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Precarious Creativity

Global Media, Local Labor

Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson

In most parts of the world, screen media workers—actors, directors, gaffers, and makeup artists—consider Hollywood to be glamorous and aspirational. If given the opportunity to work on a major studio lot, many would make the move, believing the standards of professionalism are high and the history of accomplishment is renowned. Moreover, as a global leader, Hollywood offers the chance to rub shoulders with talented counterparts and network with an elite labor force that earns top-tier pay and benefits. Yet despite this reputation, veterans say the view from inside isn't so rosy, that working conditions have been deteriorating since the 1990s if not earlier. This grim outlook is supported by industry statistics that show the number of good jobs has been shrinking as studios outsource production to Atlanta, London, and Budapest, among others.

No longer is Hollywood the default setting for major film and television productions. California faces stiff competition from both domestic and international locations. New York, Georgia, and Louisiana have all emerged as major production centers, often jostling with Canada and the United Kingdom for the top spots on yearly production reports. In fact, the most recent study from FilmL.A. concludes (somewhat hastily): "While these jurisdictions may trade yearly rank positions for total project count, budget value and production spending, there are no jurisdictions immediately poised to dethrone them."¹ Yet studio bosses and producers have made it clear that they intend to keep scouring the globe for lower labor rates and less regulated environs. Right-to-work states are especially attractive, as are overseas locations where unions have little or no clout. In many places, governments offer tax breaks and subsidies as further inducements, sending a message to rivals that no single production center enjoys uncontested pre-eminence.

Consequently, producers have grown ever more fleet footed, playing off one place against another in a never-ending quest to secure the most favorable conditions for their bottom lines. Today's increasingly mobile and globally dispersed mode of production thrives (indeed, depends) on interregional competition, driving down pay rates, benefits, and job satisfaction for media workers around the world. Producers say corporate financial imperatives compel them to contain costs, especially labor costs. Consequently, workdays are growing longer, productivity pressures are more intense, and creative autonomy is diminishing. Overall, this has put severe financial, physical, and emotional strain on workers and their families and further threatens the many independent businesses that service the major studios.

At the 2013 Academy Awards, evidence of this trend gained wider currency when the Oscar-winning visual effects team from *Life of Pi* used part of its acceptance speech to express solidarity with demonstrators outside the Dolby Theater who were protesting Hollywood's "race to the bottom." Like most studio features, the film earned widespread critical acclaim and more than \$600 million at the global box office by relying heavily on visual effects. Yet the very artists who created those effects were outraged by the fact that their Oscar-winning company, Rhythm & Hues, had been driven into bankruptcy only days before the awards ceremony. The news sent ripples of outrage through the effects community, since it was seen as a telling indicator of the precarious conditions under which even the best companies and their employees currently operate.² Fierce global competition for studio contracts forces shops into an aggressive bidding process that ultimately undermines the welfare of employees. Throughout the VFX sector as a whole, workers suffer from low pay, long hours, and uncertain job security. Much of this is attributable to the fact that digital effects artists lack union representation, but unionized workers are also feeling the crunch.

In 2007, the Writers Guild of America went on strike against the Hollywood studios to claim their share of the growing revenue stream from digital media, such as Blu-ray, Netflix, and Hulu. Although royalties and benefits were at the core of the dispute, writers also complained about growing pressure to produce ancillary content for web sites and social media in addition to the work they put into film and television scripts. This unpaid "second shift" is part of a growing pattern of employers using worker concerns over job security to raise productivity.³ Sometimes producers specifically demand additional off-the-clock labor. Other times these expectations are conveyed more subtly as logical extensions of, for example, a TV showrunner's marketing and promotional obligations. Successful shows now require supplemental multiplatform publicity, such as personal tweets, blogs, and behind-the-scenes footage exclusively produced for online distribution. WGA members also expressed frustration about the encroachment of corporate sponsors into sacred spaces like the writers' room.⁴ These concerns fueled a bitter three-month showdown between the guild's 12,000 members and the Alliance of

Motion Picture and Television Producers, representing the major studios. With support from other craft and talent unions, the WGA strike brought Hollywood to a standstill but in the end made only modest progress on key issues. Furthermore, in a cruel epilogue, writers now find studios using the (questionable) financial losses associated with the work stoppage as justification for offering less-than-favorable compensation packages in the poststrike era.⁵

