours. I had no bathroom breaks so I had to relieve myself in the alleyway (Participant 2).

Witnessing people not being deemed safe to drive and having to do so anyways because there is no choice is commonplace and disturbing (Participant 3).

While stipulations are in place to refuse work, workers often do not feel they are in a position to do so given their replaceability. With studios and locations often being so far out of the city center in order to meet tax incentives, commute times can average over 2 hours a day.

Film itself was established on the basis of 'getting it done' at all costs. This is an environment that breeds exploitation, and the extent of union constraints are not strong enough to curtail that core value of the industry (Participant 7).

And you have to see what your value is. And a lot of times, you just have to say no, you know, my value is more than what these people are willing to pay me or how they're treating me (Participant 9).

The alleged exploitation is justified by production companies and producers through their competitive pay and compensation structure comparative to other industries. For creative laborers, working in film provides the opportunity to generate large sums of money predicated on the model of being overworked (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 35).

I spent 30 years as a broke artist doing visuals barely swinging from job to job. So it seems like good money but when you look at the number of hours you put it in, 15 to 17 hours a day, it's not really. I don't feel that's fair compensation, there's a veneer of success (Participant 10).

I would say that the compensation is good relative to other jobs, disproportionately well compensated. But you're working overtime everyday with unpredictability and uncertain hours, so if one was being compensated without the overtime it's not

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

that well-paid. The disproportionate profitability is dependent on being consistently overworked so it's not profitable unless you're consistently overworked (Participant 3).

When examining cost structure at the entry-level, the current rate for a Production Assistant Helper is \$320.83/day, \$15.65/hr on a 15-hour scale (as of July 10, 2022) which is equivalent to minimum wage in British Columbia ('2021-2024 Rate Sheets'). Both Participant 2, a Lamp Operator, and Participant 4, a 3rd Assistant Director, cited currently pursuing degrees outside of film to provide an alternative to the industry under such conditions. Participant 2, however, said that the opportunity to day call whilst being in school has allowed them to pay for school without any debt. Furthermore, Participant 3, who worked in the catering department, has left the industry entirely due to the exploitation and un-sustainability of the work, revisiting Rubin & Rubin's analysis of labor management practice. Corollary to Marx's claim that exploitation is the appropriation of value (in this instance creative labor) by capitalists, Vancouver's film industry provides an apt example of how this phenomenon is being perpetuated today (Zwolinski and Wertheimer, 2017). It remains justified because the decisions are inherently *creative*.

The current labor structure is designed to extract as much output as possible from workers below the line, while the priority for those above the line is to achieve their vision and goals for a given project. Being asked to manage tasks and handle situations that are clearly above your pay grade is viewed as a vote of confidence in this industry. What it actually does is provide a justification to underpay those who have the competencies to handle responsibility beyond their current job description (Participant 7).

Public perception & obstacles

To the average outsider, the film industry is a body of skilled individuals — comprised of directors, actors, and producers — that create consumable content. A vast majority of the quintessential roles go unnoticed. In a workforce that is defined by being seen, few are visible. The misconceptions around the industry and its divisions make it difficult to quantify meaning. Decision making is a complex process facilitated by a huge majority of individuals coming together to make something work. To the public, when an actor or director's name is

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

attached to a project, it becomes theirs. However, especially within television, the creative power of such roles can often be severely limited by the demands of a certain brand or network's framework.

The biggest discrepancy in public perception is the assumption that the director is at the top calling all the shots/responsibilities and is higher in decision making process where it's really the producers. Directors and DOPs are seen as these creative sources on set which is true but they are not directorial in decision making (Participant 3).

I've had people ask me all the time, not understanding the division of how positions work. And whenever I do, they're incredibly confused and don't understand how this isn't more common knowledge that people don't understand how that distribution works (Participant 5).

Behind the scenes, it belongs to the work of often over a thousand individuals who have contributed to the process, many of whom might have become involved on chance encounters (Rowlands and Handy, 2012: 666). 3 of the 10 participants interviewed got involved in the industry just because a peer had suggested it to them.

While the lack of understanding around how creative jobs work within the film industry is not the public's responsibility, how such projects are marketed is at the expense of those involved, and fulfillment garnered. A recurring theme among interviews was the notion that skewed public perception is lacking about an essential contributor to Vancouver's economy.