Hollywood has a tradition of labor activism that stretches back to the 1930s, with unions and guilds today representing a wide spectrum of artistic, craft, and industrial employees. Although the history of labor representation has been fraught with tensions and controversies, screen workers have at times been capable of mounting campaigns to resist managerial pressures and agitate for better conditions. By comparison, Louisiana, Georgia, and Florida—all now seen as viable locations for motion picture production—are right-to-work states where local laws undermine the prospect of unionization, making the workforce more pliable. Moreover, outside the United States, in cities like Prague, where there are no creative or craft unions, day rates for talent and crew are a small fraction of what U.S. and U.K. crew members earn. In other locations, such as Vancouver and London, unions have offered significant concessions to attract Hollywood productions, cutting wages and revising work rules to satisfy U.S. producers. And in China, the world's second-largest theatrical market and therefore a desirable partner for coproductions like *Transformers 4*, unions are an arm of the Communist Party, representing the interests of ruling elites rather than workers.

When Hollywood producers select a distant locale, they are often welcomed as a fresh source of skilled jobs in a glamorous industry, but the jobs they create tend to be temporary, and the workplace pressures are often more intense than in Southern California. Safety issues are perhaps indicative. On February 20, 2014, tragedy struck on a railroad bridge in rural Georgia where a film crew had set up a hospital bed in order to shoot a dream sequence for *Midnight Rider*, an independent, low-budget picture about the Allman Brothers rock band. Working outside the bounds of the regular production schedule and hoping to “steal” a memorable shot, the crew, which included Oscar-winning actor William Hurt, suddenly found itself in the path of a fast-moving freight train. As they frantically scattered, twenty-seven-year-old Sarah Jones, the second assistant camera operator and the youngest crew member, tenaciously adhered to the protocol of her craft by struggling to protect the equipment, a fatal misjudgment that cost her life. Her death sent shock waves through the industry. Web sites and social media lit up with expressions of outrage. T-shirts, umbrellas, and improvised signage on motion picture sets around the globe enunciated a sentiment widely shared in the world's most glamorous industry: “We are all Sarah Jones.”

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, at least ten other on-set fatalities occurred in the United States during the decade leading

up to Jones's death. Although no reliable figures exist for accidents outside the States, workers were quick to recall fatalities during the filming of *The Dark Knight Rises* in the United Kingdom in 2008,⁶ *The Expendables 2* in Bulgaria in 2011,⁷ and *XXX* in the Czech Republic in 2012.⁸ Said one camera operator, "You can probably ask any film production technician who's been on the job ten years, and they can probably give you half a dozen incidences where they should have been killed or injured, and just by the grace of God they weren't."⁹ Another noted that most crew members, especially young and inexperienced ones, are afraid to speak up about safety concerns for fear of jeopardizing their chances at future jobs.

Mobile production outside the purview of strong union oversight isn't the only factor inciting concern about the increasing personal risk. In 2006, Oscar-winning cinematographer Haskell Wexler produced *Who Needs Sleep?* a searing documentary inspired by the death of an assistant camera operator in a car crash after falling asleep at the wheel on his way home from an eighteen-hour workday. For Wexler, then in his early eighties, the tragedy was representative of a growing trend toward excessively long work shifts, which are often scheduled back-to-back with little turnaround time. The film documents personal and family stress engendered by early calls, late nights, and long weeks. As part of a broader movement called "12on12off," the documentary advocates industry-wide reform to rein in such abuses. Although supported by a wide spectrum of craft workers, talent, and even producers, many were unwilling to speak on camera for fear of being quietly blacklisted in a town where jobs are growing ever more scarce. Even union leaders were skittish about the campaign, many of them afraid to antagonize studio bosses and spur the ongoing migration of production jobs out of California. With so many individuals resigned to suffering in silence, it undermines the potential for collective action and institutional reform.

And yet what is perhaps most remarkable about these precarious labor conditions is that the pattern repeats itself in many parts of the world. In October 2008, the Federation of Western India Cine Employees, an alliance of twenty-two unions representing below-the-line workers ranging from dancers and extras to editors and carpenters called a citywide strike in Mumbai, the entertainment capital of South Asia. More than 147,000 workers participated in the labor action, and topline talent, including Shah Rukh Khan and Amitabh Bachchan, walked out in sympathy, shutting down film and TV production on the eve of a busy holiday season.

At the time, the average filmworker was making \$9.75 a day, and the average television employee a little more than \$8 a day. Unions representing craft workers and service employees began agitating for higher wages around 2005, pointing to the burgeoning prosperity of Bollywood, which was then generating over \$3 billion a year in revenues and paying its marquee talent more than a million dollars for each film. In 2007, unions and producers signed a memorandum of

understanding that would raise wages by as much as 15 percent. Eighteen months later, workers walked out after extended haggling about broken promises, claiming more than \$10 million in unpaid wages, with many workers saying they hadn't seen a paycheck in months. In addition to wages, the strike raised concerns about long work hours that in some cases involved thirty-hour shifts. On-the-job safety and meal breaks were other points of contention.

Facing a massive labor action that drew public support from Bollywood's biggest stars, producers quickly relented, agreeing to raise wages in line with the original memorandum, arbitrate claims for unpaid wages, and establish a twelve-hour cap on work shifts.¹⁰ Despite this quick victory, union leaders expressed deeper concerns about what they say are concerted attempts to undermine organized labor by hiring nonunion workers and relocating production outside of Mumbai, especially to overseas locations like Scotland and Australia. Closer to home, officials criticized a system of subcontracting that helps producers circumvent union agreements. Most notoriously, some subcontractors delayed paychecks for months or even refused to pay at all. Union leaders have complained that workers are more vulnerable than ever and that hard-earned gains from the past are being challenged at every turn.

The Bombay motion picture industry was until recently renowned as a familial system of employment that was at turns discreetly exploitative and touchingly paternalistic. Since the 1990s, the commercialization of television and the corporatization of the movie business have transformed a national media economy into a multimedia global juggernaut with skyrocketing revenues and blockbuster production budgets. Consequently, the relations of production have grown more formal and contractual. They have also been transformed by management logics that are remarkably reminiscent of those being practiced by the major Hollywood media conglomerates.

Of course very significant differences remain, and as we will see in the chapters that follow, similarities in labor trends around the world are marked by enduring and profound differences as well. Chapters about the radical alterity of the Nigerian videofilm industry and tumultuous conditions of creativity in the Arab world make this point only too well. Yet our essays converge around the issue of precarity, a term that points to a broader set of concerns about relations of production and the quality of social life worldwide. Andrew Ross drew these connections in *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, arguing that "no one, not even those in the traditional professions, can any longer expect a fixed pattern of employment in the course of their lifetime, and they are under more and more pressure to anticipate, and prepare for, a future in which they still will be able to compete in a changing marketplace."¹¹ Ross characterizes precariousness as a common condition for workers all over the world, from the low-end service sector in developing nations to white-collar elites in centers of capital. No longer can individual workers expect

a single career; instead they must ready themselves for iterative change and persistent contingency as standard employment and its associated entitlements become artifacts of a bygone industrial era. Precarious livelihoods are indicative of a new world order of social and economic instability.

Although film and television workers are often characterized as highly trained industrial elites, they share similar concerns, which have been fueled by the growth of media conglomerates and the globalization of production. Beginning in the 1980s, deregulation and privatization rippled around the world, transforming national economies and profoundly affecting media industries. Pressed by commercial interests, most governments relinquished long-standing public service policies, opening the door to transnational investment and unleashing a torrent of technological innovation that spurred the development of new media delivery services through satellite, cable, Internet, and mobile communication channels.

Some effects have been positive, but others have proven quite troubling. Today both private and public media systems around the world are driven by market imperatives that foster intense competition between transnational services and local providers. Media sovereignty, previously a foundational principle of national regulation, has been trumped by discourses of consumer sovereignty and market competition. With national borders eroding and services multiplying, media companies have responded by merging into vast multiplatform global conglomerates, including Hollywood's Time Warner, Bollywood's Reliance Media, Brazil's Grupo Globo, and the pan-Arab Rotana Group.

Leading media companies today are larger and more complicated than ever before. They are also more closely attuned to financial imperatives than they are to the subtleties of creative endeavor or the nuances of audience taste. Media CEOs spend most of their time wooing investors and crafting quarterly reports rather than thinking about content or creativity. This in turn insulates corporate decision makers from creative practice, privileging content that is relentlessly market-tested at all stages of production, resulting in a creative process that begins and ends with competitive positioning. In the fields of narrative film and television, this has encouraged a fixation on marquee talent and presold brands that can be parlayed into blockbuster media franchises. In the minds of many executives, marketable content is king, which means they are willing to bid astronomical sums for the services of Shah Rukh Khan or the rights to Harry Potter.