Below the line workers comprise a giant subset of the economy in Vancouver and because of that huge groups of people are relying on this structure for their income, but there is limited communication between them and no public knowledge about what these actual roles entail. Unions are the face for labor forces and you don't see how many people are involved or who those individuals are, the credits are not doing a lot for public perception, it's just a huge wash (Participant 3).

Participant's 3 and 7 noted a comparison between film's production complex and militaristic structure that would aid in the public sphere. The embedded entertainment-military complex is intrinsic to the foundation of how the industry has evolved, 'in many ways the military

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

system and a movie set are similar in that everybody has a precise mission to fulfill a goal bigger than the group' (Hess, 2016).

What surprised me about film is the extent of the militaristic structure that film is founded upon. Though the working culture in film is starting to catch up to the contemporary realm of society, the lingering aspects of a deeply hierarchical and archaic structure of power still remain (Participant 7).

An apt comparison to film would be the military — a rigid hierarchy based on some productive goal in a physical sense where people and things are being moved around for purposes so as long as that goal is being upheld and satisfied. Then every cog of the machine pushing it to the point only has to follow other orders in the hierarchy, people are only going 1-2 steps up in communication so it becomes like isolated smaller groups of people and the top becomes completely invisible even though they are the ones that everyone sees credited (Participant 3).

These collective findings introduce a new perspective to Marx's framework through a creative lens. By infusing a different angle encouraged by technological innovation and evolving moral praxis, the film industry is a mechanism from which to restructure the intersection of capitalism and the creative economy. This type of labor can exist under a capitalist structure and still be inherently creative, underscoring a radical policy shift. While it can serve to reproduce an exploitative and alienating environment, creative work can be 'good work,' just redefined (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2012: 1).

CONCLUSION

The theoretical and empirical objective of this study was to explore the labor conditions underscoring the film and television industry in Vancouver, Canada to investigate the relevancy of Marxist convictions through qualitative interviewing. The emergence of creative labor under industrial capitalism has complicated the experience of worker subjectivity and stipulations of ownership, not contending with Marx's traditional schema. When ingrained practices have not been adapted to meet contemporary demands and legal implications,

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

workers suffer as a result of what was once considered ethical practice. The subsequent lack of transparency in management and decision-making reduces morale, fosters distrust, and establishes an environment of competitive individualism with few benefits.

The findings attendant to RQ1 and the exploration of creative labor through anecdotal evidence involved public misconceptions and ranging feelings of self-actualization by passionate projection. Moreover, they also demonstrated that RQ2 is upheld by the standard determined by Marx — that tenets of alienation and exploitation are still relevant within the creative labor structure under the capitalist film complex. However, where Marx was sustained, the participants had mixed reactions to accepting mistreatment which was foregrounded by levels of management. The empirical and methodological implications of the study provided dueling insights. While experiences of exploitation were contentious, feelings of alienation were universally addressed. Ultimately, this study fulfills an interdisciplinary limitation within labor and media studies that provides a novel analysis of the subjectivity inherent to creative capitalization, and how labor can coexist under affective conditions where financial gain is involved.

This study could be replicated in other decentralized production centers, such as Toronto, ON or Atlanta, Georgia, and expanded by analyzing different demographic markers and positions of seniority. The opportunities for further research are expansive and far beyond the range discussed here. Examining conditions of labor at the intersection of creative and capitalistic pursuits can be ethically precarious, complicated by the breadth and exclusivity of the sample. For instance, switching to French hours, compressing the work day into 10 hours with a reduced lunch period, could offer a potential solution (Cohen, 2020). The takeaway is that it is possible for creative laborers to feel self-actualized participating in this mode of unionized labor. However, evidenced by Vancouver's current model, only through accepting years of potentially exploitative and alienating conditions that eliminate work-life balance and create a facade of success through continuous overwork. This research provides an opportunity for local markets to examine, and overhaul their practices, and for the discipline to expand on this implicit tension. To be seen; both on and off the screen.

Can creative labor coexist under an industrial capitalist model?

EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

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EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

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EMILY MCKENNA ARBOGAST LARMAN

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