Pressed by the rising costs of franchise rights and top talent, conglomerates seek to contain production expenses by trimming budgets in other areas, especially below-the-line labor. As suggested above, this logic is manifested in new power plays aimed at increasing productivity and diminishing the wages of craft and service workers. Moreover, producers and executives outsource jobs to independent contractors, resist input from union officials, and undermine the creative authority of skilled artisans. New technologies have furthermore allowed

employers to knit together transnational production teams so that workers often find themselves collaborating or competing with lower-paid counterparts in such places as Hengdian and Hyderabad. This respatialization of media labor exerts persistent pressure on workers and labor organizations, offering employers novel forms of leverage.

Yet the shifting geographies of media production have also opened the door to opportunities for screen media workers. Government policymakers in many parts of the world initially expressed reservations about deregulation and globalization, but they ultimately welcomed the chance to collaborate with transnational media conglomerates, embracing a set of commercial practices that have increasingly become the norm. During the 1990s, policymakers began to position their countries as hotspots of the “creative economy,” reasoning that intellectual and cultural output had become distinguishing features of the world’s wealthiest societies. Sophisticated financial services and biotech research are emblematic of this global postindustrial hierarchy, but the most charismatic sector is popular culture, which many believe is the signature component of creative economies. An oft-repeated anecdote of the era pointed to a 1994 presidential advisory report in South Korea that compared the total revenues from Steven Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* to the export earnings from 1.5 million Hyundai automobiles. This striking comparison instigated a greater allocation of government resources to the media sector, contributing to the renowned “Korean Wave” of pop cultural exports that subsequently swept across East Asia.¹²

The policy discourse on creative economies has fueled competition among such cities as London, Vancouver, Beijing, and Dubai, all aspiring to become media capitals renowned for their talented workforces. Many governments offer subsidized facilities, tax incentives, and labor concessions that are designed to nurture local capacity and lure producers away from other locales, especially Hollywood, where real estate and labor costs are substantially higher. Yet these cities now face competition as well, fueling a race to the bottom as conglomerates hopscotch the globe, playing each place against the others, in large part by exacting concessions from workers.

Arresting this race to the bottom will require greater awareness by all parties. Public policy research has explored ways to nurture a creative economy, but little has been written about the declining labor conditions within those economies. Much has been made of the challenges posed by media conglomeration, but little of it addresses the impact on creative employees and workplace practices. And while researchers have detailed the causes and effects of “runaway production,” little of this work is framed by a global perspective, nor does it examine possibilities for building transnational labor alliances or regulatory frameworks that will be essential if conditions are to improve.

Shortcomings in current research are largely caused by institutional constraints. Executives generally focus on market research and cost containment

strategies that have the potential to improve their quarterly reports.¹³ Government leaders seek policy recommendations that will help them grow their economies.¹⁴ University administrators privilege media management studies to further embed their institutions within prevailing funding structures. And labor organizations support research that has immediate relevance to their existing members.¹⁵ No organization has the motivation to build a balanced and comprehensive portrayal of the trends, conditions, and concerns of screen media workers during an era of unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

As for scholarly research, media globalization has garnered significant attention, but there remains a relative paucity of research on labor issues.¹⁶ A notable exception is *Global Hollywood*, which provides a critical framework for understanding the play of power between major media conglomerates and their increasingly globalized workforce.¹⁷ Like many political economies of media, the authors argue that Hollywood uses both commercial and political strategies to ensure its cultural dominance around the world.¹⁸ Uniquely, however, the authors also analyze the changing conditions of creative labor in the film and television industries, contending that studio operations have become increasingly mobile, allowing producers to pursue cost advantages and government subsidies worldwide. Moreover, by threatening to move their operations to the most amenable location, studios exploit the advantages of a global labor market *and* exact concessions from Hollywood unions at home. In a groundbreaking argument, the authors show how the New International Division of Cultural Labor (NICL) is driving down wages and working conditions globally. Yet the analysis operates largely at the level of metatheory and talks little about conditions on the ground or the specific middle-range dynamics of this race to the bottom.¹⁹ Susan Christopherson offers a similarly expansive perspective on runaway production in the film and television industries, noting that government incentive programs and flexible modes of production have made it easier for transnational media firms to outsource labor.²⁰

Among the forces driving these changes are local and national economic development policies that are informed by the work of scholars such as Richard Florida, who contends that globalization has unleashed a growing competition among cities to attract creative talent in order to enhance their service and information industries, which he considers the most prosperous sectors of the global economy.²¹ Likewise, John Howkins suggests that mature industrialized countries must invest in the “creative economy” if they are to cope with challenges posed by the flight of manufacturing overseas. Howkins contends that deindustrialization can best be addressed by enhancing the human capital that a country has to offer. This approach has been embraced by policymakers in many parts of the world as a justification for subsidies, infrastructural investments, and training programs in media, computer, and design industries, among others.²² Although these policies are often controversial,²³ some scholars have nevertheless embraced them,

realizing that failure to take action could doom the prospects of local media institutions and further strengthen Hollywood's global grip. At the same time, though, they are attentive to the challenges and compromises that such policies entail.²⁴

Interestingly both the political economy and economic development approaches tend to gloss over localized effects of globalization on the actual labor practices at cultural and creative work sites. By comparison, researchers in the sociology of work tradition offer empirically rich inquiries into the personal and professional lives of creative workers in advertising, fashion, design, music, new media, and the arts.²⁵ Their work reveals recurrent concerns about a largely flexible, itinerant workforce. Hired on a contractual basis, these workers suffer intensifying productivity demands that intrude on their personal and family lives. They furthermore confront creative and compensatory risks that make them vulnerable to swings in demand and in turn make them willing to accept less than desirable assignments. This scholarship also examines gender, racial, and global inequalities. Such issues resonate with many of our own preoccupations with the quality of screen media labor, especially in an era when digital technologies are reshaping the contours of work and industry organization. Yet we worry that literature on the sociology of work tends to find latent creative potential anywhere, in anyone, and from anything. This diffuse conception of cultural work does not do justice to the specificities of screen media's industrial mode of production and pays scant attention to the particular qualities of its highly specialized and detailed division of labor.

A more nuanced and richly textured approach can be found in the work of John Caldwell and his colleagues, who explore both the stylistic implications of screen media labor routines and the ways workers understand, represent, and theorize their labor.²⁶ Inspired by ethnographic and discourse analysis, "production studies" use specific instances to analyze broader trends and relations of power, but they tend to stop short of linking their analysis to a global political economy, preferring instead to offer specific claims about the internal dynamics of media industries and workplaces. They also tend to be suspicious of totalizing frameworks, preferring to see power as multivalent and capillary rather than centrally anchored by the logic of capital. Again, this scholarship is path-breaking and highly innovative, but it rarely—with the exception of Mayer²⁷—extends its frame of analysis to account for global dynamics.

The approaches outlined above are sometimes pitted against each other, but recent developments suggest the necessity of adopting an integrative approach to address the relentless and pervasive class warfare being waged against creative workers around the world. We are deeply concerned by the rapid transformation of screen media, noting the growing convergence of visual and narrative styles, the ascendancy of commercial values at all levels of practice, and the increasing interconnection of media institutions within a global regime of accumulation. We do not see these trends as indicative of a "once-and-for-all victory" by a capitalist

cabal but rather as specific aspects of an ongoing war of position distinguished at once by adversity and opportunity for the labor movement. In fact, this tension—between adversity and opportunity, between gains and losses, between hope and despair—remains a structuring concern across the collection as a whole. In what follows, we invited contributors from around the world to offer insight into the changing nature of film, television, and digital media work in diverse locations: Hyderabad, Lagos, Prague, New Orleans, Miami, the Middle East, and of course, Hollywood. Case studies address the growing pressures on creative workers in these cities and regions as well as the opportunities made available by the increasingly global nature of media production. Debates also touch on issues of advocacy and negotiation—identifying what resources are (or are not) available to address some of the challenges that confront workers in the screen media industries. The collection therefore maps out what we see as a significant terrain of scholarly inquiry into the multiple and specific ways that local labor practices engage with and contest processes of media globalization.

Perceptive readers will notice a range of agendas and perspectives across the chapters. They will also detect a shared commitment to untangling the nuances of precarious creativity across different industry sites and scales, and in spaces where those sites and scales converge as part of larger global projects. Our ultimate intervention not only considers the struggles taking place within the spatially dispersed operations of the world's largest media conglomerates but also brings these approaches into conversation with research that expands scholarly inquiry into working conditions and labor organizing efforts around the world. In doing so, we hope the collection constitutes a scale-making project of its own by transgressing disciplinary, methodological, and geographic boundaries in its engagement with current debates on creative labor.

Labor relations are a historical phenomenon—over time they inevitably adapt and transform.²⁸ But the contributors to this collection approach the contemporary moment as a particularly critical historical juncture, a point in time when corporate consolidation, digital technologies, and the globalization of production have so altered the structural forms and everyday practices of screen media production that our object of study risks appearing much more amorphous. This in turn raises urgent questions about how we even conceive of labor in the first place when meaningful opportunities for creative endeavor now appear ubiquitous to those who champion the shady boundaries between producers and consumers, professionals and amateurs, work and fun. This point is made most forcefully in Toby Miller's opening critique of the popular and critical enthusiasm for digital media's emancipatory potential, a contemporary zeitgeist, he argues, that constitutes a detrimental blind spot in our scholarly attempts to wrangle with the dark and damning risks technophilia poses to the environment and organized labor. For Miller, we are so enamored with (digital) disruption, transformation, and

transcendence that old media and its associated critiques, like political economy, have become passé. So too are concerns about the everyday lives of professional media workers, now that everything from political activism to creative production has succumbed to the open and participatory allure of digital technologies and social media networks. John Caldwell also cautions against overly enthusiastic readings of the digital era by drawing attention to the increasingly core creative and economic value of what he calls “spec work,” a reiterative process of brainstorming, calculated guesswork, and creative presumption that has become pervasive among above- and below-the-line workers. Think public pitch fests, beta-tested web series, freely circulating demo reels, or online self-promotion. Like Miller, Caldwell doesn’t champion this development as the function of a more open, democratic, and participatory capitalist system but regards it as the opposite: an unregulated, unruly, and uncompensated practice that undermines labor value by giving away much intellectual property for little in return.

Marking labor as more diffuse and dispersed shares some conceptual similarity with the notion of the social factory most closely linked to autonomist Marxism, a school of thought that rejects the industrial factory as the sole site of labor relations and instead posits a more decentralized perspective wherein “the whole society is placed at the disposal of profit.”²⁹ Shanti Kumar explicitly engages with this concept in his essay on the proliferation of “film city” proposals across a number of major cities in India. By building buzz and excitement about their urban environs, film city promoters attempt to brand locations as hotbeds for creative activity and innovation; in doing so, they mobilize urban life as a whole in the pursuit of capital. By this logic, individuals are not alienated objects employed as pawns in a game for global competitive advantage but rather eager contributors to a city’s creative momentum because of the affective allure of participating in that process. Vicki Mayer similarly explores the economic and affective registers of urban labor relations in her discussion of the HBO production *Treme*, which was filmed in New Orleans in the 2010s. Mayer turns to the “moral economy” of local labor to better understand how the show’s producers encouraged the city’s residents to take up unpaid or underpaid work as background extras on the series. She describes the strategy as “the odd pairing of the ethically right and instrumentally efficient,” a form of exploitation necessary to resolve bottom-line financial pressures but nevertheless embraced by locals because their labor was framed a part of a larger moral commitment to the city’s post-Katrina recovery.

Violaine Roussel engages in similar debates about transformations of the creative apparatus but shifts the focus away from the motivations of screen media workers to consider how media concentration and globalization have transformed the practice of “agenting” in Hollywood. Here she connects the diversified activities and worldwide operations of talent agencies to the increasingly complex division of labor among talent agents, who now work in teams designed to provide

multimedia coverage for major clients, a dramatic change from the personalized relationships of the past. This bureaucratization of agency practice has diminished the creative aspects of the job and undermined interpersonal relations between agents and talent. Petr Szczepanik also considers the shifting nature of job functions, career trajectories, and creative collaboration by focusing on production culture in Prague. He examines local technicians who make up the vast majority of below-the-line crew on large-scale international productions. These craft workers crew up for foreign producers and department heads and thus operate in a professional world distinct from laborers who work on domestic film and television projects. Although international productions offer local technicians better pay, more stability, and opportunities for knowledge and skills exchange, these assignments rarely offer a sense of creative engagement or opportunities for upward mobility.

An even more complicated set of dynamics is at work in regional media industries, as explained by our contributors Matt Sienkiewicz, Tejaswini Ganti, and Juan Piñon. Taking issue with reductive criticisms of Western assistance to nascent media operations in Kabul, Afghanistan, Sienkiewicz paints a much more nuanced picture of the trade-offs and tensions at work when global institutions helped foster the development of Afghanistan's first cadre of female television professionals. His analysis highlights the limited yet notable success of female producers whose new-found career opportunities are nevertheless marked by a disproportionate sense of precariousness when compared to local male colleagues and media workers in other parts of the world. Turning from gender to class dynamics, Ganti chronicles what she describes as a curious paradox in the production of Bollywood films, where English has become the lingua franca among the core creative and financial decision makers. Significantly, she explains this linguistic hierarchy as a concrete manifestation of the increasingly international and commercial orientation of Hindi cinema. In short, English proficiency functions as a sign of the industry's ongoing globalization, rationalization, and professionalization, while onscreen dialects help distinguish individual films in an increasingly crowded marketplace both at home and abroad. This in turn leads to a stratified work world in which language competency serves as a marker of power and authority. Global-local dynamics also figure in Piñon's analysis of Latin American television productions. He notes that a wave of corporate consolidation, privatization, and deregulation has opened local and national television markets to the incursion of transnational media conglomerates. By navigating around national media monopolies, global companies have made pacts with local independent television producers to suture global corporate interests to local tastes and cultures. While these collaborations open space for more innovative narratives and formats, they also construct asymmetrical relationships in which local creative labor is at once necessary and ultimately dispensable.

Each of these case studies underscores the ways particular cultural and political histories and economic policies shape working conditions, cultural values, and personal/professional networks in local production cultures in New Orleans, Prague, Kabul, Mumbai, and Latin America. Yet even outside the formal circuits of capital, screen media workers are finding themselves integrated into larger global networks. Jade Miller's contribution on the Nigerian videofilm industry enumerates the ways Nollywood's fragmented exclusion from capitalist modernity engenders a high degree of informality that structures all stages of creative production—from development to distribution. This makes trust-based relationships a necessary but fraught tactic to navigate an industry with few formal governance structures, established training schemes, or labor protections. In Nollywood, power is concentrated in the hands of “marketers,” the lucky few who use their knowledge of an informal, opaque marketplace to enshrine their control over the industry.

In the discussions thus far, we can see how the spatial exploitation of film and television labor draws on an ever-expanding pool of participants. Struggles for authority, legitimacy, and inclusion continue to confront screen media workers in these locations and others, and thus underscore the need to consider the strategies and tactics workers employ to circumvent the formal and informal constraints of the social division of labor. Heather Berg and Constance Penley call the responses to these challenges “creative precarity” in their examination of the ways performers in the adult film industry survive and sometimes thrive despite formidable challenges, which include rampant piracy, diminished opportunities, and depressed wages. Drawing attention to this often overlooked site of screen media labor is a critical intervention precisely because pornography workers have long developed strategies of coping and resistance that might be adapted to other screen media work sites. Kristen Warner makes a similar historical point in her essay on casting directors and the strategies that racial and ethnic minority performers employ to circumvent exclusionary professional networks and hiring practices in the film and television industries. For Warner, the circumstances so many scholars characterize as novel developments have been an ever-present condition for minority performers in Hollywood. Yet because common industrial logic refuses to see the lack of diversity as a persistent problem, performers forgo political solidarity or collective resistance to embrace whatever strategies will improve their individual chances of getting a job. This makes meaningful social change elusive.

Possibilities for “actionable reform” figure prominently in John Banks and Stuart Cunningham's chapter about the Australian digital games industry. With the global financial crisis prompting major publishers to withdraw from the Australian market, game developers have struggled to adapt to a new industrial landscape. For some, this has been difficult, while for others it has fostered newfound creative autonomy that encourages them to produce original intellectual property.

As with the porn industry in Southern California, Banks and Cunningham find the precarious conditions of game developers in Australia not an inevitable condition but a product of government policies and industry regulations. Thus any efforts at reform must target policy and governance as mechanisms to increase certainty and stability in the sector.

Turning to East Asia, Anthony Fung and Michael Keane parse out alternative approaches to creative labor based on the particular circumstances of their respective case studies. For Keane, precarious creativity is too conceptually entwined with Western contexts, where concern is directed at the material conditions of the workforce. That is, workers who enjoy creative opportunities often make sacrifices in terms of benefits, compensation, and work hours. In China, however, creativity promises to improve the material conditions of the workforce because it opens the door to professional mobility and higher wages. Of course, there's still a dark side to creative work, but less in the realm of the material and more in the realm of imagination, where workers risk the wrath of state censorship. Fung similarly explores the contours of creative practice in East and Southeast Asia, where workers differently engage with the global digital games industry. Fung argues that the distinctive socio-political contexts of Seoul, Singapore, and Beijing shape how employees come to understand and value their own work and workaday lives. Both Fung and Keane encourage us to think otherwise about the very meaning of creativity within the diverse contexts of Asian cultural industries.

Marwan Kraidy pushes these concerns even farther by focusing on creative forms of dissent against the backdrop of the Arab uprisings of 2011 and 2012. Kraidy theorizes how the convergence of authoritarian regimes, activist politics, and digital technologies in the Middle East fundamentally alters our received notions of both creativity and precarity. He further distinguishes revolutionary creative labor from industrial creative labor, establishing the former as "an embodied, extremely precarious practice unfolding in a life-or-death situation, one among several kinds of labor (from physical struggle to mainstream media production) that challenge authoritarian leaders." Kraidy's intervention, then, not only makes visible different forms and qualities of precarious creativity but also extends the parameters of debate about creative labor, reframing core concerns about global visibility, creative autonomy, and subjectivity.

Kraidy's contribution shares much with earlier entries that highlighted the different registers—economic, affective, and political—of urban labor relations, while also theorizing a particular mode of production with a distinctive global orientation. Similarly his chapter recalls the strategies and tactics of other marginalized media workers when he enumerates the modes of resistance revolutionary artists employ in the face of extreme circumstances.

It's fitting to conclude this collection, then, with an extended discussion of the future prospects for collective action: what can traditional unions and advocacy

groups do to ensure safe working conditions and quality of life in such tumultuous times? Herman Gray responds with ruminations on the larger assumptions that structure research and policy regarding the industry's diversity problems. In particular, Gray traces how coupling on-screen representation and off-screen demography has come to shape so much critical debate about racial parity and progress, and how the site of media production has served as the default target for state, industry, and academic interventions. Most interventions not only have failed but have become predictable institutional exercises with little tangible value. Given these shortcomings, Gray suggests other research possibilities for studying race and racism within the context of a dramatically shifting intermedial landscape, pointing to new forms of affect, attachment, and identification as powerful tools for pursuing social justice within the context of creative practice. Likewise, Allison Perlman establishes an alternative framework through which to study the politics of creative labor by recasting media advocacy itself as a form of media work. Focusing on the National Hispanic Media Coalition, she demonstrates the critical value of media advocacy in contexts where individual laborers lack the ability to personally agitate for collective change in the workplace. Yet this work is threatened by the precarious existence of the advocacy organizations themselves, as they increasingly (and paradoxically) rely on funding from corporate media to support their operating budgets, reliance that can compromise a group's ability to carry out its core functions on behalf of the constituencies it represents. In similar fashion, Miranda Banks and David Hesmondhalgh outline a number of pressures undermining the current effectiveness of labor unions and guilds in the entertainment industries. Marketization, digitization, and freelance labor are obvious culprits, but through an extended examination of the Writers Guild of America, the authors offer a compelling account of how a national labor organization can proactively respond to and influence global production flows and transnational labor networks. Banks and Hesmondhalgh contend that even though significant obstacles remain, the struggle to establish a global consciousness among screenwriters is perhaps a first step toward building the sorts of international alliances necessary to tackle many of the challenges described in this book.

Overall, this collection of essays attempts to expand the geographic and intellectual range of screen media studies, moving past romanticized assumptions about creative work in favor of more incisive discussions about power, equity, and collective action. Our contributors contend that we must first make visible the escalating stress and strain confronting media workers worldwide before outlining compelling alternatives or transferable solutions. *Precarious Creativity* therefore encourages readers to view these issues through a global lens in order to avoid the provincialism that has too often characterized labor and policy debates. Although well aware of the diverse conditions of screen media production, this volume offers critical reflection on the ways workers are increasingly caught up in a global

production apparatus. As our contributors make clear, the central tension is not one between local laborers in different regions—a perspective that feeds too easily into the hands of producers—but is rather a struggle against the diverse yet increasingly interconnected modalities of exploitation in screen media production around the world.

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